

## The Lord's Supper: Dining with Jesus

### 1 Corinthians 11:12-15

**March 20 & 21, 2010**  
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This past weekend I had the opportunity to partner with a great organization, Child Evangelism Fellowship, in a several day fundraiser. It didn't hurt that the event was in Florida. They raised a lot of money and I enjoyed one round of golf while I was there. Golf in the Midwest has its own set of hazards – sand bunkers and water hazards. Florida has a unique one or two like this one I took a picture of.



Notice the golf ball under his leg. I think that's an unplayable lie. Fortunately, that was not my ball!

We are in a rich portion of 1 Corinthians 11 and the clearest teaching concerning the Lord's Supper to be found in the Bible. Last time we saw Paul's sharp criticism of the elitist snobbery that was evident during the Lord's Supper. The early church would have a meal as a part of the Lord's Supper known as the Agape Feast; the Love Feast. What happened was that the wealthier members were eating before the others arrived and leaving nothing for the poorer church members. Paul was incensed. The Lord's Supper is a simple dramatization of what Jesus accomplished on the cross. He restores us to unity with God and He restores us to unity with one another. Division and selfishness at the Lord's Table is saying something relationally that isn't true spiritually because in Christ we are all one. Unity and love need to be on display always – especially at the Lord's Table.

I gave one example last week of a married couple fighting all the way to church and then taking Communion as if all is well and then fighting all the way home. I said they would be better off not partaking of it. I had a woman write me. She said very seriously and sadly, "If that is the case I would never be able to take the Lord's Supper."

Let me clarify this. First of all, none of us deserve to participate and if we have to be perfect in order to take the bread and cup, none of us ever would. So I don't believe it means everything has to be perfect and harmonious. In fact, when life is in chaos, that's when we need the assurance of Christ's presence the most. Remember the context: Christians were creating division even as they were partaking of the Supper. The question isn't if we are perfect. The issue is whether I am blatantly disregarding the application of the gospel to my

relationships in the church. Do I have a forgiving spirit as God forgave me? A reconciling spirit as Jesus reconciled me? Or am I rebelling against God, creating division, nursing resentment, and unwilling to repent of sin? Then I should not partake. I should repent and seek to be restored to my brother or sister by asking forgiveness, and then partake again with them in a spirit of Christian unity.

Clearly the Corinthians had lost sight of what the Lord's Supper is really about. So Paul reminds them: *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Paul takes them back to the beginning. The Lord's Supper began at the Last Supper, in the Upper Room. Paul wasn't there but he says in verse 23 that he received this from the Lord. It may have been a direct revelation or he was told about it by the disciples who were there. It was on Thursday, the night of His betrayal and the night before His crucifixion that Jesus gathered in an Upper Room to celebrate the Jewish feast of Passover with His disciples.

Passover was the high point in the Jewish calendar. The feast of Passover was commanded by God to Israel in remembrance of the night He brought them out of Egypt. It was after the 10<sup>th</sup> plague when the death angel came over all Egypt killing every firstborn. God told the Israelites to kill a lamb, take its blood and put it on the door of the home and the angel of death would Pass Over them. Do you see the imagery? A lamb was killed, its blood was shed, and salvation was given. The Passover meal reenacted Israel's night of salvation.

Jesus' Last Supper was high drama. Judas is confronted and leaves to betray Jesus. John records a lengthy teaching Jesus gave known as the Upper Room Discourse. Jesus displays ultimate humility by washing the feet of the men who are arguing as to which of them is the greatest. And Jesus established a new memorial and a new meal.

So why do we eat the Lord's Supper? Like Baptism, because Jesus told us to. Paul repeats the phrase twice in verses 24 and 25, *Do this in remembrance of me*. The Greek verb is specific. "Do" is a present continuous verb meaning, *keep doing it*. The early church kept doing it and 2000 years later, we're still doing it. But many of us are like the Corinthians, we do the ceremony but we miss its meaning, and I think, its blessing.

## **How to Eat the Lord's Supper**

### **Profoundly thankful (Verse 24)**

*The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it.*

Thankfulness is not an explicit command. All the accounts indicate a thanksgiving or blessing. Paul notes that. Perhaps you've heard the Lord's Supper called "The Eucharist" and wondered why. Eucharist means "give thanks" and is the Greek word found here. Profound thankfulness in the Lord's Supper is evident in the early church: *And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people.* (Acts 2:46-47)

I recently read a quote by George Carlin, "Those who dance are considered insane by those who can't hear the music." A casual observer at the Lord's Supper should ask, *What are these people so happy about?* They can't hear the spiritual music. Thankfulness and gladness shows that we hear it. We get it. We get that God treated Jesus on the cross like He was us. Were it not for Christ, God's wrath would crush us and do so for all eternity. Just think for a moment, what if? What if Jesus had not died? What if He was still dead? What if His death wasn't efficacious for us? What if it simply wasn't true?

We would be condemned by God for eternity. We would be in serious trouble. But discovering that the gospel is true and available to me would be the happiest day of my life. That's what the Lord's Supper refreshes in our hearts. In a way, every time I take the bread and the cup it's like getting saved all over again. Don't get me wrong, I am not saying it is that. But like a wedding anniversary rekindles memories of the wedding day joy, the Lord's Supper ought to rekindle salvation joy and gladness. In taking it, I am reaffirming again what I affirmed by faith in the first place, Christ is my Savior and Lord. (Frank Viola, *Reimagining the Church*, p. 77) It is to sing inwardly, *My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness* (*The Solid Rock*, Public Domain). The Lord's Supper needs to be reverent for sure, but I wonder if we are missing an element of celebration. I think sometimes after partaking we should just burst out with applause or sing the most jamming song we know.

## Remembering Jesus

*Remembrance* is the word repeated twice in our text and is most certainly at the center of God's purpose in the Supper. After both the bread and after the cup Jesus said, *Do this in remembrance of me*. To remember is to bring to mind. So clearly the Lord's Supper is a God-intended way to bring to our minds and hearts the person and work of Christ. Perhaps like a computer that has thousands of files, our minds have thousands of things it can remember and think about. Yet there is one Jesus file that needs to be opened to our consciousness again and again. I am a great sinner, but Christ is a great Savior.

To help with that, Jesus provided two symbols. Remembrance symbols. If you are married, you are hopefully wearing a ring. Why do married folks wear rings? It identifies you as married; you're taken. Someone already has your heart. It says something to other people but it also says something to you. It also serves to remind you that you are married and someone else has a claim to your heart. Taking the Lord's Supper doesn't make you a Christian any more than wearing a ring makes you married. But for the genuine believer, these symbols call to mind the glory of the gospel and the sorrow over our sin and the suffering that Christ endured. Remembering is much more than recalling. It is to spiritually bring to mind and heart the core of our faith. To remember Him. Jesus doesn't tell us to remember Gethsemane or His scourging or even the cross (although we must never forget them). He told us to remember *Him*. The Lord's Supper is to be personal and relational. It is about a person, Christ.

What about these symbols? *On the night when he was betrayed [he] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.* (Verses 23-24) The first element in the memorial is bread. You may or may not realize all of the controversy in church history centered on the statement related to the bread, *This is my body*. I don't have a lot of time to wade through it. If you have questions, we can get you resources. I do want us to know why we believe what we believe. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox view is called *Transubstantiation* (although I understand that the Orthodox do not use that word). They believe that during the Lord's Supper a miraculous transformation happens so that the bread actually becomes the body of Christ

and the cup the blood of Christ. The Reformers in the 16<sup>th</sup> century broke from this, but splintered into several positions. The Lutheran position is that the elements don't physically change but that Christ's presence is in and through the elements. Zwingli took the position that it was merely an opportunity to remember.

Our belief is the other major protestant position that the elements are symbols of Christ's presence. One simple reason is that it was clearly a symbol to Jesus in the Upper Room. He was still *in* His body when He said the bread *was* His body. Similarly, the cup couldn't become His blood as He had not died yet. We do believe in Jesus' unique presence in the Lord's Supper, but not in the symbols themselves. Rather, the symbols represent His spiritual presence among us.

This keeps the Lord's Supper from becoming superstitious. I grew up in the church and remember seeing the leftover grape juice in the church refrigerator. It kind of freaked me out. Is it okay to drink the leftover Communion juice? Is there something special about it? There are all kinds of superstitions about it. Even the third *Indiana Jones* movie was about the search for the cup of Jesus and its healing power. All of this misses the point. The symbols are like that wedding ring. The ring only matters if there is a reality of love behind it. The reality behind the symbols is the presence of Jesus with us and the salvific blessings that are ours in Him.

### **The Bread – Jesus' Body Given for Us**

*This is my body, which is for you. (Verse 24)*

*For you.* Think of that. His body for us. It hearkens back to the Passover Lamb who gave His life to save others. By virtue of His incarnation, Jesus had a real and fully human body. He wasn't a ghost or an emanation. He was fully human with a fully human body. A body "For you" speaks of His substitutionary work. He died as our substitute. He died in our place. The fuller term is "substitutionary atonement." God requires all sin to be punished by death but God allows for substitutes. One person can take the punishment for another, like the Passover lamb. Christ was that substitute for us. He died in our place. He took the holy wrath of God we rightfully deserved.

This is what the bread represents. A symbol of His body. By eating the symbol I am embracing the truth that Jesus body was given for me, fully satisfying God's wrath in my place. *Do this in remembrance of me.* Bring that to mind and heart. Let's do that now. [We partake of the bread]

### **The Cup – The New Covenant of Jesus**

*In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (Verse 25)*

I would guess that most of us take the cup and think "the blood Jesus shed." While this is a good thought, did you hear what Jesus said? He says of the bread, *This is my body.* He says of the cup, *This is the new covenant in my blood.* Do we think that? Do we know what it means?

We deal in covenants all day long. We live in houses that have covenants attached to them regarding ownership and property lines and mortgages. You could get the paperwork and prove the terms. We drive cars that have titles showing that we have not stolen them; we bought them. We purchase items with credit cards and debit cards and we have signed

papers insuring that we will meet the obligations. Even our cash has covenants as it says on all currency that it is backed by the US government. We may not use the word covenant but our lives are dominated by covenants. Commitments and guarantees. That's a covenant.

God relates to us through covenants that He binds Himself by the oath of His word. They are agreements with guarantees.

- *Adam, if you eat of this tree, you will die* (Genesis 2:16-17)
- *Noah, I promise it will never flood like this again* (Genesis 8:21ff.)
- *Abraham, I promise that your descendants will be like the sand on the seashore* (Genesis 22:15ff.)
- *Israel at Mt. Sinai, if you keep my commandments I will bless you. If you don't, I won't* (Exodus 19:3ff.)
- *David, because you are a man after my heart, your descendant will sit on an eternal throne* (2 Samuel 7:1ff.)

What are these? They are divine commitments from God to us defining how God will relate to us and how we will relate to Him. All of them were guaranteed by the unchanging character and truthfulness of Almighty God. But what is also true of the covenants I listed? None of them provide what we need for salvation. The whole book of Hebrews argues that these old covenants were unable to save us because *"It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."* (Hebrews 10:4)

The Old Covenant did not save anyone. Rather, it showed us how much we needed a new and better covenant – one that could actually save us. That is why this new covenant is so much better than the old ones; it creates a relationship by which our sins can be eternally forgiven AND by which we can eternally relate to God through Jesus who mediates this covenant on our behalf.

- We are ministers of a New Covenant (2 Corinthians 3:5-6)
- The New Covenant is a covenant of the heart (Hebrews 8:8ff.)
- The new replaces the old (Hebrews 8:13)
- Jesus mediates/applies the New Covenant (Hebrews 9:15)
- The New Covenant is better in every way (Hebrews 12:24)

The New Covenant, like the old, required death to be established. A lamb was killed in the old and in the new; Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. How can we have any confidence in this covenant? Jesus' death guarantees that all its promised benefits will be applied.

What does Jesus want us to bring to mind when we partake of the cup? There is a gospel filled with promises from God.

- *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.* (Romans 10:13)
- *If you confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your hearts that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* (Romans 10:9)
- *I will remember their sin no more.* (Jeremiah 31:34)
- *As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.* (Psalm 103:12)
- *Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16).

What are all these? Words. Just words. Blah, Blah, Blah. In the world we live in, words don't mean much. What do we need? We need guarantees.

That is what we have and that is what Jesus wants us to bring to mind and heart through the taking of the cup. His blood was shed to guarantee to all who believe that God WILL

fulfill His end of the covenant. God will NEVER go back on his Word and Jesus' death is His signature on the agreement.

And when I gather with God's people bringing all the guilt I feel for my moral and spiritual failings, when I hold the elements in my hand and feel the weightiness of God's holiness and the reality of His judgment on sin, it can be overwhelming. I can wonder, *Is God going to come through?*

That's what the cup does. It assures me. New Covenant. New guarantee. Look at the juice and think, *This is the New Covenant guaranteed by Jesus' death.* Let the symbol say something in your soul within. As a follower of Jesus, my sins really are forgiven. Eternal life really is mine. And Jesus has done it all. *This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.* (Verse 25) [We partake of the cup.]

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