

ERIC SVENDSEN

**THE TABLE OF
THE LORD**

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE SETTING
OF THE LORD'S SUPPER IN THE
NEW TESTAMENT AND ITS
SIGNIFICANCE AS AN
EXPRESSION OF
COMMUNITY**

REVISED EDITION

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PREFACE

“An excellent work! This will be a very helpful contribution to house church life, and a very real challenge to those in more conventional churches.

May it be widely read and implemented.”

—Robert Banks

Professor of Lay Ministry, Fuller Theological Seminary

Author, *Paul's Idea of Community*

The current practice of the Lord's Supper as a symbolic meal consisting of token bread and wine cannot be supported by Scripture or early church history. Instead, the Lord's Supper in the NT consisted of a full meal, a single loaf of bread and a single cup of wine. Nor is this setting unimportant theologically. On the contrary, the setting of the Lord's Supper in the NT was, in fact, an expression of apostolic theology.

The meal-aspect of the Supper is important for a number of reasons, not least of which is its social dimension. The Supper served as a catalyst to abolish barriers between social classes and ethnicities in the early church. Moreover, it provided the setting for the rich to show their love by providing for the poor—hence, the adoption of the term *Agape* for the Supper in the NT.

Another significant feature of the meal-aspect of the Supper is its connection to the Messianic Banquet at the *eschaton*. The Lord's Supper is portrayed in the NT as a prefigure of this banquet. The early church saw the Supper as a means to petition Christ to return and fulfill his promise to “eat again in the kingdom.” Its setting and focus were uniquely suited for a mood of messianic joy, not somber introspection.

The supposed separation by Paul of the meal-aspect from the so-called elements is based on a misinterpretation of 1 Corinthians 11. Not only did Paul intend for the meal-aspect to continue, but its discontinuation did not occur until well into the post-apostolic age. Moreover, what Paul calls the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 is in fact the meal itself, of which the bread and wine are only a part (albeit an important part).

Finally, the so-called elements themselves took the form of a single loaf of bread and a single cup of wine. The singularity of these elements holds theological significance. Not only is it *symbolic* of the unity (singularity) of the gathered body of Christ; it is, in fact, a *cause* of this unity.

TO STEVE ATKERSON,
COLLEAGUE IN A COMMON GOAL

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Finally, much thanks is due to my colleague, Steve Atkerson, who has acted as my theological sparring partner and has been instrumental in honing my current beliefs about the church and its practice.

INTRODUCTION

One might wonder why a book on the aspect of community in the Lord's Supper would need to be written. The Lord's Supper, it might be argued, has been so thoroughly excavated by recent scholarship that there could scarcely be anything left to dig up that has not already been considered by one study or another. Besides, such a topic as community in the Lord's Supper is supported by such scant evidence that no argument for it could for very long be sustained.

This book challenges that thinking. But more than that, it challenges its readers—indeed, the church as a whole—to rethink the current practice of the Lord's Supper, and to rediscover the dynamic of the early church in *its* practice of the Supper. The differences between the two are crucial and have critical consequences for community and eschatology.

It is the purpose of this book first to lay out the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper as an expression of community found in the pages of the NT and early church history, and then to attempt to show how that pattern expresses the underlying apostolic theology of the Supper. Observations will be made along the way noting the extent to which that same theology is absent in the current practice of the Supper. Finally, this book will suggest ways to recapture the theology of community in the practice of the Lord's Supper intended by the apostolic witnesses.

We will begin by examining the importance of true unity in the practice of the Supper, and how that unity is both caused and symbolized. Major consideration will be given to the writings of Paul, and in particular 1 Corinthians, and to relevant post-apostolic writings. Next, we will discuss the physical setting and content of the Supper, particularly noting its significance as a full meal. We will also examine whether or not the historical separation between the so-called elements of the Supper and the meal itself is a valid one, as well as whether the NT witnesses to multiple practices of the Supper or one universal practice. Next, we will compare the apostolic practice of the Supper to the banquet etiquette of the surrounding Judaic and Hellenistic societies, noting the similarities and differences, in an attempt to discover the various purposes of the meal-aspect of the Supper.

Following this, we will explore the eschatological focus of the Supper, its relationship to the Messianic Banquet, and the implications for its communal form. This will entail probing the various antecedents to the Banquet, including OT, NT, and Qumran sources. Finally, we will investigate whether there is an intended frequency to the practice of the Supper and the reasons behind such frequency.

Some brief comments are in order as to the form this book has taken. This book started out as a Master's thesis, and its original form, with the exception of a few minor changes, has been left intact. Hence, it is a highly technical work and the original languages of Scripture have been used throughout. Where it has been deemed helpful, English transliterations and/or translations have been added next to the Greek and Hebrew. Because of its technical level, it is not expected that every reader will be able to grasp all concepts equally, much less be able to make use of the original languages. It will be helpful for the reader to have at his side a Greek-English interlinear and a good Greek lexicon while reading through this book.

Finally, it is hoped that this book will be helpful in assisting the church in regaining the joy and intimacy of table fellowship such as is found in the practice of the early church, and, in some small way, will contribute to the vast literature written by other scholars in this area who have attempted to do the same. It is to that end that I proceed.

THE TABLE OF THE LORD

Eric Svendsen
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CHAPTER 1

PAUL'S CONCERN FOR UNITY IN 1 CORINTHIANS 11

First Corinthians 11 has long been the standard Lord's Supper text used by Protestants in their communion services to recite the words of institution; and rightly so. The Pauline version of the Last Supper is the only one which we may be certain was written primarily for liturgical purposes.¹ It alone is found in the context of a discussion about the Lord's Supper, whereas all others were (apparently) written to record the historical fact of the Last Supper.² Consequently, Paul's account is helpful in that it offers insight into other avenues of the Lord's Supper not specified by the other accounts. This is not to say that Paul is exhaustive in his treatment—indeed, we would not have even this much if there had not been abuses of the Lord's Supper in Corinth—but that what he offers by way of explanation exceeds that offered by the other accounts. In other words, whereas the Synoptic accounts purport to record the historical event and give only minimal reflection as to its ramifications for the Lord's Supper,³ Paul's account is just the opposite; his includes only minimal treatment of the historical event (11:23-25) and much reflection on its ramifications.⁴ For this reason special consideration must be given to Paul in discussions where the primary focus is the Lord's Supper.⁵

It is precisely because Paul expands on the traditional words of institution that we may begin to see other related aspects of the Lord's Supper that would be difficult at best to ascertain from the Synoptic accounts. One such aspect, unity, is particularly strong in 1 Corinthians 11,⁶ and it is to this aspect that we may now turn.

¹Paul's immediate concern, of course, is to resolve a problem in church practice. However, since liturgy may be defined as standardized church practice, and since Paul's concern is to bring the Corinthians in line with that which he "received" (v. 23), it is not inaccurate to speak of Paul's purpose as "liturgical." See also n. 6 below.

²I. H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 35. Although it is true that purpose and literary form must carefully be distinguished, it is equally true that purpose (at least to some degree) determines literary form. Cf. Craig Blomberg's case study in his *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1987), 66-72 passim.

³This is not to say there are no redactional considerations by the writers for their readers. Indeed, the very fact that there are differences among the accounts indicates that the writers were selective about the details to be included. Nevertheless, the thrust of the Synoptic accounts (and of Paul's account in 1 Cor 11:23-25 for that matter) is, in the first instance, historical.

⁴This should not be construed to mean that one account is more "valuable" than the others. Neither does this mean that Paul sees little relevance for his church in the Last Supper account or that the Synoptic writers see little value in the Lord's Supper. The inclusion or exclusion of this or that material does not thereby appreciate or depreciate the value of the account. It means only that each account is better able to yield those theological points for which it is redactionally suited.

⁵As opposed to discussions where the primary focus is the Last Supper.

⁶Granted, Paul's words are situationally constrained and are designed to counter an abuse. Nevertheless, since Paul says nothing that would not be true of the Lord's Supper in any case (even if there were no abuses), and since he places great importance on what he does say, we can only conclude that what he says is essential to the Lord's Supper. That he might have presented the Lord's Supper differently had there been no abuses is beside the point. The fact is, there was an abuse and it is because of this abuse that we know more about the theology and practice of the Lord's Supper than we otherwise would have known.

The Problem at Corinth

In order to understand what Paul says about the Lord's Supper in this text one must first understand what he is battling. The views on this, though varied, do not deviate severely from each other. Regardless of which view one takes about the problem at Corinth, few deny that the underlying problem is disunity. Some of the Corinthians were excluding other Corinthians from the fullness of benefits that accompany the Lord's Supper. Paul's burden therefore is to reestablish the unity-aspect in the Lord's Supper. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to survey the contents of 1 Cor 11:17-34 and the proposed views of the problem at Corinth, and then to decide among them.

Survey of Views

Paul begins his discussion of the Lord's Supper with a negative tone. He has previously praised the Corinthians for their adherence to "the traditions" (v. 2) but finds he cannot praise them in their practice of the Lord's Supper⁷ since their meetings do more harm than good. Paul identifies in v. 18 why this is so, and it is at this point that the exegetical options open up. The root of the Corinthians' problem is division. The problem for the exegete is not so much in determining the kind of divisions to which Paul is referring (it seems clear from vv. 21-22 that Paul has in mind class divisions, viz., the wealthy and the poor⁸) as in determining the reason for these divisions. There is virtual unanimity that the Lord's Supper described here by Paul is a full meal and not merely the bread and cup. Hence the church at Corinth came together for a common meal, probably provided by the wealthy, which was to be shared with the entire assembly. On a cursory reading it seems apparent that the wealthy were arriving at the meeting ahead of the poor and eating the meal before the poor arrived.⁹ Paul's corrective then would be for the wealthy to "wait"¹⁰ for the others before eating.

This reconstruction has not gone unchallenged. On the lexical level some have questioned whether προλαμβάνω (*prolambanō*) in v. 21 can here be rendered "to take before." B. H. Winter, for instance, holds that the problem in Corinth was that the "haves" were eating their meal in the presence of the "have-nots" who, after partaking of the bread, patiently waited for the "haves" to finish their meal so that the entire body could then partake of the cup together. His reconstruction revolves around the idea that προλαμβάνω in v.

⁷F. F. Bruce (*First and Second Corinthians*, NCB [London: Oliphants, 1971], 108) sees τούτο (*touto*) in v. 17 as referring to what has preceded, as does J. Héring (*The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, ETr. by A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock [London: Epworth, 1962], 111-12) and C. K. Barrett (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, HNTC [New York: Harper & Row, 1968], 260), and concludes that Paul is only with qualification praising the Corinthians for holding to "the traditions" in 10:2. While this is certainly possible, it must be noted that Paul's usual form in 1 Corinthians is to give praise and then immediately to qualify his praise (such is the case with 7:1-2, "it is good . . . But"; and 8:4-7, "we know . . . However"). Paul does this in 11:2-3 as well ("I praise you . . . But"), which seems to argue against the notion that the qualification comes in v. 17. Moreover, Paul's statement in v. 17 ("I do not praise you in this") seems (in form) to negate rather than to qualify. It is probably better (with G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], 536 n. 23) to take this instance of τούτο together with that found in v. 22 as forming an *inclusio* (cp. 7:29-35).

⁸There is a near consensus among scholars that Paul does not have in mind the divisions mentioned in 1:10-12 (but see pp. 18ff of this book for my qualification). Based on Paul's mention of σχίσματα (*schismata*) and αἱρέσεις (*haireseis*), G. Theissen (*The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, ed. and ETr. by J. H. Schütz [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982], 147) rightly associates the problem at Corinth with groups rather than with individuals. Moreover, these groups are later identified as the poor and the wealthy (i.e., those who are hungry and have nothing over against those who are drunk and take their own meals, vv. 21-22), *idem*, 148.

⁹Cf. προλαμβάνω (*prolambanō*) in v. 21.

¹⁰V. 33, ἐκδέχεσθε (*ekdechesthe*).

21 is to be translated here simply as “receive” (not “take before”).¹¹ For support he notes that neither of the two other occurrences of this word (Gal 6:1; Mark 14:8) has the meaning “to take before” and that the preposition in compound is intensive, not temporal.

S. H. Ringe has further developed Winter’s proposal and has argued that there were differing “menus” in the church, one for the haves and another for the have-nots, and that it is against this “banquet etiquette” that Paul reacts so strongly in 1 Cor 11:17-34.¹² J. Murphy-O’Connor argues similarly that the problem of 1 Cor 11:17-34 is about the type of food offered to the participants.¹³ He argues that in the architecture of the first-century Corinthian house, the triclinium (i.e., the dining area) could not accommodate everyone, and that there was a necessary overflow into the atrium (the courtyard), hence creating two groups. According to Murphy-O’Connor’s reconstruction, the rich Christians (in the triclinium) were offered choice food while the poor (in the atrium) were offered only scraps. It is in this way that “one is hungry and another is drunk” (v. 21). Certainly this was a common practice in the ancient world as is evident by examples from the writings of Juvenal, Martial and Pliny.¹⁴

An older and much discussed view is that of Hans Lietzmann. Calvin Porter gives a helpful summary of Lietzmann’s view of the Supper.¹⁵ Lietzmann breaks the Supper down into two different traditions: (1) the Jerusalem tradition which observed no memorial to Christ’s death but which was celebrated in anticipation of the Messianic banquet; and (2) the Pauline tradition in which the death of Christ and a memorial to him was the central theme (apparently without exclusion of the Messianic banquet). The problem in 1 Cor 11:17-34 according to Lietzmann is that those who held to the Jerusalem tradition were attempting to supplant the Pauline tradition. Consequently, Paul must reinforce his tradition by emphasizing the centrality of the death of Christ in verse 26.¹⁶

There is some merit to Theissen’s view. Theissen thinks the problem is that the wealthy members were eating a “private” meal (which consisted of choice morsels) before officially starting the common meal (which consisted of an inadequate quantity and quality of food).¹⁷ Theissen takes ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν (*en tō phageîn*) in 11:21 temporally (“during the Lord’s Supper”)¹⁸ and argues that these private meals were also eaten in front of the poor. Marshall agrees with Theissen’s assessment of the situation in Corinth and in this way Marshall

¹¹B. H. Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth: An Alternative Reconstruction,” *Reformed Theological Review* 37 (1978): 74-78 passim.

¹²Sharon H. Ringe, “Hospitality, Justice, and Community: Paul’s Teaching on the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34,” *Prism* 1 (1986): 60. In support of this view it should be noted that in v. 21, “each one” (= all at the assembly) “takes his own supper” (i.e., the kind of food fitting for his social status), and as a result, “one is hungry” (since his supper is of the kind that is offered to the lower class) “and another is drunk” (since his is of the kind that is offered to the upper class). The μὲν . . . δὲ (*men/de*) construction ties together both the “hungry” and the “drunk” as receivers of a “supper” of some kind. But “each one” (ἕκαστος [*hekastos*]) could just as readily refer to all at the table before the poor arrive (viz., the “haves”). The μὲν . . . δὲ construction need imply no more than the end result of such a practice (viz., one remains hungry [when he finally arrives], the other [imbibing too long] is drunk). See below for other criticisms of Ringe’s view.

¹³Jerome Murphy-O’Connor, “Eucharist and Community in First Corinthians,” *Worship* 50 (1976): 37.

¹⁴See under “An Expression of Equality of Status” in chap. 6 of this book.

¹⁵Calvin L. Porter, “An Interpretation of Paul’s Lord’s Supper Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-34,” *Encounter* 50 (1989): 32.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁷Theissen, 148, 151-52.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 153.

can account for both the idea that each was “taking his own supper” (v. 21) as well as the idea that some were eating ahead of others (v. 33).¹⁹

Proposed View

None of these views seems very satisfying. Against Lietzmann’s view, Porter echoes a common concern among scholars that one should not “assume opposing views about the Lord’s Supper within the Corinthian church.”²⁰ Lietzmann’s proposal is much too speculative and for this reason has been rejected by many scholars (e.g., Marshall, Higgins, Porter, et al.).

The view of Winter, Ringe and Murphy-O’Connor is an attractive reconstruction but does not answer all the questions that must be raised about the text. Why, for instance, does Paul tell the Corinthians to “wait for each other” (v. 33)?²¹ As Theissen notes, this explanation “does not make wholly comprehensible the conflict connected with the Lord’s Supper. . . . in that case Paul would only have to admonish all to share equally.”²² Ringe’s use of the evidence is deficient in this respect. In order to harmonize her reconstruction with Paul’s injunction in v. 33, Ringe must propose that the rich were partaking of their menu *before* the poor arrived, who then, upon arrival, partook of a less substantial meal than the rich.²³ However, this argument is difficult to sustain since it introduces a modification in the historical evidence of the ancient banquet etiquette to which she appeals.²⁴ According to Murphy-O’Connor, the uniqueness of the ancient banquet etiquette theory lies in the fact that both groups (both rich and poor) are at table at the same time.²⁵ But if the acceptance of this theory requires a modification to make it work, why accept the theory in the first place? Winter attempts to deal with this injunction of Paul by assigning to ἐκδέχεσθε the meaning “‘receive one another’ in the sense of sharing,”²⁶ although he recognizes that in every other instance of the word the meaning is “to wait for.” Moreover, Winter’s assertions about the meaning of προλαμβάνω are not conclusive. Even Fee (who sympathizes with Winter’s position) admits, “one cannot totally rule out a temporal sense” and “the lack of further description by Paul makes a clear-cut decision impossible.”²⁷ In spite

¹⁹Marshall, *Last Supper*, 109.

²⁰Porter, 34.

²¹Εκδέχεσθε. The “hungry” one in v. 34 is not the same as the one in v. 21. In v. 21 it is the “have nots” who are hungry; in v. 34 it is the “haves.” To view Paul’s words in v. 34 as an instruction for the poor referenced in v. 21 would not only seem callous (he has already chided the Corinthians for “shaming those who have nothing” in v. 22)—as though this instruction would suddenly cause the “have nots” to be relieved of their hunger—but would also seem to be in tension with his instruction to “wait for one another” in v. 33; wait for what? It is also noteworthy that Paul’s purpose for this instruction is to prevent the Corinthians from coming together “for judgment.” It was the eating practices of the wealthy (not the poor) that was resulting in judgment. Little would be served by instructing the poor to eat at home while the rich continued in their practice of the meal to the exclusion of the poor—the basis for “judgment” is not thereby eliminated. It is only by viewing the “hungry” in v. 34 as the “haves” (who felt a need to eat all the food of the meal before the poor arrived) that these difficulties can be removed.

²²Theissen (155).

²³Ringe, 61-62.

²⁴See under “An Expression of Equality of Status” in chap. 6 of this book for this evidence.

²⁵Murphy-O’Connor, “Eucharist and Community,” 37.

²⁶Winter, 79.

²⁷Fee, 542.

of the arguments in its favor, it seems best to abandon the “banquet etiquette” theory²⁸ and conclude simply that the rich were arriving at the meeting and eating the supper *before* the poor could arrive. Possibly the demands of employment created longer working days for the lower class whereas the wealthy enjoyed the luxury of shorter working days or setting their own hours.²⁹

The view of Theissen and Marshall is the most promising; yet it too has problems, the most obvious of which is the treatment of ἴδιον δεῖπνον (*idion deipnon*) in v. 21. Both Theissen and Marshall take this as a reference to the Corinthians’ practice of eating individual meals which each person brought only for himself, or a “private” meal for the rich only which was eaten before the common meal shared with the poor. It is unlikely, however, that this is what Paul intends since, as Käsemann argues, ἴδιον δεῖπνον is probably to be seen in contrast to κυριακὸν δεῖπνον (*kuriakon deipnon*) in the preceding verse.³⁰ If this is correct then we cannot view ἴδιον δεῖπνον as referring to any “private meal” which was eaten by the rich before the common meal took place. Nor is it likely that this refers to individual meals that each person brought solely for himself.³¹ Rather we should see this as referring to the Supper itself, which, when all in the body are invited, becomes the *Lord’s Supper*, and which, when some are excluded for illegitimate reasons (such as social status), remains one’s *own* supper.³²

How then should we view the problem at Corinth? There is no good reason to abandon the *prima facie* sense of Paul’s words. The wealthy in Corinth, it seems, were purposely arriving at the meeting conveniently at a time when the lower class could not possibly be there (perhaps because of occupational restraints). There they partook of the meal³³ (intended for all), perhaps reasoning that since the poor contributed nothing to the meal neither should they eat anything. This may even have been a distorted application of Paul’s own tradition for his churches.³⁴ That the Corinthians may have misinterpreted Paul at this point is not exactly out of the question.³⁵ Moreover, it seems possible (though by no means certain) that the Corinthians saw a distinction between the meal proper (which they may have viewed as optional) and the bread and cup (which they saw as the actual “Lord’s Supper”). If this is the case then it may be that the wealthy Christians at Corinth were taking the common meal before the poor arrived, saving the bread and cup which were taken with the poor present, thus separating (illegitimately, according to this view) the meal from the so-called Eucharist.³⁶ Bornkamm subscribes to this view (though not in every detail). He proposes that it is the

²⁸As Theissen (155) says, “as long as it is assumed that it is a matter merely of different quantities of food for the rich and the poor Christians, Paul’s suggested solution must seem odd.”

²⁹So A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament* (SBT 6; London: SCM, 1952) 71; and Gunther Bornkamm, “Lord’s Supper and Church in Paul,” *Early Christian Experience* (London: SCM, 1969), 126.

³⁰E. Käsemann, “The Pauline Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper,” in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (SBT 4; Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1964), 119-20.

³¹While this view is not ruled out by Käsemann’s observation, it does become rather tenuous.

³²So Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, American ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 81.

³³No attempt will be made here to support the meal-aspect of the Lord’s Supper—this will be addressed later. It will be sufficient at this point simply to state what was the practice of the Corinthians; I know of no one who disputes this point.

³⁴See, e.g., 2 Thess 3:6-13.

³⁵The Corinthians, after all, are notorious both for misinterpreting Paul and for taking his instructions to an extreme (see, e.g., 1 Cor 4:8; 5:9-10; 6:12-13; 7:1-2; 8:1-13; 15:12; 2 Cor 1:17; 2:6-8; etc.).

³⁶Paul’s recital of the Lord’s Supper *paradisis* would then be seen as a corrective to show the intended order—bread, meal, cup. That Paul does not go into detail about the order is explained by the fact that he sees the order of the Lord’s Supper as secondary to the more important issue of disunity at the Supper. It may be inferred from Paul’s statement at the end of this section

“sacralization” of the bread and cup apart from the common meal that Paul is correcting in v. 29, and sees it as a “strange irony” that Paul is refuting the very thing of which the church would later be guilty when historically it abolished the common meal altogether.³⁷ There are both positive and negative aspects to this proposal and these will be taken up more appropriately later.

The Lord's Supper as Defined by Unity

Perhaps one of the clearest themes that emerges from this section of Paul's writings is his overarching concern for unity in the body when celebrating the Lord's Supper. Yet it would be a grave mistake to view this unity merely in metaphysical terms. All too often “we equate unity with union.”³⁸ This, however, does not seem to be the case in Paul. Paul's concept of unity is one that must be worked out and expressed on a practical level. As Murphy-O'Connor puts it, “if an explanation [of the body] in ‘static’ terms is thereby excluded, we are forced to consider an explanation in terms of ‘function.’”³⁹

Moreover, it is not so much the unity of the body universal that Paul is concerned with, but the unity of the body in each local assembly.⁴⁰ This unity is to be portrayed, in Paul's view, “when you come together as a church” (1 Cor 11:18), and, more specifically, “when you come together to eat” (vv. 20, 33).⁴¹ It is against this unity that the Corinthians are acting in their practice of the Lord's Supper.

Paul's immediate concern, therefore, is to address their “divisions” and to reestablish unity. As already mentioned, the “divisions” (σχίσματα [*schismata*]) in v. 18 are related to social status; they are divisions between rich and poor. The “divisions” (αἰρέσεις [*haireseis*]) of v. 19, on the other hand, are not so easily explained.⁴² Why does Paul say “there must be divisions among you”? The answer, in part, lies in v. 18 since v. 19 begins with an explanatory γὰρ (*gar*).⁴³ Most commentators believe that Paul here intends an eschatological division; that is to say, the tares will eventually and inevitably be divided from the wheat and so

(v. 34, i.e., that he would “set the rest of the things in order” during his next visit) that the details about the proper order of the Lord's Supper would be straightened out at a later time. Fee (569) sees this statement as open-ended and concludes that “it is not possible even to know to what ‘the other things’ refer”; but F. W. Grosheide (*Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], 277) is probably correct in saying, “If Paul had written these words at the end of his letter they might be taken as referring to a number of questions he could not treat in his epistle. But at this place they can only refer to further treatment of these church suppers.” On balance, the most that can be inferred with relative certainty is that Paul had more to say about the Lord's Supper. Anything beyond this must remain in the realm of speculation.

³⁷Bornkamm, 149.

³⁸Murphy-O'Connor, “Eucharist and Community,” 373.

³⁹Ibid., 375.

⁴⁰Although Paul does not use the term here, he elsewhere uses “body” in reference to the local assembly (cf. 1 Cor 12:12-27), and specifically in the context of the Lord's Supper (cf. 1 Cor 10:17). See also P. T. O'Brien's discussion in “The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity,” in *The Church in the Bible and the World*, ed. D. A. Carson (Exeter: Paternoster, 1987; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 105-114 passim.

⁴¹Fee (536) points out that the verb συνέρχομαι (*sunerchomai*) (“come together”) which is used five times in this section (11:17-34), is “one of the key words that holds the argument together. . . . Thus the concern is with what goes on when they ‘come together as a church’ (v. 18).”

⁴²Fee (538) regards it as “one of the true puzzles in the letter.”

⁴³Ibid., 538 n. 32.

much the better if it occurs now.⁴⁴ The phrase in v. 18 (“to some extent I believe it”) is variously interpreted. Fee, for example, thinks Paul acquired his information from some of the poor who were being excluded from the meal and who thus had a biased “view from below.”⁴⁵ On this view Paul is acknowledging that his informants are not exactly impartial witnesses and so believes them “to some extent” but wants also to hear the “view from above.”⁴⁶ But Paul’s tone throughout the rest of this section betrays no hint that he only partially believes the report, as though it were merely a matter of a misunderstanding between the rich and the poor that Paul must attempt to patch up. On the contrary, Paul’s language toward the alleged violators is much too strong for someone who only half believes the report.⁴⁷ Indeed, Paul knows that “many are sick” and that “a number have fallen asleep” (v. 30), and explains this epidemic as the consequence of their actions at the Lord’s Supper—not exactly the kind of language used by someone who is only half convinced that there is in fact such a violation. Barrett’s explanation, that Paul deemed his informants credible people but was unwilling “to credit so scandalous a story,”⁴⁸ is much more plausible.⁴⁹

Grosheide takes σχίσματα as a reference to personal opinions, so that, although Paul is against disunity in the body, he is equally against uniformity.⁵⁰ It seems unlikely though that this is Paul’s intent, since it requires too drastic a change of thought. As Barrett notes, there can be no significant change of meaning between σχίσματα and αἰρέσεις, for “if there were such a change the connection of thought would break down.”⁵¹

Whatever view is to be adopted, it must adequately account for both γάρ in v. 19 and οὖν (οὐν) in v. 20. The word γάρ in v. 19 explains either the report itself or Paul’s partial willingness to believe it (but it may be a combination of both). The word οὖν in v. 20 introduces the consequence of the Corinthians’ αἰρέσεις in v. 19. It is at this point that the difficulty arises for those who see αἰρέσεις as “eschatological divisions,” for in the first place it is difficult to see how eschatological divisions “explain” in any way the divisions between rich and poor at the Supper. Are we to assume that the wealthy Corinthians are not true believers and that they are even now making themselves manifest? What then is Paul’s point in vv. 30-32 when he says that the reason many of the violators of the Supper are sick and many have died is precisely so that they “will not be condemned with the world”? To introduce the eschatological division of believers and unbelievers at this point does not fit well with the flow of Paul’s argument. Nor does this interpretation account well for οὖν in v. 20. Why would the Supper cease to be the Lord’s Supper (v. 20) simply because some unbelievers have made themselves manifest? In other words, if Paul sees these αἰρέσεις as an “eschatological necessity”⁵² (and

⁴⁴So Fee, 538-39; Bruce, *1 Corinthians*, 109; Barrett, 261-62; Héring, 112-13; and L. Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 157-58.

⁴⁵Fee, 537.

⁴⁶So also Grosheide, 266; and Morris, 157.

⁴⁷Cf. v. 22, “Do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? . . . Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”

⁴⁸Barrett, 261. Bruce’s explanation is similar (*1 Corinthians*, 109).

⁴⁹Paul’s “unwillingness” does not necessarily imply that he didn’t fully believe his informants since, on this view, his unwillingness to credit the story is prompted only by what he wishes to be true of the Corinthians, not by what he knows to be true in actual fact.

⁵⁰Grosheide, 266.

⁵¹Barrett, 261.

⁵²Barrett, 262.

one that is ultimately good since it makes clear those who are “approved”⁵³), then his conclusion in v. 20 (which is one of rebuke—“it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat”) must seem odd to the Corinthians.⁵⁴ It would be more in keeping with Paul’s style if at this point he suggested the Corinthian believers separate themselves from the false Christians rather than to suggest they strive for unity with them.⁵⁵

On the whole it seems more natural to take Paul’s statement in v. 19 as one of irony or sarcasm.⁵⁶ While it is true (as most commentators point out) that σχίσματα in v. 18 does not refer to Paul’s previous discussion about “divisions” in 1:10-12 and 3:4, it does not at all follow that this must be the case with αἰρέσεις in v. 19. It is likely that Paul is thinking of just such divisions and is in effect saying, “Oh yes, of course, I’ve forgotten; these divisions of yours are necessary so that everyone will know that it is your own little clique that has God’s approval, and nobody else!”⁵⁷ This view adequately accounts for γάρ (*gar*) (v. 19) since the Corinthians’ general proclivity toward “divisions” explains their divisions in the Lord’s Supper as well, and οὐν since what follows from their divisions is the annulment of the Lord’s Supper from their meals. It is quite probable that the sarcasm extends through v. 22.⁵⁸

Paul now proceeds in vv. 20-21 to define the Lord’s Supper in terms of unity.⁵⁹ The norms of society (according to which class divisions were expected) were influencing (if not dictating) the manner in which the Corinthians were behaving at the Lord’s Table.⁶⁰ Consequently, these norms were destroying “the very unity which that meal proclaimed.”⁶¹ Paul’s primary concern here is not the Lord’s Supper *per se* but the significance of the Lord’s Supper as an expression of unity.⁶² When Paul says in v. 21 that the Corinthians’ behavior is tantamount to despising the “church of God,” he means not so much that the “have-nots” are being ill-affected (although this is certainly true in light of his additional statement, “shame those who have nothing”) as that the “church” as a community, as a result of abuse, is being deprived of its essential unity.⁶³ A

⁵³Despite Fee’s assertion to the contrary, 539.

⁵⁴This is especially so because both Jude (v. 12) and Peter (2 Pet 2:13) see unbelievers as “stains” and “blemishes” in the common meal. The implication is that it would be good if they were not there.

⁵⁵See, e.g., 1 Cor 5:9-11 and 2 Cor 6:14-18.

⁵⁶Fee (538) admits that this is possible.

⁵⁷A similar instance of sarcasm in this letter may be found in 4:8.

⁵⁸It must be admitted that, if this is the case, Paul’s sarcasm fluctuates from caustic (stating something that is in fact untrue but seems to be true from the standpoint of the Corinthians, v. 19) to irony (“It is your *own* supper, not the Lord’s Supper you eat,” vv. 20-21; “One is hungry and another is drunk!,” v. 21; “Would you like me to praise you for this?,” v. 22). But compare a similar instance of this in 4:8 where Paul first states what is true only from the standpoint of the Corinthians (“You are already filled, you have already become rich, and have become kings without us!”) and then implies what is ironically true—that they were not reigning (“I wish you really had become kings so that we might reign with you!”). Although he puts the latter in the form of a wish, the effect is nevertheless the same; for he could not “wish” they were reigning unless they were not in fact reigning. Whether or not Paul is wishing what is eschatologically *not yet* true is unimportant; it is still *not true* at this point.

⁵⁹Defining the Lord’s Supper in terms of unity is, of course, limited to “necessary conditions” and does not extend to “sufficient conditions,” since obviously unity is not all that is required for there to be a “Lord’s Supper.”

⁶⁰Fee, 544.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

celebration of the Lord's Supper apart from this corresponding unity is not the Lord's Supper at all.⁶⁴ The rationale for Paul's statement is explained by the premium he places on the unity-aspect of the Supper. Not only is unity one focus of the Supper, but, for Paul, "the Supper is the focus of Christian unity."⁶⁵ Consequently, any celebration of the Supper without this unity (regardless of the title the Corinthians might give to it) is simply one's *own* supper (v. 21).

⁶⁴Paul's words "it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" imply that the celebration of the Corinthians, under normal circumstances, would in fact be the Lord's Supper.

⁶⁵Marshall, *Last Supper*, 153.

CHAPTER 2

THE STRUCTURE OF PAUL'S ARGUMENT IN 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17

Paul's mention of the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 10:16-17, although decidedly incidental to his discussion about the consequences of idolatry,¹ reveals a significant aspect of the Supper, both in its practice and in its theology, that would, apart from this section, have remained unknown; namely, that there is "one loaf" from which all partake. Before exploring this aspect, however, it will be profitable (if we are to avoid the erroneous interpretations which plague this passage) to examine the context in which it is found.

Paul's line of thought begins in 10:1.² The Israelites were identified as the people of God. Their identifying mark was bound up in their association with Moses and the exodus from Egypt. They were in effect "baptized" by means of this relationship (v. 2). There is no need here to see this "baptism" as anything more than a convenient parallel between the Israelites and the Corinthians. Properly speaking, this was not a baptism at all. Paul is merely trying to make the point that the Israelites were identified as the people of God no less than the Corinthians are presently. His point is extended in a further analogy. The Israelites identity as the people of God can also be seen in the provision of food and drink supplied by God himself. Paul calls it "spiritual food" (πνευματικὸν βρῶμα [*pneumatikon brōma*]) and "spiritual drink" (πνευματικὸν ἔπιον [*pneumatikon epion*]) intentionally to parallel the Lord's Supper of the Corinthians, just as he has previously paralleled the Israelites' "baptism" to the Corinthians' Christian baptism.³ Paul's point of these parallels is revealed in vv. 5-6, and the application for the Corinthians extends to v. 11. Even though the Israelites retained their identity as God's people, it did not follow that they were beyond God's judgment; for, as the historical account clearly indicates, "they were laid low in the wilderness" (v. 5). So also the Corinthians are not beyond God's judgment even though they are identified as God's people.⁴ It is therefore important for Paul that the Corinthians keep a close watch on their lives. The overarching theme running through this section (which began in chapter 8) is idolatry.⁵ Paul mentions this first in his list of applications (v. 7) and then

¹So Fee, 465.

²Although in fact this section is bound together with Paul's argument in chaps. 8 and 9, as is evident from γάρ (*gar*) (explanatory γάρ) in 10:1 (cf. W. Harold Mare, "1 Corinthians," *EBC*, ed. F. E. Gaebelin [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 248). Nevertheless, there is only a loose connection between these two sections (cf. Barrett, 220) and one may safely proceed from v. 1 as a starting point to understand Paul's argument in chapter 10.

³So, among others, E. Käsemann, 114; also A. T. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical on the Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975), 202.

⁴So Fee, 450. Both Fee (459) and Barrett (220) argue that the Corinthians believed it was the rites of Baptism and the Lord's Supper that secured them from harm. But this is based on the assumption that Paul's burden is to attack a Corinthian hyper-sacramentalism which J. S. Ruef (*Paul's First Letter to Corinth* [Middlesex: Pelican, 1971], 89) and others have questioned, since it is based on other assumptions such as a Gnostic background or an overarching theme of Christian freedom. Since these assumptions are dubious, it seems more natural to say simply that the Corinthians saw their identity as Christians as that which secured them, not the rites themselves.

⁵Although some have seen Christian freedom as the theme. But see the comments by Ruef, 89; also cf. 8:1, 4; 10:7, 14, 19-22. On the other hand, the options for the theme of this section (i.e., idolatry and Christian freedom) do not have to be seen as mutually exclusive. It is possible (and likely) that Paul's theme is a combination of both.

mentions other activities in vv. 7-10 which must be seen in relation to idolatry, perhaps even as consequential to idolatry (viz., orgies [v. 7], immorality [v. 8], rebellion [v. 9], and complaining [v. 10]).⁶ He ends his list of applications in vv. 12-13 with a warning and a promise: a warning to those who flippantly consider their status as “Christians” as a guarantee of indestructibility—they must “take heed”; and a promise to those who in humility acknowledge their frail condition—they must take courage. The promise, that when tempted by idolatry (and its related activities) God will provide “a way out,” applies to those (but only to those) who are not “looking for the *way in*.”⁷

Paul begins in v. 14 to come to the heart of what he has to say. The Corinthians thought it harmless to participate in the banquet ceremonies of pagan gods. They were, after all, “knowledgeable” that there is only one God and that there is no such thing as an idol (8:1-6), and that food is made for the stomach (6:13) and is not to be rejected (1 Tim 4:3-5). Therefore, it must follow that no harm can be done by eating in an idol’s temple. But Paul rebuffs this logic of the Corinthians. While it is true that an “idol is nothing” (6:4), it does not at all follow that there is no force at work behind the worship of an idol. As Bornkamm puts it, these “demonic *non-entities*” are, nevertheless, “*demonic non-entities*.”⁸ Yet on what principle is it true that a Christian is ill-affected by his participation in a pagan feast? Could it not be argued that, demons or no demons, as long as one understands what is behind it all and refrains from the worship-aspect of the pagan feast, one could conceivably partake of the food without compromising his Christian faith? That is what Paul answers in vv. 15-22, and it is here that his discussion is significant for the Lord’s Supper.

The Meaning of Κοινωνία

Paul chooses two scenarios by which he may illustrate the magnitude of the Corinthians’ practice of participation in the pagan feast. On the one hand, there is the nation of Israel; those who eat the sacrifices become sharers in the altar. On the other hand, there is the Church; those who eat of the bread and drink from the cup become sharers in Christ. The question remains, What is the meaning of this κοινωνία (*koinōniā*)? Is it communion (vertically with a deity), or participation (horizontally with other participants)?

A. T. Robertson subscribes to the former.⁹ He draws a distinction between κοινωνία in these verses and μετέχω (*metechō*) in v. 17 (the former means “having the whole,” while the latter means “having a share”).¹⁰ The basis for this view customarily comes from the papyri where there is evidence of invitations to the feast of one god or another.¹¹ On this view the worshipper has mystical communion¹² with the deity at whose table he is eating. Therefore, the Christian (or anyone else for that matter), when he partakes of the Lord’s Supper, has this kind of communion with Christ. The meaning of κοινωνία, therefore, is to be seen in light of the pagan understanding of communion with a deity.

⁶This is not to say that any or all of these activities are necessarily connected with idolatry; only that Paul makes that connection here. Paul’s use of διότι (diōti) in v. 14 seems to rule out any objection to this connection.

⁷Barrett, 229.

⁸Bornkamm, 125.

⁹Robertson and Plummer, 212.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Most notable among these is *P.Köln* 57, καλεῖ σε ὁ θεὸς εἰς κλείνην γεινο(μένην) ἐν τῷ Θηραίω αὐριον ἀπὸ ὠρ(ας) θ; but see also *P.Coll. Youtie*, 51-55; *P.Oxy.* 110, 523, 1755, 2592, 3164.3; *P.Osl.* 157; *P.Yale* 85; and *P.Fouad* 76 (G. H. R. Horsley, *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity: A Review of the Greek Inscription and Papyri Published in 1976* [North Ryde, Aust: Macquarie Univ., 1981], 5-9).

¹²I.e., the worshipper shares a common spiritual bond with the deity who in turn becomes “present” at the table.

Robertson is somewhat of a maverick in this regard, since almost all recent scholarship seems to be in disagreement with his view.¹³ On the other hand, almost no one subscribes to either view by itself. The majority of scholarship has instead come down somewhere in the middle.¹⁴ Wainwright concedes that Robertson's view is indeed a starting point for the meaning of this word, but it is only that and nothing more.¹⁵ C. T. Craig has noted that in each case of the word *κοινωνία* (or its derivative) in this passage the noun which follows is always in the genitive:¹⁶ *κοινωνία τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* ("participation of the blood of Christ") (v. 16); *κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ* ("participation of the body of Christ") (v. 16); *κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου* ("partakers of the altar") (v. 18); *κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων* "partakers of demons") (v. 20). Craig sees significance in this and in the fact that Paul does not use the preposition "with" (*μετά* [*meta*]) in any of these cases, indicating that the idea here is not strictly association *with* another person but "participation in something in which others also participate."¹⁷ The difference is that the former is a one-to-one relationship between the participant and the deity, whereas the latter is a one-to-many relationship between the participant and the rest of the community who are participating in the same thing.

This is essentially the view of most scholars. There is no real alternative between the ideas of communion and participation;¹⁸ both ideas are implied.¹⁹ The participants' *κοινωνία* is with one another, but the "basis and focus" of this *κοινωνία* are bound up in their common interest (in the case of a Christian) in Christ.²⁰ *Μετέχω* in v. 17, therefore, needs to be seen almost as a synonym of *κοινωνία*.²¹ Any view that sees *κοινωνία* as referring *only* to communion with a deity must break down in v. 17; for there it is clear that Paul intends a common participation. In the case of Israel, those who sacrifice at the altar become *κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου* (*koinōnoi tou thusiastērion*), "sharers" (with one another²²) of the altar (v. 18). Certainly this does not exclude communion with the deity; but neither can this be the primary idea, for the

¹³Cf. e.g., Fee, 446-47; Barrett, 231-32; and Morris, 146.

¹⁴Fee, 466. Cf. Marshall (*Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 150) who says "we must not regard these as completely separate experiences."

¹⁵"It seems equally clear that *κοινωνία* is to be interpreted in the first place a participation in the sacramental species (rather than as simple fellowship of Christians one with another in the meal)," Wainwright, 115.

¹⁶C. T. Craig, "The First Epistle to the Corinthians: Introduction and Exegesis," *IB*, ed. G. A. Buttrick et al. (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 114.

¹⁷J. Y. Campbell, "KOINΩNIA and Its Cognates in the New Testament," *JBL* 51 (1932): 353, quoted in Craig, 114. See also n. 27 below for elaboration of this idea.

¹⁸W. A. Sebothoma ("Koinonia in 1 Corinthians 10:16," *NeoT* 24 [1990]: 66) rightly criticizes those who attempt to create a false disjunction between the aspects of participation and communion in *κοινωνία*; "the concept in question comprehends both." Cf. also H. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia, ed. G. W. Macrae, ETr. J. W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 171.

¹⁹Barrett (231) renders this word "a common participation" and adds, "both English words are needed to render *κοινωνία*." Cf. G. V. Jourdan ("Κοινωνία in 1 Cor 10,16," *JBL* 67 [1948]: 119) who says, "*κοινωνία* possesses a quality of signification which is capable of being applied simultaneously in an internal and in an external direction, that is to say, of being used at the same time with an objective and subjective force."

²⁰Fee, 467.

²¹Barrett, 233; or, as Conzelmann argues, *μετέχω* explains *κοινωνία*, 172.

²²Barrett, 235. Cf. also BDF (93), "to consume the sacrifices as a community." J. Y. Campbell ("KOINΩNIA and Its Cognates in the New Testament," *Three New Testament Studies* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965], 25) notes that the equivalent phrase in v. 20 (*κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων*) means "partners (with heathens) in demons."

object of the common participation is the “altar,” not God.²³ What it does exclude is the idea that by eating the religious meal the participants are actually eating the deity.²⁴ If for no other reason than this “modern translations have rightly abandoned the use of the term ‘communion’ in this verse.”²⁵

Having shown what is involved in the word *κοινωνία*, it remains to see what the basis of this *κοινωνία* is for the Christian. This may be adduced from v. 16: Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν (“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation of the body of Christ?”).

In the first instance it must be noted that Christian *κοινωνία* is τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“of the blood of Christ”) and τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ (“of the body of Christ”). As Craig has already shown²⁶ it is significant that Paul does not use the preposition *μετά*; it is simply fellowship “of the blood/body of Christ.”²⁷ The “body” and “blood” of Christ likely refer to Christ’s own physical body and blood given up in death, not the elements of the Lord’s Supper by which they are represented; they are intended as metonyms for “the benefits of Christ’s death.”²⁸

The Significance of “The Cup/One Bread”

The phrase, Τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας (*to potērion tēs eulogias*) (“the cup of blessing”), may come from, as Kasper argues, a “modified form of Jewish table customs,”²⁹ but more likely comes from a Passover background.³⁰ The presence of the first-person plural in both εὐλογοῦμεν (*eulougoumen*) (“we bless”) and κλῶμεν (*klōmen*) (“we break”) makes it likely that Paul does not intend to limit this practice with the cup and bread to Corinth alone, but rather suggests that he has all his churches in mind.³¹ He is in effect quoting “commonly accepted belief.”³² There is no significance for liturgical form in the fact that Paul reverses the

²³Unless “altar” is a circumlocution for “God.” But see Campbell (24) who notes that *θυσιαστήριον* is never used as a euphemism for God, nor are any of its Hebrew equivalents. See also Fee (470, esp. n. 41), who argues that Paul here is referring to the meals “prescribed in Deut. 14:22-27 . . . that followed the sacrifice,” and not to the priests’ portion of those sacrifices (9:13). Therefore, “altar” should be taken as “food of the altar,” and not as a reference to God.

²⁴“Neither the language and grammar, nor the example of Israel nor the examples from the pagan meals allow such a meaning,” Fee, 467. Jourdan (121-22) questions whether the idea of a worshipper “consuming” his god even existed in Paul’s day. In any case, “the Greek conception of a religious banquet held on the supposed invitation of the gods” does not (as, e.g., Lietzmann holds) present any “true parallel” since there is no idea of *communion* in this concept, merely *association* (*idem*, 121).

²⁵Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 15. Marshall opts for the meaning “participation” or “means of sharing.”

²⁶See above.

²⁷Probably a descriptive genitive showing the *kind* of fellowship. Against the idea that association is in mind (“our fellowship *with* the blood/body of Christ”), Campbell (23) has noted that (1) in all but one instance, when a genitive is used with *κοινωνία* it is a genitive of the thing shared; (2) that αἷμα (*haima*) and σῶμα (*sōma*) are *things* in which one can participate, but with which one cannot properly have fellowship; (3) no example can be found of *κοινωνία* denoting “fellowship with” unless accompanied by a dative.

²⁸So M. J. Harris, “Baptism and the Lord’s Supper,” in *In God’s Community*, ed. by D. J. Ellis and W. W. Gasque (Wheaton: Shaw, 1978), 22; and Higgins, 70.

²⁹Walter Kasper, “The Unity and Multiplicity of Aspects in the Eucharist,” *Communio* 12 (1985): 116.

³⁰The question of whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover will be taken up later.

³¹So Barrett, 232.

usual order of the bread/cup to cup/bread. Marshall rightly ascribes the unusual order to the fact that Paul “wanted to make a point about the bread rather than about the cup.”³³

But just what is the point that Paul makes about the bread? Paul goes beyond the mere fact that it is a participation in the body of Christ and, in addition, shows its significance for unity. There is *one* (εἷς [heis]) loaf³⁴ of bread in the Lord’s Supper.³⁵ This one loaf of bread, according to Paul, somehow creates unity within the body: ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σώμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἔσμεν (“because there is one loaf of bread, we who are many are one body”). As if to prevent someone from downplaying the force of ὅτι (*hoti*), Paul adds: οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἐνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν (“for we all partake of the one loaf of bread”). There can be no mistaking Paul’s meaning here, and it is doubtful that the grammar can be taken any other way.³⁶ Paul believes there is theological significance in the singularity of the loaf of bread. It is important to Paul that there is an expression of unity in the body (not merely a static concept of unity); this is accomplished by all partaking of one loaf of bread.³⁷ Harris’ assertion that the single loaf and single cup “expressively symbolize the unity of believers”³⁸ is true in itself, but does not go far enough. Paul does not say that we partake of one loaf of bread *because we are one body*; on the contrary, we are one body *because we partake of one loaf of bread*. As Wainwright notes, the bread “both *signifies* and *causes* churchly unity” (emphasis his).³⁹ The force of ὅτι and γὰρ together makes it clear that Paul sees the singularity of the loaf as a *cause* of this unity, not merely its symbol.⁴⁰

The same may be said about the cup. Although Paul does not specifically assign a numeric value to the cup, the presence of the article (τὸ ποτήριον) and the parallel with the loaf suggests that (as with the bread) there is only one cup.⁴¹ Ποτήριον (“cup”) is almost certainly intended to stand for both the cup itself

³²Porter, 37; also Robertson and Plummer, 212. Although Phillip Sigal (“Another Note to 1 Corinthians 10.16,” *NTS* 29 [1983]: 135) sees v. 17 as Paul’s midrash to v. 16.

³³Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 119.

³⁴When used with a numeral, ἄρτος (*artos*) always means “loaf of bread.”

³⁵V. 17.

³⁶So Higgins, “He gives the reason why the breaking of bread is a means of sharing in the body of Christ. . . . Sharing the one loaf makes us one body,” 70.

³⁷“This oneness is demonstrated and reaffirmed by sharing in the common loaf,” *ibid.*, 69.

³⁸Harris, 25.

³⁹Wainwright, 117. So also, Robertson and Plummer, “The single loaf is a symbol and an instrument of unity,” 213; and Fee, “the solidarity of the fellowship of believers [is] created by their all sharing ‘the one loaf,’” 466. This is also the view of Barrett, 234, Grosheide, 231-32, Morris, 146, and the majority of scholars.

⁴⁰Markus Barth (*Rediscovering the Lord’s Supper* [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988], 35) argues that ὅτι is used here to introduce a quotation. On this view ὅτι marks an early eucharistic confession rather than acts to introduce a reason (“because”). While this is certainly a legitimate use of ὅτι (see 1 Cor 8:1, 4, 11:23, 14:23, 25, and 15:3-5), it is odd that in the majority of places where it is certain that Paul is quoting an oral saying he does not introduce it with ὅτι (see, e.g., 1:12; 3:4; 4:8; 6:12-13; 10:23, 28; 12:3, 15-16 [“because”], 21; 15:32-33, 35; 16:1-2). Moreover, in each of the passages cited above in favor of Barth’s argument ὅτι is more naturally translated as “that” (introducing indirect discourse), whereas in the present passage this translation would be awkward at best. Paul does not seem to use ὅτι in this letter to introduce direct discourse as Barth’s view requires.

⁴¹So Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 121. Of course, the article in both cases (v. 16) could point to the *kind* of cup/bread that is being consumed without reference to the number of cup/bread. However, this use of the article seems to be precluded by Paul’s insistence in v. 17 that there is “one” loaf of bread. This singularity, by extension, seems to apply naturally to the cup also.

and the contents within (viz., the wine).⁴² When each local assembly gathers together to partake of the bread and the cup, the members are made one body by virtue of their common participation in the bread and cup:

Because all have eaten portions of the same element, they have become a unity in which they have come as close to one another as members of the same body, as if the bodily boundaries between and among people had been transcended.⁴³

Paul's concern then in this and the ensuing verses (vv. 18-21) is to show the oneness of any given religious body (whether Israel, the church, or pagan religions) at a religious feast,⁴⁴ of which the Christian feast serves as an example. This oneness means that anyone who thus joins himself with the participants of the feast becomes one with that religious body, and hence, becomes one with the activities of that religious body.

Whether this oneness is metaphysical or merely representative cannot easily be determined, although Paul's insistence in v. 20 ("I do not want you to be participants in demons") favors a metaphysical oneness. In either case, this oneness must be seen as an essential quality of the Lord's Supper. Its cause in the Christian feast (i.e., the singularity of the loaf and cup) must therefore also be of an essential quality. It is to this quality that we may now turn.

Implications for Communal Form in the Lord's Supper

As we have already seen, the elements of the Lord's Supper (viz., the bread and wine) are, at least for Paul, in the form of a single loaf of bread and a single cup of wine. We have also seen that Paul attaches theological significance to this form of the elements and that the form itself somehow *causes* unity to occur within the local body of believers as each member partakes of the elements. But what if this form is not followed? What are the implications when the singularity depicted by the one loaf and one cup is absent?

According to Harris, a sacrament "dramatizes the central truths of the Christian faith."⁴⁵ If this is true, then the correct form of the sacrament⁴⁶ is of importance; for an incorrect form would not accurately convey the central truth that it intends to dramatize. If, for instance, Paul intends for the singularity of the bread and cup to portray oneness in the body, then the absence of that singularity necessarily implies the absence of a "visible proof"⁴⁷ of oneness. In fact, much more is at stake than mere portrayal. Since, as Paul argues, the singularity of the bread and cup *causes* unity in the body, then the absence of this singularity may imply the absence of bodily unity in the Lord's Supper.⁴⁸

⁴²Contra Marshall (114) who sees the wine as insignificant since "it is the cup which is the symbol." But how does a cup *by itself* represent Christ's blood in v. 16? Moreover, Paul mentions in 1 Cor 11:26 that one may "drink the cup." It is more likely that he has in mind here, not the cup itself, but the contents within.

⁴³Theissen, 165.

⁴⁴See chap. 7 of this book for elaboration on the significance of feasting in the first century world.

⁴⁵Harris, 14.

⁴⁶"Sacrament" is defined here as a "means of grace," not as a means of eternal life.

⁴⁷Jourdan, 121.

⁴⁸If there are other causes of bodily oneness that can replace this cause, Paul does not mention them. Of course this may simply be one avenue of many. On the other hand, while it is true that other factors contribute to the unity of the body (love, acceptance, tolerance, etc.) it may well be that the kind of oneness Paul mentions in this passage is of a different sort altogether. The "table of the Lord" (v. 21), the κοινωνία, the bread and cup, and the act of participation all work together to produce this oneness in a unique way. Perhaps, then, it is more accurate to speak in specific terms of *eucharistic* unity rather than bodily unity in general. If this is the case, it seems no other avenue could easily replace the avenue of the singularity of bread and cup.

Against this view, Marshall, while seeing value in maintaining the symbol of one loaf and one cup, allows modifications of this form where the form may be impractical. For larger settings he suggests simultaneous participation.⁴⁹ However, it is not completely clear how simultaneous participation would convey adequately the symbol of unity which participation in one loaf and one cup pictures. After all, Paul states that one reason all of the participants of each local assembly⁵⁰ are one body is because they all partake of one loaf and one cup. Bread that is presented in a broken form⁵¹ does not symbolize unity but division. The same holds true of wine that is pre-poured into individual cups.

Paul's words seem to demand singularity of the bread and cup before the form can accurately *portray* or *cause* unity. It is not enough simply to have the elements of the bread and cup; these elements must also be capable of expressing their intended theological function. Any other form, while perhaps more practical, does injustice to the theological significance Paul attaches to the oneness-aspect of the elements. To the extent that Paul's concept of oneness in the Lord's Supper is not portrayed via the proper form, to that extent the form is impoverished in terms of its ability to cause (or even to symbolize) the unity that Paul sees as so essential to the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁹Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 156.

⁵⁰By "assembly" is meant the normal and regular local gathering of believers to partake of the Lord's Supper (for an in-depth discussion see chaps. 4 & 8 of this book).

⁵¹E.g., the broken crackers that serve as the "bread" in a majority of denominations today.

CHAPTER 3

THE UNITY-ASPECT IN THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

The unity-aspect of the Lord's Supper was carried over to the first few generations of Christianity after the apostles. Many of the early church fathers reflect the same teaching of oneness in their writings as Paul does in his. Ignatius is one such example.¹ Although very brief (and certainly by no means descriptive), Ignatius does nevertheless indicate an adherence to the Pauline concept of the singularity of the elements. Within the closing of his epistle to the Ephesians, Ignatius records the following:

Assemble yourselves together in common, everyone of you severally, man by man, in grace, in one faith and one Jesus Christ, who after the flesh was of David's race, who is Son of Man and Son of God, to the end that you may obey the bishop and the presbytery without distraction of mind; *breaking one bread* [ἓνα ἄρτου κλάωτες], which is the medicine of immortality and the antidote that we should not die but live for ever in Jesus Christ.²

Although Ignatius does not here mention the singularity of the cup, he does so elsewhere in his letter to the Philadelphians:

Be careful therefore to observe one eucharist (for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ and *one cup* [ἓν ποτήριον] into union in His blood; there is one altar as there is one bishop, together with the presbytery and the deacons my fellow-servants), that whatsoever you do, you may do it after God.³

It seems evident from these two passages that Ignatius (and the churches to which he writes) sees importance in the singularity of both bread and cup. While Ignatius does not expand on that singularity it seems likely that he has in mind the same theology of the Lord's Supper as did Paul in 1 Cor 10:16-17. Ignatius makes a connection between the "oneness" of the faith, the Son of God, the flesh of Jesus, and the altar with that of the bread and cup in the Lord's Supper. In this regard he seems to go beyond Paul, perhaps in an attempt to emphasize the true humanity of Jesus over against his Gnostic opponents.⁴ In any case, Ignatius believes that the church universal is partaking of one loaf and one cup within the Lord's Supper. This demonstrates that the unity-aspect was understood as an integral part of the Supper even within the post-apostolic church.

This emphasis on "oneness" is also apparent in *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus, in which he records the words of the bishop who presides over the Supper: "And we ask you that you would send your Holy Spirit . . . and that you would grant it to all the saints who partake, that they may be united

¹According to Eugene LaVerdiere ("The Eucharist in the New Testament and the Early Church—IX: One Flesh, One Cup, One Altar," *Emmanuel* 100 [1994]: 519), Ignatius "refers to the Eucharist in every one of his letters except the letter to Polycarp."

²Ign. *Eph.* 20, in J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, eds., *The Apostolic Fathers* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 142.

³Ign. *Phld.* 4, *ibid.*, 154.

⁴See, e.g., Ign. *Smyrn.* 2-3, *ibid.*, 156-57.

(βεβαιωθῶσιν [*bebaiōthōsin*]).⁵ For Hippolytus the unity of the body of believers is caused by the Holy Spirit *through* participation in the Eucharist. It would not be too far wrong to say that, for Hippolytus, unity is the *goal* of the Lord's Supper. At the very least, it is clear that the aspect of unity was an important part of the celebration of the Supper.

Another patriarch, Cyril of Alexandria, in commenting on 1 Cor 10:17, says: "If we all partake of the one bread, we are all become together one body."⁶ While most of Cyril's writings on the Lord's Supper address other aspects than oneness (indeed, even the one before us is not exegeted by him to any significant degree), the underlying assumptions are nevertheless apparent. Cyril assumes the same causal relationship of the bread and unity as does Paul. In similar fashion Cyprian writes:

When the Savior takes the bread that is made from the coming together of many grains, and calls it his body, he shows the *unity* of our people, which the bread symbolizes. And when he takes the wine that is pressed from many grapes and grains and forms a *single* liquid, he shows that our flock is composed of many who have been brought into *unity*.⁷

Some have seen in Cyprian's words an allusion to the *Didache*. Referring to the bread of the Eucharist, the writer of the *Didache* states: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may Thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into Thy kingdom."⁸ While there are similarities in analogies used, and while Cyprian may very well have the words of the *Didache* in mind, the focus of each is decidedly different. For while the focus of Cyprian is a *present, spiritual* unity within the body of Christ, the focus of the *Didache* is clearly an *eschatological* reunion (i.e., a gathering together at the end of the age).

Already we are beginning to see a change of emphasis in the Eucharist, from the bread as the cause of unity to the bread as a symbol of unity.⁹ This is true of both bread and wine. Indeed, as one surveys the views of the fathers on this issue one finds a variety of thought about the unity aspect in the Eucharist; from the bread as the cause of unity among the members in each local assembly, to the bread as the cause of unity among the members of the church universal, to the bread as the cause of unity between the church and Christ, to the bread as a mere symbol of unity.

Yet it must be said with equal force that all the fathers who speak on this issue see significance in the physical form of the bread and wine—that it consists in one loaf and one cup. This is clear in the case of Cyprian from his insistence that the bread symbolizes the "unity of our people," and that the wine "forms a single liquid," and that this too symbolizes the "many" who are "brought into unity."

One final father that is worthy of our consideration is Chrysostom. Of all the early fathers who deal with this aspect of the Eucharist, Chrysostom is far and away the most detailed in his exegesis of the oneness of the loaf and cup. In his explanation of Paul's words in 1 Cor 10:16-17 he writes:

⁵*Apostolic Tradition* 4:12, quoted in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church*, 2d ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963), 76. While Hippolytus does not specifically mention the "oneness" of the elements, his words here do reveal his belief that participation in the Eucharist produces unity in the body.

⁶Quoted in Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, ETr. N.E. Nagel (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), 30.

⁷*Epist.* 69, 5:2, in Raymond Johanny, "Cyprian of Carthage," in *The Eucharist of the Early Christians*, ed. Willy Rordorf, ETr. M. J. O'Connell (New York: Pueblo Publishing Co., 1978), 172.

⁸*Did.* 9, in Lightfoot and Harmer, 232.

⁹Although it may be that Cyprian believes both and simply mentions only one.

For what is the bread? The body of Christ. What do they become who partake of it? The body of Christ: not many bodies but *one body*. Many grains are made into *one bread* so that the grains appear no more at all, though they are still there. In their joined state their diversity is no longer discernible. In the same way we are also bound up with one another and with Christ. You are not nourished from one body and the next man from a different body, but all from one and the same body. For this reason he adds, "We have all partaken of one bread." If we eat of the same bread and so *become the same*, why then do we not show the same love and in this also *become one*?¹⁰

Chrysostom, like Cyril and the writer of the *Didache*, uses the analogy of the individual grains of bread which collectively become one loaf to illustrate how the bread of the Eucharist creates and symbolizes unity among believers who partake of the bread. Unlike Cyril, Chrysostom sees the oneness of the bread (and participation in it) as the cause of unity among believers, not just its symbol. This is especially evident in his assertion that those who partake of the bread "become the same." That he means "oneness" here seems clear from the parallel about love: "and in this also become one," hence using the words "same" and "one" synonymously. Those who partake of the bread, therefore (according to Chrysostom), become one.

What was said earlier of Cyril of Alexandria may also be said of the church fathers collectively; namely, that while their writings on the Eucharist (with few exceptions) generally do not include detailed analysis of its unity aspect, what they do include clearly reveals that they see the unity aspect as both vital and widely accepted by the church as a whole. To that extent they testify to the adherence of the early church to Paul's idea of oneness in the Lord's Supper.

¹⁰*Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, 24:4, quoted in Elert, 28.

CHAPTER 4

THE ALLEGED SEPARATION OF THE EUCHARIST FROM THE COMMON MEAL

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul addresses the Lord's Supper as it relates to the unity within the assembly of the Corinthians. It is evident from Paul's words in this passage that the Corinthians were partaking of an entire meal, not just the bread and wine. As we have already pointed out, very few dispute this. Bruce echoes a common belief among scholars that, "the Eucharist, then, was evidently taken in the course of a communal meal."¹ What is disputed, however, is the precise relationship between the Lord's Supper and the Corinthians' meal, and whether Paul in this passage gives any indication that he wants the Corinthians to put an end to their practice of eating a meal together or whether he wants them to continue. To find the answers to these questions it will be helpful to look at the tradition that Paul received about the Supper, and then to reexamine the so-called "Pauline Precedent."

Paul's Concept of "The Lord's Supper"

The first step in deciding about the ongoing relevance of the meal-aspect of the Supper is to determine just what Paul means by the title "Lord's Supper" in 1 Cor 11:20. This title (from the Greek, κυριακὸν δεῖπνον [*kyriakon deipnon*]) occurs only here in the NT. While δεῖπνον occurs often in the NT, the only other place that κυριακὸν occurs is in Rev 1:10 in reference to "the Lord's Day." This phrase in all likelihood has as its referent Sunday, the day Christ arose from the dead and the day on which the church commemorated that resurrection. No attempt will be made here to defend this view—Carson's work is definitive and the reader is referred there.² The relationship between the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper will be examined later in this book.³ Suffice it now to say that the word κυριακὸν means roughly "belonging to the Lord." In the case of κυριακὸν δεῖπνον it means "the supper belonging to the Lord."⁴ Yet just what is this "supper"? Is Paul here referring to the meal of the Corinthians, of which the bread and wine are dominant features, or is he referring to the bread and wine alone? Put another way, could Paul have referred to the bread and wine as a "supper" apart from the meal?

¹Bruce, *First and Second Corinthians*, 110. See also Conzelmann who notes, "It is plain that we have here not merely a sacramental proceeding, but a real meal," 195.

²See esp. the contributions by A. T. Lincoln ("From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation*, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982], 343-412 passim) and R. Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," *ibid.*, 221-250 passim.

³See chap. 8.

⁴Barrett (262) sees other options as "in memory of the Lord," "under the authority of the Lord," and "in the presence of the Lord."

It is an interesting fact that every other instance of δέιπνον in the NT refers to nothing less than a full meal, and in many (arguably, all) cases it refers to a banquet or feast.⁵ It would be odd in light of this to maintain that Paul has in mind the so-called “elements” (i.e., the bread and wine)—apart from the meal—when he refers to the κυριακὸν δέιπνον. On the contrary, what Paul calls the “Lord’s Supper” is itself the meal with the bread and wine.⁶ Paul has in this one instance revealed to us his concept of the Lord’s Supper. The bread and wine by themselves can no more be called the Lord’s Supper (nor, indeed, a δέιπνον in any case) than the meal without the bread and wine. Any attempt to view κυριακὸν δέιπνον as a title for a symbolic supper is refuted on the grounds that the Corinthians themselves were not partaking of a symbolic supper but rather a real supper.⁷ This seems clear from Paul’s corrective of their abuses: “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.”⁸ It would be difficult to know just how some of the Corinthians could be getting drunk and satisfying hunger by partaking of a symbolic meal.

The Order of the Lord’s Supper in Paul

One way to determine whether or not Paul considered the meal-aspect of the Lord’s Supper to be a crucial part of the Supper is to take a closer look at the tradition he received about the Supper. Paul tells us about this tradition in 1 Cor 11:23-26:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Several important points can be made about Paul’s words here. First, the order of consumption is, for Paul, bread/supper—cup. Paul does not say when they began eating the meal; only that the cup came after. The “cup” referred to here is likely the “cup of blessing” which in Jewish custom was consumed after eating, since, as Fee has noted, this phrase was in use as “a technical term for the final blessing offered at the end of the meal.”⁹ Paul, in fact, uses this phrase for the cup of the Lord’s Supper in 1 Cor 10:16 (τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας, “the cup of blessing”).

Second, we may assume since Paul makes the point that the cup was distributed *after* supper, that the saying about the bread took place either immediately before the meal (to initiate the meal) or during the meal. It is therefore likely that, in Paul’s Lord’s Supper tradition, the loaf is distributed at the beginning or during

⁵ The only occurrences of δέιπνον in the NT are in Matt 23:6; Mark 6:21; 12:39; Luke 14:12, 16, 17, 24; 20:46; John 12:2; 21:20; 13:2, 4; 1 Cor 11:20, 21; Rev 19:9, 17.

⁶ So Higgins (71) who says, “The Lord’s Supper here is the whole of the common meal”; Conzelmann (194) who says that the “community meal [is] here described as the Lord’s Supper”; and Michael J. Townsend, “Exit the Agape?,” *ExpT* 90 (1978-79): 358. Contra Fee (535) who speaks of the Corinthians’ common meal “at which the Lord’s Supper is also eaten.”

⁷ See H. R. Gummey, “Lord’s Supper,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromily (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979-88), 1923, “It should be noted that the name, ‘Lord’s Supper,’ belongs to the *agape* rather than to the Eucharist; its popular use [as a reference to the bread and wine] is a misnomer of medieval and Reformation times.” See also Grosheide (267) who says: “The Lord’s Supper, as Paul uses the word here, is not to be restricted to what we call Holy Communion, for the following words do not fit the description of a sacrament.”

⁸ 1 Cor 11:20-22.

⁹ Fee, 468. So also Barrett, 231.

the meal and the cup follows the meal. What is significant about this order is the inclusion of the mention of an actual meal within the tradition itself. Why does Paul include this? Doubtless there were many things that took place at the Last Supper that are not included in any of the Lord's Supper traditions. Yet Paul speaks of the meal-aspect ("after supper") as an integral part of his tradition.¹⁰ This passing reference does not bespeak the unimportance of the meal, but rather the *assumption* that the meal is to be included in the practice of the Lord's Supper.¹¹ Moreover, it was commonplace in the first century to initiate a meal by breaking bread;¹² this fact alone argues strongly that the breaking of bread at the Lord's Supper *assumes* the initiation of an actual meal.

Third, none of the Synoptic accounts contradicts Paul's order here. Matthew and Mark place the saying about the bread "while they were eating,"¹³ whereas Luke is silent in this regard. While Luke's silence may be taken to mean that they were not yet eating when Jesus distributed the bread, it may also be taken to mean that Luke assumes they were already eating. In any case, as has already been pointed out in a previous chapter, Paul is, strictly speaking, the only one of the four whose primary purpose for including this tradition is to establish the correct practice of the Supper.¹⁴ To that extent, Paul's order must be seen as more relevant to the actual practice of the early church than the Synoptic accounts.

It should be mentioned here that Marshall objects to the idea that the early church followed the order of the Last Supper meal since "it ignores the fact that what Paul cited was not an account of what the church ought to do but a description of what Jesus did . . . the church's meal was not a Passover meal."¹⁵ While it is true that the church's meal was not a Passover, it seems difficult to imagine why Paul's tradition, which Marshall regards as a liturgical account, would not be formulated in such a way as to indicate the order of the proceedings which the church was to follow. Indeed, what reason is there to assume that the order would be otherwise? In light of this, it seems best to view Paul's tradition of the Supper as that which is to be reflected by the practice of the church. As Theissen notes:

It is unthinkable that Paul would quote a sacred, cultic formula, expressly state that he received it in just this and no other form, yet at the same time tacitly suppose that its order is not to be followed. . . . If he wants to bring about some order [1 Co 11:34], he cannot possibly repeat obsolete instructions.¹⁶

Fourth, the question must again be asked, What does Paul mean by "supper" in this passage? Does he have in mind here a symbolic supper consisting only of bread and wine? Or, does he have in mind an actual meal as would be expected of one recalling the events of the Last Supper of the Lord and his disciples? Paul uses the same word (δειπνον) that he used in v. 20 (although in the verbal form this time, μετὰ τὸ

¹⁰Given the other ways this tradition could have stated the same phrase (e.g., μετὰ τὸ φαγεῖν ["after the act of eating"] rather than μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι ["after the act of supping"]; the first implying the eating of bread only, the second a full meal—or simply, "then he took the cup") the early church must have understood the meal-aspect to be an integral part of the Lord's Supper to have included it; for as even Fee (554) concedes, this phrase forms an "otherwise unnecessary role in the tradition."

¹¹As Theissen (152) notes, "The formula presumes that there is a meal *between* the word over the bread and that spoken over the cup. One gets to the cup μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι" (italics his). See also Townsend, 357; Ringe, 62; and Bornkamm, 155.

¹²See chap. 5 below.

¹³Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22.

¹⁴See chap. 1.

¹⁵Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 111.

¹⁶Theissen, 152.

δειπνήσαι). It seems then that Paul sees the meal-aspect as part of his tradition, and that the meal with the bread and cup form the Lord's Supper.

The "Pauline Precedent" Reexamined

Many who concede that the Corinthians were, in fact, partaking of an actual meal have postulated that Paul's purpose for writing this pericope is to put an end to the meal-aspect.¹⁷ This is alternatively based on the assumption that Paul sees this meal as the source of the Corinthians' divisions,¹⁸ or that Paul does not view the meal as an essential aspect of the Lord's Supper to begin with,¹⁹ or a combination of both.²⁰ Evidence that can be adduced in favor of the view that Paul is here putting an end to the meal-aspect of the Lord's Supper includes: (1) Paul tells the Corinthians that their meal is not the Lord's Supper (v. 20) and that the Lord's Supper consists only of the bread and cup to which Paul refers extensively in vv. 23-28; (2) Paul implies that he wants them to cease practice of the meal-aspect by his statement, "Don't you have homes to eat and drink in?" (v. 22); and (3) Paul ends this section with the words "if anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment" (v. 34). Here, it is argued, is the Pauline Precedent that initiated the cessation of the meal-aspect of the Lord's Supper once and for all.²¹

Against point (1) it may be noted that the seeming emphasis Paul places on the bread and cup in vv. 23-28 is not intended to *de-emphasize* the importance of the meal-aspect. Even Fee (who subscribes to the cessationist view of the meal-aspect) concedes this point: "The context makes it clear that 'to eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord' means simply to participate in the meal known as the Lord's Supper. Paul is not trying to give special emphasis to the bread and wine per se."²² In addition, Paul's statement "it is *not* the Lord's Supper you eat" (v. 20) is not intended to deny that the Lord's Supper consists of a meal; rather that the Corinthian meal, at one time regarded as the Lord's Supper, can no longer be regarded as such because of the abuses associated with it. This is clear from Paul's explanation of his statement in the very next verse: "*for* as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk" (v. 21). In other words, what would, under normal conditions, be the *Lord's* Supper, the Corinthians, by their divisions, have turned into their *own* Supper. Paul is not here attempting to separate the meal from the bread and wine; rather whatever points he makes about the meal are applied equally to the bread and cup (vv. 29-30).

¹⁷So, e.g., Kasper (131-32), "The repetition of the special words and gestures of Jesus also came to be separated; [*sic*] at a very early stage, from the normal 'full meal.' This is already evident with Paul, in 1 Cor. 11:17-34."

¹⁸So Héring, 113. See also B. Klappert, "Lord's Supper," *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 2, ed. C. Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Exeter: Paternoster, 1975—78), 530, "the separation of the meal from the Lord's Supper is also assumed in 1 Cor. 11. It is here that the direct cause of the Corinthian abuse lies."

¹⁹So Grosheide, 268. See also Frank C. Senn ("The Lord's Supper, Not the Passover Seder," *Worship* 60 [1986]: 366) who says, "If the Lord's presence is attached to the bread and cup, the rest of the meal is superfluous. . . . The Lord's Supper is a ritual meal; it need not be an actual meal."

²⁰So, e.g., Conzelmann (195) who, although seeing the Lord's Supper in Corinth as a "real meal," nevertheless views Paul's corrective as an attempt "to separate the *sacrament* from satisfaction of hunger" so that the Supper "thereby loses its character of 'agape,'" (*italics his*). According to Conzelmann, "in this way the church celebration becomes a pure celebration of the Sacrament," *ibid.*

²¹So Higgins, 60-61, 71; and F. V. Filson, *A New Testament History: The Story of the Emerging Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 252.

²²Fee, 560.

Against point (2) above we may again question the assumptions regarding Paul's intent. Barrett is right when he notes about v. 22:

On the surface this seems to imply that ordinary, non-cultic eating and drinking should be done at home, contradicting the inference drawn above [from vv. 20-21] that the Corinthian supper included an ordinary meal. But Paul's point is that, if the rich wish to eat and drink on their own, enjoying better food than their poorer brothers, they should do this at home; if they cannot wait for others (verse 33), if they must indulge to excess, *they can at least keep the church's common meal free from practices that can only bring discredit upon it.*²³ (Italics mine)

This same observation may be made against point (3) above. There it is argued that Paul's closing words for this section ("if anyone is hungry, he should eat at home," v. 34) imply Paul's desire that the meal-aspect of the Lord's Supper should cease. Yet, as Barrett notes above about v. 22,²⁴ Paul's concern is to put an end, not to the meal itself, but to the abuses that accompanied the meal. This seems clear on two counts. First, Paul uses the singular pronoun and the singular imperative in this verse—lit., "if *anyone* (τις) is hungry, let *him* eat (ἔσθιέτω [*esthiétō*] at home"—not the plural. This suggests strongly that Paul's point is simply that if any *individual* cannot restrain himself from eating the Supper before the poor arrive, then that individual should eat something at home so that he won't be tempted to hoard that which rightly belongs to the entire body. Second, the verse that immediately precedes v. 34 seems to preclude any notion that Paul here intends to put an end to the meal-aspect: "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other," (v. 33). If Paul means to abolish the meal-aspect of the Lord's Supper then it is odd that he would make a closing statement which assumes that the Corinthians will continue the meal as they have been (minus, of course, the abuses). Indeed, the only modification of the Supper that interests Paul is that the Corinthians "wait for each other" so that all may partake of the meal together.²⁵

The Agape in Jude 12

Tucked away in Jude's short epistle is a singular reference to the *Agape* (ἀγάπαις [*agapais*], often translated as "love feasts"). There may also be a reference to this "feast" in 2 Pet 2:13 (συνεσχομένοι ὑμῖν, "feasting with you"); in fact, the variant reading in this verse for ἀπάταις (*apatais*) ("deceptions") is ἀγάπαις which is supported by a few significant manuscripts including B, A^c, and Ψ.²⁶ This feast in Jude (as well as in Peter) is included as a passing reference (not unlike Paul's teaching on the bread and cup in 1 Cor 10:16-17). However, as with Paul, we may detect certain assumptions on the part of Jude for including it in the first place. It will be helpful first to survey the context in which this reference is found.

Jude's letter is one of urgency; that much is evident from his greeting. Although he had originally planned to write a general letter dealing with issues of salvation, he felt constrained to write instead to warn his readers about certain heretics who had infiltrated the church (v. 3-4). He compares these heretics to some of the OT villains that incurred God's judgment, including the rabble that Moses had to deal with, fallen angels, and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah (vv. 5-7). Beginning then in v. 8, Jude sets out to make

²³Barrett, 263.

²⁴See also his comments on v. 34: "it has been suggested . . . that this instruction represents a beginning of the separation of the eucharist (or symbolical meal) from the *agape* (or fellowship meal). This however is not so," *ibid.*, 277; see also Bruce, *First and Second Corinthians*, 116.

²⁵Cf. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* 110; Bornkamm, 129, 155; and Winter, 73.

²⁶There is also a less significant variant for ἀγάπαις in Jude 12 (ἀπάταις, supported primarily by A); but, as Michael Green (*2 Peter and Jude*, 2d ed., TNTC [Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press / Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987], 188) notes, ἀγάπαις "is unquestionably the right reading here." Bruce Metzger (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: Biblia-Druck, 1975], 725) notes that the evidence to the contrary is due to the influence of 2 Pet 2:13.

application to the current heretics. They “pollute their own bodies, reject authority and slander celestial beings” (v. 8). They are compared, not only to the foregoing villains, but to Cain, Balaam, and Korah as well (v. 11). It is in this context that Jude mentions the *Agape*: “These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm” (v. 12). The question is, Just what is this *Agape*?

Common Meal or Lord’s Supper?

On a purely contextual level, it seems evident that Jude is first referring to a common meal. Although the word ἀγάπαις is literally “loves,” it is closely connected by Jude to the participle form of συνευωχέομαι (*sunēuōcheōmai*) (“feast together”), which occurs only here and in 2 Pet 2:13. For this reason, and since Jude and Peter cite identical thematic content, it seems safe to assume that both writers have the same thing in mind. Aside from this evidence (and the witness of the early church in the post-apostolic era, to which we will turn shortly), no scholar seems to question that Jude is using ἀγάπαις as a term for a Christian feast. The disagreement is over whether ἀγάπαις is a term that designates *merely* a common meal, or is, in fact, a synonym for the Lord’s Supper.

Some scholars view Jude’s reference here as nothing more than a common fellowship meal.²⁷ This is not a widely held view, however, and most scholars have adopted the view that Jude is here referring to none other than the Lord’s Supper itself.²⁸ In Townsend’s words:

There is nothing . . . to suggest that this *excludes* the Eucharist itself . . . [and] . . . there seems [to be] no good reason why ἀγάπαις here should not fulfill the same function as κυριακὸν δεῖπνον does in 1 Cor 11²⁰, where, as we have seen, it refers to the total complex of events, i.e., the Eucharist in its normal common-meal setting. . . . It is *prima facie* unlikely . . . that Jude 12 should refer to an Agape distinct from the Eucharist.²⁹

With this Marshall agrees when he notes: “There is nothing to suggest that the love feast was a separate kind of meal from the Lord’s Supper, and it seems more probable that these were two different names for the same occasion.”³⁰ It is indeed more difficult to understand Jude’s anxiety about ungodly men partaking of this meal if it is not the Lord’s Supper and if it does not include the Eucharist. It seems best, therefore, to view Jude’s *Agape* as the Lord’s Supper itself.

Jude’s Relevance to the Issue

Jude’s relevance to the issue of the common meal in the Lord’s Supper is twofold: (1) Jude offers non-Pauline corroboration about the Supper; and (2) he reveals the importance of the Supper via a specialized term. We shall elaborate on each of these points in turn.

²⁷So Simon Kistemaker, *Peter and Jude* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1987), 392; and W. Gunther and H. -G. Link, “Love,” *NIDNTT*, vol. 2, 547; and, to some extent, J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and Jude*, HNTC (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1969), 269-270.

²⁸Included here, among many others, are Green (188-89), Townsend (360), Marshall (*Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 110), Higgins (60), C. Spicq (*Agape in the New Testament*, ETr. M. A. McNamara and M. H. Richter [St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1965], 370), R. Bauckham (*Jude, 2 Peter*, WBC 50 [Waco, TX: Word, 1983], 84), and Edwin Blum (“Jude,” *EBC*, 392).

²⁹Townsend, 360.

³⁰Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 110

Non-Pauline Corroboration

The fact that Jude, in writing to his churches, can refer to a church practice that is similar to Paul's is revealing in that it implies the universality of this practice. Higgins assumes that this meal-aspect of the Lord's Supper was practiced universally by the church when he says, "The custom at Corinth, *as elsewhere*, was for the special eucharistic partaking of bread and wine to take place during the course of a meal"³¹ (*italics mine*). Not only was this participation in a eucharistic common meal "likely the practice of every Pauline church,"³² it was, as Jude 12 indicates, likely the practice of every *apostolic* church. In Spicq's view the church held the *Agape* in order to "reproduce as exactly as possible the circumstances that surrounded the institution of the Eucharist."³³ It would be odd in light of this to maintain that this meal was confined to Pauline churches alone; for the meaning and significance of the Last Supper applies equally to all churches. It seems best then to conclude that the *Agape* in Jude corroborates the Lord's Supper in Paul as a common meal which served as a setting for the bread and cup of the Eucharist, and which was practiced universally by the apostolic church.

Agape as a Specialized Term

One other indication of the universality of the *Agape* may be seen in the name itself. While the mere practice of the *Agape* by the early church cannot be seen as the determining factor in whether or not this practice was considered normative,³⁴ it seems likely that since this practice had been given a special name it was indeed considered a normative practice by the apostolic church itself. This is the basis upon which Bauckham³⁵ and Lincoln³⁶ view Sunday as the normative day of meeting for the church. Bauckham notes, for instance, that the regular, consistent practice of meeting on Sunday coupled with the use of the specialized term, Lord's Day, "gives that custom the stamp of canonical authority."³⁷ With this Lincoln concurs:

That the first day of the week was given the title Lord's Day suggests a matter of far greater import than convenience or practicality. . . . True, the designation "Lord's Day" in [Rev 1:10] is incidental rather than being part of the primary didactic intent of the writer, but we are not using this passing reference in order to establish a precedent but to show that a precedent had already been set in the practice of at least John's churches and evidently met with his approval. So in the case of worship on the first day of the week we have a pattern that is repeated in the New Testament, and as is shown by Revelation 1:10, the pattern had become established.³⁸

What can be said here about the "Lord's Day" applies with equal force to the "Lord's Supper/*Agape*." Indeed, we may claim even more evidence for a normative practice of this meal since much more is said

³¹Higgins, 60.

³²G. B. Caird, *The Apostolic Age* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 52.

³³Spicq, 370.

³⁴Other factors must be weighed as well, including the underlying theology of the practice, the way in which the practice is presented by the NT writers, and the extent to which the practice is distinct from the practices of the surrounding culture and other religious groups.

³⁵Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 221-250.

³⁶Lincoln, 343-412.

³⁷Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 240.

³⁸Lincoln, 387-88.

about it in the NT than about the Lord's Day. Moreover, as Lincoln has noted, John alone uses the title Lord's Day. Yet, as Lincoln further notes:

Although we have evidence for this pattern from only some parts of the early church, its rationale is not one that was applicable only to those parts or indeed applicable only to the early church period but one that remains applicable throughout the church's life. Hence the practice of Sunday worship can be said to be not merely one that recommends itself because it bears the mark of antiquity but one that, though not directly commanded, lays high claim to bearing the mark of canonical authority.³⁹

This is likewise true in the case of the *Agape*. Although Jude alone uses this title, Paul, as we have seen, refers to the same meal and calls it the Lord's Supper. Neither writer gives a direct command to adhere to this practice of holding a meal; yet, as in the case of John and the Lord's Day, each writer assumes, by virtue of the use of a specialized name, that the practice is an established, universal custom. Moreover, as with the Lord's Day, the "rationale" of the meal (inasmuch as it is part and parcel of the tradition that was handed down to Paul from the other Apostles, and inasmuch as it is a "reproduction" of the Last Supper⁴⁰) must apply equally and in the same way to all churches.

The Testimony of Early Church History

By the middle of the second century the Eucharist and the accompanying meal stand as separate ceremonies, presumably to keep the Eucharist from becoming profaned by the participation of unbelievers.⁴¹ Jeremias thinks that the origin of this separation can be traced back to "the time of Paul"⁴² and was done to safeguard the Eucharist from the unbaptized. However, while Jeremias' rationale for this separation is no doubt valid, Townsend is probably correct in ascribing the separation to the post-apostolic period.⁴³ As Townsend notes:

At the earliest stage of the tradition however, there is no evidence that such a procedure [of separating the Eucharist from the Agape] was envisaged. We must be extremely careful not to read back into the NT from the undoubted practice of the second and subsequent Christian centuries.⁴⁴

This separation then most likely occurred during the second century; yet throughout the NT period and even beyond "Christians met together to hold common meals that were more than a token reception of bread and wine."⁴⁵ Marshall is no doubt right in his belief that whatever may have been the relationship between the Eucharist and the common meal in later times, "they belonged together in New Testament times."⁴⁶ Although we cannot know with certainty the exact date at which this separation occurred, we can nevertheless pinpoint the general period by examining some of the writings of the second century.

³⁹Lincoln, 388.

⁴⁰Spicq, 370.

⁴¹J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1966), 116, 132-33.

⁴²Ibid., 133.

⁴³Townsend, 359.

⁴⁴Ibid., 360.

⁴⁵Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 111. See also Filson, *History*, 345.

⁴⁶Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 145.

Tertullian

Although Tertullian does not make the express connection between the Eucharist and the *Agape*, we know with certainty that the *Agape* was still in practice during his time. In his *Apology*, Tertullian describes for us a meeting of the early church during an *Agape*.⁴⁷ His thrust is clearly to defend the Christian feast against false accusations of extravagance. Tertullian insists that at this feast Christians eat and drink as “temperate people,” eating only as much as satisfies hunger and drinking only as much as needed to quench thirst. Through it all, Tertullian gives no indication that there would be cessation of partaking of this meal. On the contrary, he insists that it involves nothing that can be considered illegal and characterizes the feast as a “rule of life” for Christians.⁴⁸ Moreover, it seems likely that Tertullian views the *Agape* as the Lord’s Supper itself since he contrasts its practice with the meals held by the pagans in honor of Hercules and Serapis. It would be strange if the parallel he makes does not correspond to the Lord’s Supper.

Clement of Alexandria

In his *The Instructor*, Clement of Alexandria writes extensively about the *Agape*. As with Tertullian above, we cannot know with certainty whether the Eucharist is to be included in Clement’s *Agape*. However, there are indications that Clement sees the *Agape* and the Eucharist as integral parts of the same practice. When contrasting the Christian *Agape* with the feasts practiced by non-Christians he writes: “But we who seek the heavenly bread must rule the belly.”⁴⁹ This can only be an allusion to John 6.

Clement’s language sometimes suggests that he is against the idea of a Christian feast altogether; yet it is clear that Clement is interested only in the separation of extravagance from the meal, not in abandoning the meal itself.⁵⁰ He believes the *Agape* should be a means of showing love to the poor,⁵¹ and is meant to provide sustenance, not pleasure.⁵² Far from abandoning the *Agape*, Clement desires only to correct potential abuses of it.

The Letter of Pliny

One of the earliest pieces of evidence that we have for the post-apostolic practice of the early church is that found in a letter of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan dated about A.D. 111-112. In this letter Pliny relates the testimony of former Christians who have defected and renounced Christ. The portion of the letter that alludes to the *Agape* is one that is often cited in quips and quotes in some of the more popular manuals of church history:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before sunrise and reciting an antiphonal hymn to Christ as God, and binding themselves with an oath—not to commit any crime, but to abstain from all acts of theft,

⁴⁷Tertullian, *Apology* 39:16, *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*, vol. 10, ed. R. J. Deferrari, ETr. R. Arbesmann et al. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 101.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor*, Book 2, 1:1, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, ed. A. Roberts and J. Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 1994), 238.

⁵⁰Ibid., v. 15.

⁵¹Ibid., vv. 7, 11.

⁵²Ibid., v. 8.

robbery and adultery, from breaches of faith, from denying a trust when called upon to honor it. After this, they went on, it was their custom to separate, and then to meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. And even this, they said, they had given up doing since the publication of my edict in which, according to your instructions, I had placed a ban on private associations.⁵³

The last two sentences are of particular interest to those attempting to pinpoint the exact date of the cessation of the *Agape*. Clearly Pliny can be describing nothing other than the Christian feast, and for this reason many scholars have seen in this edict the end of the *Agape* as practiced in the first century. Wainwright echoes the widely accepted view that the phrase, “even this they had given up doing since my edict,” refers to the church at large abandoning the common meal.⁵⁴ Goguel sees the word *sacramentum* (“oath”) as evidence that the Eucharist was transferred to the morning meeting after Pliny’s edict against social gatherings.⁵⁵ Kasper sees this as “clear evidence” for the separation of the Eucharist from the *Agape* in the second century.⁵⁶

But just how this letter supports the separation of the Eucharist from the *Agape* is not so apparent. Against Goguel’s view *sacramentum* is probably best taken here as “oath.”⁵⁷ Moreover, Pliny speaks of the *sacramentum* as being practiced in the morning during the same pre-edict period as when the common meal was practiced in the evening. What reason then would there be for separating meal from Eucharist if they were being practiced separately *before* the edict?

The strongest argument for the cessation of the *Agape* in Pliny is the statement to which Wainwright refers; namely:

It was their custom to separate, and then to meet again to partake of food, but food of an ordinary and innocent kind. And even this, they said, they had given up doing since the publication of my edict in which, according to your instructions, I had placed a ban on private associations.

Wainwright (among others) takes this to mean that the church universally abandoned the meal aspect due to the edict of Pliny that banned private associations. This assumes however that “they” refers to the entire church. It is more likely, in view of the fact that this is a report from ex-Christians who were making statements in denial of the charge that they were continuing in their associations with other Christians, that “they” refers here not to the church, but to these ex-Christians only. In other words, the ex-Christians had given up meeting with the church since the publication of the edict. These may have been nominal Christians who had joined the ranks of the church perhaps for social reasons and left for purposes of expediency; namely, the threat of execution!⁵⁸ Moreover, it is doubtful that the phrase, “and even this, they said, they had given up doing since the publication of my edict,” pertains to the *Agape* specifically, but more likely refers to

⁵³Pliny to the Emperor Trajan 96, Book 10, vol. 2, rev. W. M. L. Hutchinson, ETr. W. Melmoth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 403-405.

⁵⁴Wainwright, 76.

⁵⁵M. Goguel, *The Primitive Church*, ETr. H. C. Snape (New York: Macmillan, 1964), 359.

⁵⁶Kasper, 132. So also Kelly, 269; and Jeremias, 136.

⁵⁷With Bruce, *New Testament History*, 424. Cf. *The Oxford Latin Dictionary* (ed. P. G. W. Glare [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983]) which gives the meaning, “an oath made to an organization,” military or otherwise; and *The Latin-English Lexicon* (ed. E. A. Andrews [New York: Harper & Brothers Publications, 1852]), which gives the meanings “a military oath of allegiance, a [non-military] oath, a solemn obligation.”

⁵⁸The punishment for persistent refusal to recant was death: “So far this has been my procedure when people were charged before me with being Christians. . . . I ordered them to be led off to execution,” *Pliny to Trajan*, Hutchinson, 401.

any meeting with the church. Indeed, the ban was placed upon “private associations,” not specifically cultic meals. It was the apostate Christians who had “given up” meeting together, not the church.

The Didache

One other significant writing of the early second century that deserves mention in regard to the *Agape* is the *Didache*. In *Did.* 14 there are instructions on gathering together, one reason of which is to break bread. *Did.* 9-10, however, gives more explicit details about the early second-century procedure for the eucharistic celebration. In *Did.* 10, immediately after the instructions about the sayings over the bread and cup, the writer says: “And after you are *satisfied*, thus give thanks,”⁵⁹ and then proceeds to give instructions about prayer after the meal. The writer implies a meal here, for who could become “satisfied” on token elements? He makes the same allusion to a meal in the prayer said after the meal: “You, Almighty Master, created all things for your name’s sake, and gave food and drink to men for *enjoyment*.”⁶⁰ The food for which the writer gives thanks is for “enjoyment,” not for representation. The allusion to a meal in connection with the Eucharist is revealing, for it indicates that the *Agape* was still very much a part of the Eucharist in the early second century.⁶¹ It cannot be until later that the *Agape* faded from the scene. This in turn implies that there probably was no apostolic intent of the *Agape* ever ceasing. On the contrary, from Paul to Jude to the second-century church we have a consistent witness of a universal practice of the *Agape* without the slightest hint that it should not be practiced.

⁵⁹Lightfoot and Harmer, 232.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 233.

⁶¹Contra G. D. Kilpatrick (*The Eucharist in Bible and Liturgy*, Moorehouse Lectures 1975 [Cambridge: CUP, 1983], 20) who believes these texts not to be referring to the Eucharist but to “an ordinary Christian meal.” Goguel (342), pointing out the similarities between chapters 9, 10, and 14, concludes that they all refer to the same rite.

CHAPTER 5

THE MEANING OF “TO BREAK BREAD” IN THE LORD’S SUPPER TEXTS

As we have already shown in the previous chapter, the meal instituted by Jesus for his church goes by a variety of titles in the New Testament, including *Lord’s Supper* and *Agape*. One other way the writers of the New Testament signify this meal is by the use of the phrase “the breaking of bread.”¹ As we shall see below, even if this phrase did at one time refer only to the initiation of a meal and not the meal itself, it eventually came to refer to the meal proper, at least in Christian circles.²

Survey of Views

There is general agreement among scholars that the phrase “break bread” refers in the New Testament to participation in an entire meal. Martin, for instance, postulates that this phrase may be a “technical term” for the whole meal.³ While Higgins is correct when he says that this phrase “never denoted a whole meal until the New Testament,”⁴ it is equally true that in the New Testament this phrase is to be seen always in the context of a meal.⁵ The more valid question might be to ask whether it refers to anything like participation in a symbolic meal (i.e., the eucharistic bread and wine without the meal). This seems doubtful. According to Cullmann “to break bread” usually means “to take a meal,”⁶ and Filson sees this phrase as just another way of describing the common meal.⁷ In spite of this general agreement among scholars there are those who dissent from this view, not least of which is Jeremias, whose work we will address later.

Paul’s Use of “To Break Bread”

Most of the references to the phrase “break bread” come from Luke’s writings. In fact, in all of Paul’s writings this phrase is used only once (1 Cor 10:16). Yet, as we have already shown in the previous chapter, Paul’s concept of “breaking bread” cannot be seen apart from the entire meal of the Lord’s Supper. Although it is true that Paul has in mind the one loaf and the one cup, it is equally true that he does not see these as completely separated from the rest of the meal. The more pressing question for our purposes is, What

¹Or some such variant form; “to break bread,” “the bread that we break,” etc.

²Harris, 21.

³R. P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood: Revell, 1964), 122.

⁴Higgins, 56.

⁵Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 130.

⁶O. Cullmann, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in Primitive Christianity,” in *Essays on the Lord’s Supper*, ed. J. G. Davies and A. R. George, ETr. J. G. Davies (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 10.

⁷Filson, *History*, 344.

meaning does Luke give to this phrase? Since Paul and Luke were traveling companions, it is reasonable to suppose that whatever Luke means by this phrase cannot be substantially different from what Paul means by the phrase.⁸

The Meaning of “To Break Bread” in Acts

Luke uses the phrase “break bread” five times in the book of Acts. Four of these include probable references to the Lord’s Supper, while the last is more likely a common meal. It is all but certain that, in the former, Luke uses this phrase as a virtual synonym for the eucharistic meal.

Acts 2:42, 46

In Acts 2 Luke records for us the practice of the early church immediately after Pentecost:

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. . . . Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.⁹

The most common way to translate v. 42 is (as the *NIV* does here) with a four-fold division of activities: (1) apostles’ teaching; (2) fellowship; (3) breaking of bread; and (4) prayer.¹⁰ However, a three-fold division cannot be ruled out and may be preferable. The Greek text reads: ἦσαν δὲ προσκαρτεροῦντες τῇ διδασκίᾳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου καὶ ταῖς προσευχαῖς. It is interesting to note that although each of the four activities mentioned has its own article (τῇ, ταῖς=“the”), καὶ (*kaì*) is used only twice to separate activities instead of three times as would be expected if all four activities are to be seen as separate. There is no καὶ between τῇ κοινωνίᾳ (“the fellowship”) and τῇ κλάσει τοῦ ἄρτου (“the breaking of bread”), and this may signify one activity rather than two—“fellowship in the breaking of bread.”¹¹ On this view the two nouns are in regimen and so both would naturally have the article. Further support for this meaning may be adduced from the fact that Paul, Luke’s traveling companion, expressly tells us that “the bread that we break” is indeed a κοινωνία in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16).

Taken by itself it is difficult to know if “breaking of bread” here means a symbolic meal or an actual meal. Yet, any ambiguity in this verse is removed in v. 46. There it is clear that Luke associates the breaking of bread with “eating together” (μετελαμβάνον τροφῆς [*metelambanon trophês*])—lit., “receiving one’s share of food”).¹² Nor is this likely a common meal, for as Bruce notes, “The ‘breaking of bread’ probably denotes

⁸This point cannot be pressed too far. There are many who question the similarities of Luke and Paul’s theologies, and Luke’s willingness (or, indeed, ability) to paint an accurate picture of Paul’s theology and practice (see, e.g., Eric Franklin, *Luke: Interpreter of Paul, Critic of Matthew* [Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 92; ed. Stanley Porter; Sheffield: JSOT Press], 1994; and the contributions in C. K. Barrett, *New Testament Essays* [London: SPCK, 1972]; but cf. F. F. Bruce, “Is the Paul of Acts the Real Paul?”, *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* [1975-76]: 282-305). The issue is much too involved to deal with in this short section, and so no attempt will be made to interact with the various views. The view of this book is strengthened by—not dependent upon—the similarities between Luke and Paul’s views of the Lord’s Supper.

⁹Acts 2:42, 46.

¹⁰Some translations, such as the *KJV* and *RSV*, combine “the apostles’ teaching and fellowship” to form one clause, while “the breaking of bread” and “prayer” are seen as two separate clauses.

¹¹Contra C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, ICC, ed. J. A. Emerton et al. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994), 164.

¹²*Ibid.*, 170, “What is in mind here is a real, not a symbolic, meal.”

more than the regular taking of food together: the regular observance of what came to be called the Lord’s Supper seems to be in view.¹³

That Luke holds to the same practice of the Christian meal as does Paul seems clear since “the wording [in Acts 2:46] suggests the same twofold meal observed later in the Pauline churches: a common fellowship meal or agape with which is associated the Lord’s Supper.”¹⁴ Caird rightly points out that Luke knew of no difference between his Lord’s Supper tradition and that of Paul’s for he uses the same terminology (i.e., “breaking of bread”) for both.¹⁵ Hence, the Supper found in Acts 2:46 cannot be seen as a different type of Lord’s Supper tradition than that over which Paul presided at Troas (Acts 20:7-12).

Against this view, Jeremias argues that *κοινωνία* in Acts 2:42 refers to the table fellowship of the early church and that “breaking of bread” refers exclusively and separately to the Eucharist.¹⁶ Nowhere, he argues, does the phrase “breaking of bread” refer to an entire meal.¹⁷ Indeed, as Jeremias argues: “the designation ‘to break bread’ was appropriate for the Eucharist and conforms to the usual idiom, because this was not a meal. . . . [This phrase] arose as a consequence of the separation of the Eucharist from the meal proper.”¹⁸ Jeremias concludes his argument by stating that both Acts and 1 Corinthians presuppose a separation of the eucharist from the meal proper.¹⁹

Jeremias argues his case well; nevertheless, the evidence he adduces, upon closer examination, does not hold up. Jeremias believes that a separation of the meal from the Eucharist best explains how the wealthy Christians in Corinth could exclude the poor from the common meal—namely, because they did not consider the meal as important as the Eucharist. Yet, as we have already shown in the previous chapter, what Paul calls the Lord’s Supper is in fact a full meal. Moreover, there is no indication in 1 Corinthians 11 that the poor Christians were partaking of the eucharistic bread and wine to the exclusion of the meal. It is more likely that they were missing out on everything. Jeremias does allow that the phrase “to break bread” sometimes means “the rite with which a meal opened.”²⁰ Yet, it is difficult to see just how this differs from saying that “to break bread” is a synecdoche for the entire meal. In any case, it cannot be shown that this phrase is ever used apart from an actual meal or intended meal.²¹

Many scholars in addition to Jeremias (Cullmann, Marshall, et al.) have proposed that the post-resurrection meals taken by the church were not necessarily eucharistic meals, but were simply a continuation of the meals which the apostles ate daily with Jesus while he was on the earth. Yet it must be pointed out that there is no hard evidence for this view. One could hold with an equal amount of certainty that *all* of these meals were in fact eucharistic meals. In any case, it seems unnecessary to make a distinction between the two. If the apostles enjoyed table-fellowship with the Messiah before his death, they did not fully comprehend its

¹³F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 73. See also Barrett (*Acts*, 164-65) who notes that this term had by this time become “a technical term for a specifically Christian meal.”

¹⁴G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1974), 349.

¹⁵Caird, 55.

¹⁶Jeremias, 118-119. So also Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 127. Marshall admits, however, that *κοινωνία* may simply refer to the “inward bond between Christians.”

¹⁷Jeremias, 120.

¹⁸Ibid., 120-121.

¹⁹Ibid., 121.

²⁰Ibid., 120.

²¹Contra Jeremias, 120.

significance until after his death. The meals of the church were due in part to nostalgia, but were primarily due to a now-acquired “fuller knowledge” of just what it meant to eat with the Messiah. Consequently, it is doubtful that the church saw any of its meals together without eucharistic significance.

Acts 20:7, 11

In Acts 20 there are two references to “the breaking of bread.” In v. 7 Luke records what seems to be the normal activity of the church when it meets together: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.” It is likely here, on two counts, that Luke is referring to the Lord’s Supper as a meal. First, Luke has already made the connection between “breaking bread” and “sharing food” in Acts 2:46. It would be odd (not to mention counter-productive in his redactional purpose for instructing the early churches) if he has something different in mind here. Second, Paul is part of this meeting;²² and, as we have already seen, Paul sees the Lord’s Supper as a full meal (1 Cor 11:20-21). The phrase “to break bread” in this verse is, therefore, “probably a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated.”²³

This meaning for “to break bread” seems to be confirmed in v. 11 of this same chapter: “Then he went upstairs again and broke bread and ate. After talking until daylight, he left.” This verse comes immediately after the episode in which Eutychus falls three stories and is revived by Paul. It seems certain that the “breaking of bread” here is simply the delayed fulfillment of what v. 7 indicates the meeting was for; namely, “to break bread.” In other words, the church came together to break bread (v. 7), but that activity was not realized until v. 11. Here again (as in Acts 2:46) the “breaking of bread” is associated with “eating” (γεύομαι [*geuomai*]), indicating a full meal, not mere elements.²⁴

Acts 27:35

There is one more instance of the phrase “break bread” as a possible reference to the partaking of the Lord’s Supper. In Acts 27:35 Luke records: “After he said this, he took some bread and gave thanks to God in front of them all. Then he broke it and began to eat.” In this pericope, Paul and his traveling companions are on board a ship bound ultimately for Rome. After sustaining much damage from high winds and rough seas, Paul reassures the passengers and crew that no harm would come to any of them provided they remain on the ship (vv. 30-34). He then advises all to “take some food” (v. 34), and encourages them to do so by his own example. It is here that he breaks the bread.

Some have seen a reference to the Eucharist in the words “he took some bread,” “gave thanks,” and “broke it.”²⁵ Wainwright believes this to be an instance of a eucharistic celebration of which even the unbelieving sailors partook.²⁶ Bruce holds that it may be so in a limited sense; that is, only for Paul and his party, not for the crew at large.²⁷ But W. Kelly is probably correct when he notes that the Eucharist is “quite

²²Paul’s presence and apparent prominence here increases the likelihood that the Supper is practiced from a Pauline perspective.

²³Bruce, *Acts*, 384. So also Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 129.

²⁴Luke uses γεύομαι in only two other places in Acts, both of which seem to have in mind the eating of a normal (as opposed to symbolic) meal (10:10; 23:14).

²⁵Bruce, *Acts*, 492.

²⁶Wainwright, *Eucharist*, 131.

²⁷Bruce, *Acts*, 492: “To the majority it was an ordinary meal, while for those who ate with eucharistic intention . . . it was a valid eucharist.”

out of place here.”²⁸ Luke gives us no other indication that he wishes us to see in this episode an instance of the Lord’s Supper—this is not a meeting of the church, and the purpose for eating seems to be to satisfy hunger, not to observe a cult meal. In short, there does not seem to be any compelling reason to see in Paul’s words anything other than his giving thanks for food.²⁹

Quite apart from any eucharistic aspect, it is clear in this passage that “to break bread” implies the initiation of a full meal. This is in direct response to the fact that for the span of fourteen days the crew had “been in constant suspense and gone without food—[they hadn’t] eaten anything” (v. 33). Paul then urges them to eat something (v. 34). When they had finally been convinced by Paul, they “ate some food themselves” (v. 36), and “had eaten as much as they wanted” (v. 38). This was sufficient to renew their strength so that they could “lighten the ship by throwing the grain into the sea” (v. 38). Clearly this cannot be a symbolic meal, for no symbolic meal could satisfy hunger and renew strength in this way. Moreover, it is difficult to imagine how the others would have been “encouraged” to eat had this been merely a religious observance which included only the elements of the Eucharist. It is also significant that Luke says of Paul “he began to eat” (ἤρξατο ἐσθίειν [*érksato esthiein*]), and not “he ate,” thereby signifying the beginning of a full meal—or at least that more than mere bread was involved. In any case, the phrase “break bread” here, as elsewhere in the NT, refers to a full meal, and not to a symbolic meal. There is no basis, therefore, for viewing any instance of this phrase as a reference to the eucharistic elements apart from a full meal.

Probability of Uniformity of Setting

Having shown that the phrase “to break bread” in Paul and Luke functions as a phrase to designate participation in a full meal (and in every case except Acts 27:35, the Lord’s Supper, including both elements and meal), it remains to be seen whether we can view the Pauline-Lukan Supper as a tradition that was held by all apostolic churches. If there is no uniformity of setting among the apostolic churches, then we cannot view the Pauline-Lukan expression of the Lord’s Supper (i.e., as a full meal) as an essential part of the Supper. On the other hand, if this expression of the Supper is uniform throughout the NT, then perhaps a case can be made for viewing this expression as theologically significant.

The issue of the various eucharistic traditions in the NT church is a complex one. The differences in wording among the three gospel accounts of the Last Supper³⁰—and that of Paul in 1 Cor 11:23-24—have given rise to a plethora of opinions among scholars as to whether there were four separate traditions, three traditions (Markan, Pauline-Lukan, and Johannine),³¹ two traditions (Pauline and Jerusalem), or one tradition. The views range from scholars such as Lietzmann, who, as we have seen, believes there were conflicting traditions between the Pauline churches and the Jerusalem churches, to more conservative scholars such as Marshall, who believes there is primarily one tradition with minor variations.

Evidence for a Sole Tradition

This question of the differing traditions, the subject of entire sections of books on the Lord’s Supper, is much too large an issue to treat with any justice in the remainder of this chapter—nor is this issue within the scope of the purpose of this book. There are simply too many questions involved in an issue of this

²⁸W. Kelly, *Exposition of Acts* (London, 1952), 387. See also Marshall (*Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 130) who deems it unlikely that the Lord’s Supper is being described here.

²⁹Cf. 1 Tim 4:3-5.

³⁰We will not here attempt to enter into the debate of the authenticity of the short or long text of Luke. It will be sufficient to say, with Jeremias, 144, that the external evidence “speaks decisively for the originality of the long text.”

³¹So Jeremias, 190.

magnitude, and an entire book could be devoted to unraveling it. No attempt will be made, therefore, to exhaust every aspect of this issue. The evidence for all views has been dealt with adequately elsewhere, and we shall here reaffirm the position of Marshall and others who see too little evidence in the NT to conclude the existence of multiple eucharistic traditions. The evidence for such a view is as follows.

Paul's claim to have received his Lord's Supper tradition from the Lord (1 Cor 11:23) "says nothing other than that the chain of tradition goes back unbroken to Jesus himself."³² First, Paul uses similar language in 1 Cor 15:1-5 where he claims to have "received" (παραλαμβάνω [*paralambanō*], v. 3) and "delivered" (παράδιδωμι [*paradidōmi*], v. 3) the kerygma. Second, that this kerygma is pre-Pauline is borne out by the syntactical (non-Pauline) oddities in vv. 3b-5.³³ Third, this pericope is permeated by non-Pauline terminology.³⁴ Fourth, all of this evidence leads to the conclusion that Paul is here quoting apostolic tradition. And fifth, since Paul speaks in the same way in 11:23-25, we may safely conclude that this too is pre-Pauline tradition.³⁵

Paul's use of παραλαμβάνω may mean that he procured his tradition through direct revelation from Christ (as in Gal 1:11-12), but this is not necessary. Higgins has shown that "the Lord" is used as a metonym for oral tradition in passages like 1 Cor 7:10, 25; 9:14 and 1 Thess 4:15, and that "the ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου can mean a direct receiving from the Lord, without it being necessary to think of a vision or of excluding middle members through whom the Lord Himself imparts the paradosis."³⁶ The important thing to bear in mind is that Paul "traces his tradition back to the Lord Jesus and to the night of his betrayal."³⁷ In any case, Paul certainly "was no innovator" in his tradition,³⁸ and it is clear that he "regarded himself as handing on unaltered the Church tradition which ultimately goes back to the Lord."³⁹

Marshall points out that there are only three viable options regarding the source of Paul's tradition since he no doubt learned of it in an existing church. Those options include Antioch, Damascus and Jerusalem. Yet, the tradition would be similar in any case since both the church at Antioch and the church at Damascus were founded by delegates from the Jerusalem church.⁴⁰ Any view, therefore, that sees a different origin for Paul's tradition than for the Jerusalem tradition is, as Marshall notes, "baseless speculation"⁴¹ that should at last be dropped from the discussion.

But what of the differences between Paul and Luke, who, being traveling companions, presumably hold similar assumptions about the Lord's Supper? Jeremias points out what he considers two major

³²Ibid., 129.

³³Ibid., 129-130; e.g., the use of the genitive plural ἁμαρτιῶν (*hamartiōn*) with the pronoun ἡμῶν (*hēmōn*) (instead of the characteristic absolute singular).

³⁴Ibid., 130; e.g., the use of the phrase κατὰ τὰς γραφὰς (*kata tas graphas*) (instead of the Pauline καθὼς γέγραπται [*kathōs gegrapta*]), the passive ὤφθη (*ōphthē*) (instead of the active ἐφάνη [*ephane*]) which Paul uses only in credal formulas (cf. 1 Tim 3:16), and the expressions ἐγήγερται (*egēgertai*) and τοῖς δώδεκα (*tois dōdeka*).

³⁵Ibid., 130-131.

³⁶Higgins, 28.

³⁷Frank Stagg, "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament," *Review and Expositor* 66 (1969): 8.

³⁸Martin, *Worship*, 121.

³⁹Higgins, 26.

⁴⁰Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 32.

⁴¹Ibid., 33.

differences which convince him that Luke and Paul are independent of each other: (1) omission by Luke of the copula with the logion over the cup; and (2) omission by Luke of the second injunction to repeat this as a memorial. He then argues on this basis that Luke is “more original” than Paul and that his tradition antedates Paul’s tradition.⁴² Paul’s form can be traced back to Antioch while Luke’s form is to be traced back to Mark.⁴³

This argument seems to be undermined by several factors. First, as we have already noted, since Antioch received its tradition from Jerusalem, it is doubtful that there could be substantial differences between these traditions. Second, the copula in Greek is regularly omitted where it is understood, and the presence or absence of the copula seems more naturally explained by stylistic preference than by differing traditions. In any case, we must not make too much of the use or omission of the copula. Third, the omission of the second injunction to repeat the rite is not as significant a difficulty as Jeremias makes it. What is an even greater difficulty (if it is granted that Luke is independent of Paul) is that Luke mentions the injunction at all! How is it more difficult to imagine that Paul and Luke have similar sources where Luke fails to repeat a phrase, than that Mark and Luke have similar sources where Mark fails to supply the same phrase? Put another way, why should it be more difficult to think that Luke has omitted what he may have seen as a redundant phrase, than that Luke added something that is (as far as Mark is concerned) completely innovative? Fourth, Jeremias maintains this in spite of the fact that he has argued elsewhere that Paul’s statement in 1 Cor 11:23 “says nothing other than that the chain of tradition goes back unbroken to Jesus himself.”⁴⁴ It is difficult to see how Luke can be “more original” and “more pre-Pauline” than someone who claims to have received his tradition from the original source! This is especially odd since Jeremias alludes elsewhere to the “Pauline-Lukan tradition” which is distinct from the Markan tradition.⁴⁵ Jeremias himself seems to recognize that one tradition does not necessarily have to be more original than the others since “Jesus said more at the Last Supper than the few words preserved in the liturgical formulae.”⁴⁶

Proposed Solution for Variations in the Eucharistic Texts

While we may appreciate the differences that we encounter in the various Last Supper accounts, as well as the attempt to explain these differences, it must be noted that variations in how an event has been handed down do not necessarily imply different traditions. Several factors must be kept in mind when wading through these variations. First, as Jeremias has pointed out above, not everything that Jesus said at the Last Supper was recorded. Second, based on this fact, it cannot be ruled out *a priori* that Jesus may very well have spoken *all* of the recorded sayings at various stages in the meal. On this view it is quite possible that Jesus himself elaborated on initial statements at the request of his disciples. After all, the inquisitiveness of the disciples on other such occasions—that is, when Jesus initiated new and unusual teaching—is no secret. A statement such as “this is my blood of the covenant,” for instance, may have been sufficiently vague to the disciples, prompting them to ask Jesus for clarification about “the covenant”; to which Jesus’ reply may have been “the new covenant.” Other examples can be adduced without undue difficulty.

Third, the redactional purposes of each writer played no small part in just what was to be included in each one’s account, and in just what order it was to be included. This may explain, for instance, the inherent

⁴²Jeremias, 188.

⁴³Ibid., 188-89.

⁴⁴Ibid., 101. See also p. 202 where he argues that the reason Paul uses ἀπό (*apo*) instead of παρά (*para*) in 1 Cor 11:23 is because the latter signifies those who hand down the tradition while the former signifies the originator of the tradition!

⁴⁵Ibid., 190; cf. p. 237.

⁴⁶Ibid., 238.

differences between Paul's account and the synoptic accounts as a whole. Whereas Paul's account is written for primarily liturgical purposes, the Gospels are written as primarily historical accounts. Hence, Paul has modified the tradition in such a way that it is useful for church practice; yet it is nevertheless the same tradition.⁴⁷

Fourth, some differences may be due to each writer's explanation of the obvious intent of Jesus. For instance, it is not difficult to see how the phrase "poured out for many" could be interpreted by another writer as "for the forgiveness of sins." There is no substantial difference in meaning between the two phrases.

Fifth, other differences may be due to the natural semantic field which each writer would encounter when translating Jesus' words from Aramaic to Greek. As Marshall notes, "once the original story had been turned into Greek, it could have existed in more than one form of words which could easily be altered in one direction or another."⁴⁸ Consequently:

It must be emphasized that there is no good reason for supposing that any one of the three versions must necessarily be closer at all points to the original form of the account than the others. Each of the versions can in theory preserve different features of the hypothetical original account.⁴⁹

At the end of the day, we must concur with Marshall who, after devoting a lengthy discussion to the question of just how the various Lord's Supper traditions may have developed, concludes that no theory of development "can be defended by invincible arguments," and that the "wiser conclusion" is that the original form "cannot be reconstructed with certainty."⁵⁰ The most of which we may be certain is that, though the accounts are independent narratives, all of them "descended from the same original tradition."⁵¹

One final point that should be made here concerns the respective forms of Luke and Paul's Supper traditions. Some scholars who hold that the Pauline and Lukan traditions are virtually the same, nevertheless maintain that there is a difference between the meal aspect of each one. Marshall, for instance, who holds that "the differences between Acts and Paul virtually disappear under analysis,"⁵² nevertheless attributes the apparent absence of wine in the "break bread" texts of Acts to the notion that wine "was not universally available."⁵³ However, this is unnecessary on several counts. First, Higgins, in rebutting Lietzmann's view that there were two different types of Lord's Supper traditions (a Jerusalem type according to which a common meal is taken without wine, and a Pauline type according to which the Eucharist is a memorial taken with wine), counters the notion that one can conclude this on the basis of what the text *does not* say, and insists "there is no reason to suppose that the cup did not form part of the primitive bread-breaking because it is not mentioned."⁵⁴ Second, the notion that wine was "not universally available" has by no means been established.⁵⁵ Indeed, in at least one of the geographic locations under present consideration (Jerusalem, Acts 2:42, 46) it is certain that there was no shortage of wine (Acts 2:13-15).

⁴⁷Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 33, 35.

⁴⁸Ibid., 41 n. 41.

⁴⁹Ibid., 38.

⁵⁰Ibid., 50-51.

⁵¹Higgins, 24.

⁵²Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 132

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Higgins, 59.

⁵⁵Cf. B. S. Easton, "Wine," *ISBE*, 3088.

Third, Marshall himself has acknowledged that these texts are merely “reports that such meals were held rather than descriptions of how the meals were held.”⁵⁶ Those familiar with Luke’s gospel, he argues, would need no explanation of the significance of these meetings.⁵⁷ But then one wonders why the mention of wine must be necessary in these texts before one can assume that it was used in these instances. In light of all this, it is probably best to conclude, with Goguel, that:

The use of the term ‘breaking bread’ is not used to differentiate the rite at Jerusalem from the Lord’s Supper in Paul. . . . The difference here in terminology can have been no more significant than that Christians in Paul’s Epistles are designated saints and in Acts disciples.⁵⁸

The term “break bread” when used in the context of the Christian assembly seems always to designate the Lord’s Supper, celebrated with bread and cup and in the form of a full meal. This seems to be a consistent pattern throughout, not only the Pauline churches, but in all the apostolic churches. Indeed, as we have seen in a previous chapter, this same tradition is also found in the church to which Jude writes, as is evidenced by his use of ἀγάπαις to designate the Christian feast.⁵⁹ All the evidence examined thus far seems to point in the direction of a sole apostolic tradition—one in which the eucharistic elements (bread and wine) are combined with a meal. Although there are various designations for this feast (Lord’s Supper, breaking bread, or *Agape*), they all refer to the same thing. It is likely, then, that the entire package together forms the apostolic tradition of the Eucharist. What impact does a uniform tradition have on the setting of the Lord’s Supper? It is difficult to escape the theological implications of a uniform meal-setting of the Supper. Why, for instance, should there be *any* uniform setting if the setting itself is insignificant? In fact, there are many reasons for this uniform setting, all of which are steeped in theology. We will explore some of these in the following chapters.

⁵⁶Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 132.

⁵⁷Ibid., 132.

⁵⁸Goguel, 340.

⁵⁹Not to mention Peter’s use in 2 Pet 2:13.

CHAPTER 6

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE MEAL FOR COMMUNITY

Having shown what the setting of the Lord's Supper is in the NT church (i.e., a full meal with one loaf of bread and one cup), it remains to be seen what theological significance there is to this setting. A setting without significance is undeserving of continued practice; there is no redeeming value in the practice of an empty ritual. If, therefore, the setting of the Lord's Supper as practiced by the NT church is void of any real and abiding significance, there is no compelling reason to hold to that setting. If, on the other hand, it can be shown that the setting itself (not simply the principles resulting in this setting) conveys theological truth about the Supper, then the setting is a significant part of the Supper.¹ More will be said on this in a later chapter. In the meantime, we shall examine one theological implication of this setting—that of community.

Social Considerations from the First-Century World

Some scholars have seen in the Christian banquet antecedents from either pagan or Qumran sources.² It cannot be denied that there are many similarities between the meal of the Lord's Supper and the meals of Qumran and other groups, and so it is indeed possible that Paul "refers to a practice which was commonly followed by Jewish religious groups during the time of the New Testament."³ Yet, even with the many similarities, we cannot conclude with certainty that Paul is directly dependent on such sources for these practices. In Marshall's view, pagan influence on the actions of Jesus is unlikely,⁴ and close examination of pagan practices at that time makes it equally unlikely that there was pagan influence even on the early church.⁵ One difference between the meals at Qumran and those of the church is that in the latter initiates were granted meal-privileges upon entrance into the community (predicated upon belief in Christ, the Host of the meal), whereas in the former initiates were required to undergo examination for a period of at least one year before meal-privileges were conferred.⁶ It is perhaps more probable that the early church derived its meal from the Last Supper event. The mention of a meal is included not only in the synoptic Last Supper accounts

¹According to Harris (14) a sacrament "dramatizes the central truths of the Christian faith."

²See under "The meaning of *Κουβουία*" in chap. 2 of this book for pagan sources and under "Qumran Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet" in chap. 7 for Qumran sources.

³G. Forkman, *The Limits of Religious Community: Expulsion From the Religious Community Within the Qumran Sect, Within Rabbinic Judaism, and Within Primitive Christianity* (Lund: Gleerup, 1972), 139.

⁴Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 27.

⁵Ibid., 29. See also Käsemann, 108: "The attempt to shed light on Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper from its links with Hellenistic cult-meals has completely broken down, so far as the essential issues are concerned."

⁶Forkman, 54.

but also in Paul's Last Supper account. It therefore seems more likely that this (and its Passover antecedent⁷) is where the idea of a Christian common meal originated.

While the meals of Qumran and Hellenistic society cannot be considered the source of the meal of the Lord's Supper, we cannot thereby discount the possible influence they had over the proceedings of that meal. Granted, there are notable differences between the Christian meal and all other meals; yet it seems certain that the Christian meal could not have been developed and practiced in a vacuum. Culturally conditioned aspects of the meal—such as proper etiquette, stipulations for fellowship, and class distinctions—must have been commonplace no matter what the occasion for the meal, although the expression of these concepts may have been quite different in each case. All of these aspects, to some degree, are related to community within any meal, and the Lord's Supper is no exception. The extent to which the setting of the Lord's Supper contributed to this community-aspect in the NT church may be measured in three areas: concern for the poor, dissolution of class distinctions, and a barometer of right-standing in the community.

An Expression of Concern for the Poor

Paul's concern for the poor is apparent in his expression of the Lord's Supper. Paul chides the Corinthian practice of the Supper because some of the members remained hungry even though there was plenty of food available.⁸ The reason they remained hungry is because others had eaten both their share and the share of those who had to go without. Those who remained hungry are also identified as those who "have nothing."⁹ It is here that Paul begins to show the importance of the unity-aspect in the Lord's Supper.

Several observations may be made about the Corinthian situation. First, it seems clear that the meal was provided by the "haves" for the benefit of the "have nots." Indeed, the "haves" could just as easily have eaten at home (v. 22), whereas the "have nots" (i.e., "those who have nothing") may not have had such luxury. The behavior of the "haves" in consuming all of the food before the poor arrived was tantamount to "despising the church of God" precisely because it "shames those who have nothing" (v. 22). The implication is that one aspect of the Supper is provision for the poor. As Marshall notes: "There is good reason to suppose that at the Supper the concern of believers for one another was expressed tangibly. The Supper at Corinth was probably a common meal at which the believers provided for one another's needs for food and drink."¹⁰

The form of the Lord's Supper is therefore significant for the church's expression of community in providing for its poor.¹¹ Many who have speculated a Pauline separation of the bread and wine from the meal miss this point. As Winter observes: "Some have also seen the injunction in v. 34 as the apostolic imprimatur for the beginning of the removal of the Lord's Supper from the context of a meal," then appropriately adds:

Will v. 34a absolve the rich from any responsibility to the poor by removing any concern for the poor through changing the service from a meal context? This would be out of keeping with Paul's concern for the poor.¹²

⁷The Passover influence of the Lord's Supper will be taken up in more depth in chap. 7 of this book.

⁸1 Cor 11:20-21.

⁹1 Cor 11:22.

¹⁰Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 154.

¹¹Grosheide (267) goes so far as to say that this meal "is in the first place a love feast, i.e., a special kind of poor relief."

¹²Winter, "Alternative Reconstruction," 73.

Obviously the situation for “those who have nothing” in Corinth would have improved little by removing the meal-aspect from the Supper—they still would have been hungry. We may conclude, therefore, that concern for the poor was an integral part of the Lord’s Supper.

This seems also to be borne out by the use of the title *Agape* in Jude 12. This title (“love feast”) seems to have evolved from reasons of practicality; that is to say, the expression of love toward the “have nots” was shown most concretely by the sharing of food with them.¹³ In both Paul and Jude, therefore, the teaching of the Lord’s Supper as regards the poor is that “Christians are bound together with their fellow-Christians in the Lord’s Supper and must express that unity in love and consideration for others,”¹⁴ and especially for those who have nothing.

An Expression of Equality of Status

Comment [AP1]:

Another aspect related to concern for the poor is in regard to differing status at the meal. It was common banquet etiquette in the first century to separate participants by social status. This is well illustrated in three writings from that era. The first, found in Martial’s *Epigrams*, describes what it is like to be counted among the lower class at the banquet:

Since I am asked to dinner, . . . why is not the same dinner served to me as to you? You take oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake, I suck a mussel through a hole in the shell; you get mushrooms, I get hog funguses. . . . Golden with fat, a turtledove gorges you with its bloated rump; there is set before me a magpie that has died in its cage. Why do I dine without you although, Ponticus, I am dining with you? . . . Let us eat of the same fare.¹⁵

The second, also a view from below and characterized by biting mockery, is found in a satire by Juvenal:

First of all be sure of this—that when bidden to dinner, you receive payment in full for all your past services. . . . And what a dinner after all! You are given wine that fresh-clipped wool would refuse to suck up. . . . The great man himself drinks wine bottled in the days when Consuls wore long hair . . . but never a glass of it will he send to a friend suffering from dyspepsia. . . . Did I complain just now that you were given a different wine? Why, the water which you clients drink in not the same. . . . See now that huge lobster being served to my lord, all garnished with asparagus. . . . Before you is placed on a tiny plate a shrimp hemmed in by half an egg—a fit banquet for the dead. . . . When will Virro offer to drink wine with you? or take a cup that has been polluted by your lips? which one of you would be so foolhardy, so lost to shame, as to say to your patron “A glass with you, Sir”? No, no: there’s many a thing which a man whose coat has holes in it cannot say!¹⁶

The third writing is from Pliny who, though part of the upper class, is able to sympathize with those in the lower class:

It would take too long to go into the details . . . of how I happened to be dining with a man—though no particular friend of his—whose elegant company, as he called it, seemed to me a sort of stingy extravagance. The best dishes were set in front of himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He had even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three categories, not with the idea of giving his guests opportunity of choosing, but to make it impossible for them to refuse what they were given. One lot

¹³So Kelly, 269; and Bauckham, *Jude*, 85.

¹⁴Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 121.

¹⁵*Book 3*, 60, *Martial Epigrams*, vol. 1, ed. G. P. Goold, ETr. Walter C. A. Ker (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 201.

¹⁶*Satire 5*, *Juvenal and Persius*, ETr. G. G. Ramsey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 69-83.

was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friends are graded) and his and our freedmen.¹⁷

In all three writings above, it is clear that there were class distinctions that characterized associations at meals. Theissen points out that the social organizations of the ancient world were typically “homogeneous” and exclusively “class-specific,” and even more so in religious associations.¹⁸ This is in marked contrast to the social structure of the Lord’s Supper. According to Theissen, “early Hellenistic Christian congregations were not only of a different legal structure than the associations of the surrounding world; they also differed in regard to their social compositions.”¹⁹ While there were obvious abuses found, for instance, in the Corinthian assembly, which displayed “a marked internal stratification,”²⁰ both in the assembly and at the Supper, the norm for the Lord’s Supper (as shown in Paul’s corrective) was to be just the opposite. It was rather to be the case that “their sharing of the common meal expressed and confirmed their unity.”²¹

Another notable example of this kind of abuse may be found in Gal 2:11-14. Here Paul records his confrontation with Peter over the matter of ethnic divisions during the meal. Both Filson²² and Caird²³ see this conflict between Paul and Peter in the context of the Lord’s Supper.²⁴ Peter, under pressure from Judaizers, separated himself from eating at the same table with Gentiles—an obvious carry-over from his days of observing stringent Jewish table regulations. Paul, as a corrective, reminds Peter that this kind of ethnic distinction in the meal is not in line with the “truth of the gospel” (2:14), which eradicates divisions of every kind (Gal 3:28).

Peter’s action and Paul’s correction are revealing. Peter apparently did not think it necessary to make ethnic distinctions in any other circumstance (or so Paul does not attach significance to any other), but only in the case of table fellowship. Why so? And why does Paul so forcefully condemn Peter’s action here, when at other times he saw no problem with continuation of Jewish customs so as not to offend the Jews (Acts 21:20-29; cf. Acts 18:18 and 1 Cor 9:19-20)? It seems probable that in the Christian community intimacy in fellowship was most truly and ultimately expressed by common participation in the meal. Even in Hellenistic society of the first century, the food that was served at a meal was in accordance with the value placed upon the participants, so that those most esteemed received choice food while those least esteemed received scraps. In Jewish society the class distinctions during a meal were made along ethnic and religious grounds, but (in light of Christ’s eradication of ethnic distinctions under the new covenant—Gal 3:28; Acts 10:15) were no less distasteful in their social exclusion.

¹⁷Pliny *Book* 2, 6, Hutchinson, 109-111.

¹⁸Theissen, 146.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Harris, 26. See also E. LaVerdiere (“The Eucharist in the New Testament and Early Church—II: Proclaiming the Death of the Lord,” *Emmanuel* 100 [1994]: 77) who notes, “all such distinctions and restrictions should have disappeared at the Lord’s Supper . . . which was inspired by the values of Christ’s universal lordship.”

²²Filson, 226.

²³Caird, 93.

²⁴While this is by no means certain, it seems reasonable to suppose that the Lord’s Supper is in mind here. In addition to the other indicators given below, it is doubtful that any of the early Christian meals were held without eucharistic significance. The result is the same in any case. If Peter felt compelled to separate from the Gentiles at other-than-eucharistic table fellowship, it seems odd that he would have made an exception for the Lord’s Supper.

In all of these cases the principle that is lacking is equality of status. In the Hellenistic meals, those who received scraps were shown to be of an inferior economic and social status. In Corinth, the poor who arrived late and so remained hungry were shown to be of an inferior economic status, and hence were “humiliated” (1 Cor 11:22). In Galatia, the Gentiles were shown by Peter and the rest of the Jewish believers to be of an inferior spiritual (and ethnic) status. In no other context does class distinction become so apparent. If equality of status in a community can be shown to exist in this context, it is likely to exist in all other areas. That is why Paul so strongly opposed Peter’s social separation at the meal. Nothing was so intimate as eating a meal together.²⁵ If Peter could demonstrate equality of status at the table, then no other barrier between Jew and Gentile could erect itself for very long.

All of this, of course, implies social significance for the meal aspect of the Lord’s Supper. During this meal all social, economic, and spiritual distinctions necessarily come to an end. The participants become one body and, hence, one status. Any distinction is not only discouraged, but condemned, as we shall see below.

*An Indicator of the Extent of Participation
in the Community*

On final social aspect of the Supper may be seen in its use as a barometer of right-standing in the community. Fellowship in the NT community found its apex in common participation in the meal.²⁶ Exclusion from table fellowship meant exclusion from the community as a whole.²⁷ This is illustrated in the NT by several examples. In John 13:18 Jesus, referring to Judas, says: “I am not referring to all of you; I know those I have chosen. But this is to fulfill the scripture: ‘He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.’” The magnitude of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus lies in the fact that Judas was one who had “shared bread” with Jesus—that is to say, Judas had shared table fellowship with Jesus. This is what made the betrayal so tragic; “to betray the trust symbolized by table-fellowship was to be guilty of treachery.”²⁸ The same betrayal outside the context of a meal would not have been viewed as quite so severe.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, provides two illustrations of how the Lord’s Supper acts as a test of right-standing in the community. In the first of these, 1 Cor 5:9-11, Paul rebukes the Corinthians for tolerating immorality within the community. His solution?

I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. . . . But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. *With such a man do not even eat.*

When a fellow Christian begins to slip into a less serious sin, Paul exhorts those in charge to “correct,” “exhort,” and “rebuke” (1 Tim 5:20; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:2; Gal 6:1). In the present case, however, the sin is of a much more serious nature. In this case Paul advises the church to dissociate from the offender, to the point of exclusion from table fellowship.²⁹ This kind of exclusion meant a complete severance of all ties.³⁰

²⁵As Klappert (“Lord’s Supper,” *NIDNTT*, 520) notes, “There was nothing which unites man and man, and man and God, more than eating and drinking.”

²⁶So Kilpatrick, 63: “Admission to the community meal is admission to full membership of the community.”

²⁷*Ibid.*, 64.

²⁸Harris, 26; or, as Peter K. Nelson (*Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30* [SBL Dissertation Series 138; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994], 59) puts it: “To turn against one’s table companion was to breach a profound trust.”

²⁹Instructions are given in the Damascus Document (CD 19:14) for final expulsion of those who do not hold fast to the prescribed ordinances: “They shall be visited to extinction by the hand of Belial,” Philip R. Davies, *The Damascus Covenant* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series, 25; Sheffield, ENG: JSOT Press, 1982), 259. Compare Paul’s words in (1

This same idea may be found in 2 Thess 3:6 where Paul commands the Thessalonians to “withdraw” from every believer who does not obey Paul’s teachings. The word used here (στέλλεσθαι [*stellēsthai*]) is the same Greek root used in Gal 2:12 to describe Peter’s “withdrawing” from table fellowship with the Gentiles.³¹ It could, in both contexts, carry the meaning “to avoid sharing meals with.”³²

In 1 Corinthians 5, the exclusion of table fellowship is with a view toward repentance and restoration of the offender. Such is not the case in 1 Cor 11:28-30:

A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Here Paul informs the Corinthians that their actions at the Lord’s Table are resulting in the death of some in the community. This divine judgment seems to have been swift, for many had already died in the presumably short lapse of time between their abuse of the Supper and Paul’s hearing about it. As in the case of the immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5, the Corinthians are virtually oblivious to this abuse. On the surface, one principle seems to be that if the church will not discipline its members by exclusion from table fellowship, God will do it for them—only in a much more drastic way! In either case exclusion from table fellowship is effected.

On a deeper level, however, one must ask why the participants of the meal had already incurred death as a divine judgment, whereas the immoral man of chapter five had not. The answer seems to be in what table fellowship signifies in the Christian community. Paul points to the Corinthians’ lack of “recognizing” the “body of the Lord” as the cause of this judgment. There is some ambiguity as to what is meant here by “body” (σῶμα). Marshall thinks that σῶμα should be understood in light of v. 27 where it refers to the bread of the Eucharist.³³ Theissen sees the phrase μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα (*mē diakrinōn to sōma*) (v. 29) as referring to the failure on the part of some to distinguish between the food which belongs to the Supper and the food which belongs to the “private meals,”³⁴ although Fee is probably right that this interpretation “must be ruled out as totally foreign to the context.”³⁵ A more likely referent of σῶμα is the local group of believers in Corinth. This is the meaning Paul gives to σῶμα in 1 Cor 10:17; and, it is clear from the context that concern over the rich abusing the poor at Corinth is topmost in Paul’s mind.³⁶ It seems likely, then, that σῶμα here is a reference primarily (if not solely) to the community of believers rather than to Christ’s physical body.³⁷ Not

Cor 5:5): “Deliver such a person to Satan for the destruction of the flesh,” which is associated with expelling him from the Lord’s table (v. 11).

³⁰This is in distinction to the Qumran communities where, according to Forkman (63), total expulsion occurred only in extreme cases. One could be expelled from the Qumran meal without necessarily being expelled from the community (cf. 1QS 6:4-6).

³¹Gal 2:12 has the preposition in compound; ὑπέστειλεν (*hypēstellen*).

³²So Forkman, who paraphrases 2 Thess 3:6 as “Hold aloof from (participating in meals with) those who walk in an undisciplined manner,” 135.

³³Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 114. So also Käsemann, 127.

³⁴Theissen, 153.

³⁵Fee, 563.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Although it may be that double entendre is intended.

to “discern the body of the Lord” is, in this case, tantamount to not recognizing that the poor at Corinth were to be esteemed as participants of Christ’s body. Exclusion from table fellowship was a serious consequence of sin—one that was not to be taken lightly, but was to be exercised only as a last resort in the discipline process. The rich were, without proper cause, excluding the poor from table fellowship. The deadly and ironic result was that the rich were in turn being excluded from that same table fellowship.³⁸

There is a tendency among all people to be homogeneous and to hesitate in associating with others who are different in some way. The Lord’s Supper as a meal forces its participants to erase all social, ethnic, and economic barriers. As Fee notes:

No “church” can long endure as the people of God for the new age in which the old distinctions between bond and free (or Jew and Greek, or male and female) are allowed to persist. Especially so at the Table, where Christ, who has made us one, has ordained that we should visibly proclaim that unity.³⁹

The social and economic barrier is dissolved in 1 Corinthians 11; the ethnic barrier in Galatians 2. One of Paul’s major themes in his letters is the dissolution of such distinctions between and among people in Christ⁴⁰—whether gender, class, economy, or ethnicity—and that dissolution finds its apex in the Lord’s Supper. There people of different standing are made one.

³⁸Cf. Jeremiah, 23:2: “It is an ancient oriental idea that a common meal binds the table companions into a table fellowship. This table fellowship is religious, and therein rest its obligations: its violation is a particularly heinous crime.”

³⁹Fee, 544.

⁴⁰Cf. Eph 2:11-22; Gal 3:28.

CHAPTER 7

THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A PREFIGURE OF THE MESSIANIC BANQUET

In Matt 8:11 Jesus says: “I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Luke records a similar saying: “People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God” (Luke 13:29). Jesus here is referring to a feast that will occur at the end of the age. This feast, properly called the “Messianic Banquet,” is found throughout Jesus’ teachings, but seems to be confined to the Synoptics (cf. Matt 22:1-14; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 14:16-24; 22:16, 18, 29-30). The Jews were intensely aware of this feast, and Jesus’ mention of it in these texts presupposes a general anticipation by the Jews; with the exception, of course, that they themselves would be excluded and the Gentiles would occupy their seats.¹ Of interest here is its inclusion in the Last Supper texts. It is significant that wherever the words of institution of the Lord’s Supper are found in the Synoptics, they are never without this reference to the messianic feast.

Jesus’ Vow of Abstinence in the Synoptics

As Jesus institutes the Supper, he says: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, *I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God*. . . . Take this [cup] and divide it among you. For I tell you, *I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes*” (Luke 22:15-18).² Both Matthew (26:29) and Mark (14:25) include this saying in their accounts, but only with reference to the “drinking”; Luke alone applies it to the “eating.”³ We cannot here deal with the question of which cup Luke has in view, or whether it is the same cup that Matthew and Mark have in mind—nor does this have an impact on the conclusions of this book. Whatever cup is being referenced here, all three writers link the Last Supper to an eschatological prospect.

What does Jesus mean by the saying, “I will not eat (drink) it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God (until the kingdom of God comes)”? On the very surface, the inclusion of “until” (ἕως οὗ/ἄτου [heōs hou/hotou]) indicates that Jesus intends to partake of a meal again someday. It may be assumed with reasonable certainty that Jesus has in mind the Messianic Banquet already mentioned in Luke 14:16-24.⁴ Jesus mentions this meal again immediately after his words of institution; to his disciples Jesus says, “I grant you that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom” (22:30).⁵

¹D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *EBC*, 202.

²There are at least five variants for vv. 17-20. The reading adopted by NA²⁶ and UBS⁴ gains support from P⁷⁵, **8**, A, and B, as well as a host of other significant mss., including Western support. Vv. 19b-20 are omitted by D and it^a. The other readings are unsupported by any weighty mss. evidence. See Metzger (173-77) for a detailed discussion.

³The fact that he twice mentions the kingdom (once in v. 16 and once in v. 18) shows that Luke may have a “special interest” with regard to the anticipatory nature of the Supper (Stagg, 12).

⁴Jeremias (209) rightly rejects the view that the “fulfillment in the kingdom” here is a prediction of Jesus’ death and that the promise of a future meal is fulfilled in the post-resurrection meals on the basis that it makes little sense of the text. In what way, for instance, would Jesus’ death be seen as a reason for desiring to eat the Passover, or for partaking of the cup (vv. 15, 17)? And

But then the question becomes, Why does Jesus include reference to the Messianic Banquet in a context which deals with the institution of the Lord's Supper? What relationship does the Lord's Supper have with the Messianic Banquet? In Jesus' own words, this eschatological meal (the Messianic Banquet) is to be seen as a "fulfillment" of the meal he is instituting as the Lord's Supper. This means, conversely, that the Lord's Supper is a *prefigure* of the Messianic Banquet. So then, the Lord's Supper that is being instituted by Jesus has an eschatological element; it is an anticipation and foretaste of the Messianic Banquet.⁶ As Wainwright notes:

In accordance with the characteristic biblical pattern of promise and fulfilment, the eucharist is a first and partial fulfilment of the promises of the meal of the kingdom that were given by Jesus during His ministry and it is itself the strengthened promise of the total fulfilment in the final consummation.⁷

This notion becomes even clearer when we note that the same terminology is used for both the Lord's Supper and the Banquet; both are called the "Supper" (δείπνον, 1 Cor 11:20; Rev 19:9), and the Lord's "Table" (τραπέζης [*trapezēs*], 1 Cor 10:21; Luke 22:30). This concept, however, was not conceived in a vacuum. Indeed, as we have already mentioned, the Jews were quite aware of an eschatological feast. It will be helpful, if we are to understand the full impact that this meal has upon the Lord's Supper, to trace its beginnings through the OT.

OT Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet

Old Testament references to this banquet are sparse at best. Jeremias sees Ps 118:25-29 (the conclusion of the Passover *hallel*) as the only genuine antecedent to the idea of eschatological anticipation in the Lord's Supper.⁸ Sloyan adduces other evidence from the OT to show the anticipatory nature of the banquet.⁹ Although most of the passages he cites are vague if not dubious, two are worth mentioning: Isa 25:6 and Ezek 39:17-20.¹⁰

Isa 25:6 gives us a picture of the Messianic Banquet: "On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines." There seems to be little question that this is a reference to the eschatological meal. Even v. 8

what then would be the purpose of this oath? It is best to see this as a reference to the *eschaton*, and to conclude with Jeremias that "the next meal of Jesus with his disciples will be the Messianic meal on a transformed earth" (*ibid.*, 217).

⁵This is of particular interest for our purposes since, as Nelson (51) notes, "the setting for sayings and events in 22:14-38 is at table . . . and vv 24-30 come on the heels of the theologically poignant interpretation of the meal (vv 19-20)." The inclusion of Jesus' reference to the eschatological banquet here seems also to preclude the notion that post-resurrection meals are in view in 14:16-18.

⁶"Just as the first Passover looks forward not only to deliverance but to settlement in the land, so also the Lord's Supper looks forward to deliverance and life in the consummated kingdom," Carson, 539. On this point see also Higgins, 11.

⁷Wainwright, 41.

⁸Jeremias, 36; although with the exception of such phrases as "save us" and "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" this passage itself has little by way of eschatological overtones, and no reference at all to a banquet.

⁹G. S. Sloyan, "The Holy Eucharist as an Eschatological Meal," *Worship* 36 (1962): 446-47.

¹⁰Isa 65:13-14 may also be a reference to this banquet: "My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty," since it is placed in connection with the restoration of the creation in vv. 17-25: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth . . ."; but this may simply be a reference to the rich abundance of food provided for God's people in the messianic age, and not specifically the Messianic Banquet.

intimates that this would be the meal to consummate all meals: “he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces.” Sloyan’s other reference, Ezek 39:17-20, is much less certain:

Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: “Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls—all of them fattened animals from Bashan. At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are gluttoned and drink blood till you are drunk. At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,” declares the Sovereign LORD.

The uncertainty centers around the kind of banquet being prepared here. As in Rev 19:17-18 there will be something of a “great feast” for the scavengers of the earth; but the fare will be the “flesh and blood” of soldiers, kings, and horses, not “rich food and aged wine.” It is true that this feast cannot easily be separated from the messianic feast; both are mentioned in the Revelation,¹¹ and even Luke places the Messianic Banquet in a context of “judgment.”¹² The scavenger feast is nevertheless distinct from the Messianic Banquet itself, even though they may be held simultaneously.

The concept of the Messianic Banquet, although based on a select number of OT passages, nevertheless became embellished in later Judaism.¹³ By the time of Jesus the teaching about the Messianic Banquet had developed significantly; especially at Qumran.

Qumran Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet

There is little question that the community at Qumran anticipated a Messianic Banquet of sorts.¹⁴ This is most clearly seen in the *Rule of the Congregation*:

[Th]is [(is) the session] of the men of the name [who are invited to] the feast (מִנְעֻדָּה) for the Council of the Community when [God] leads forth the Messiah (הַמָּשִׁיחַ) (to be) with them: [The Priest] shall enter [at] the head of all the Congregation of Israel and all [his] br[others, the Sons of] Aaron, the priests [who are invited to] the feast, the men of the name. And they shall sit be[fore him each man] according to his glory. And after (them) the [Messi]ah of Israel (מִשְׁחֵיחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל) [shall enter]. And the heads of the t[housands of Israel] shall sit before him [each m]an according to his glory. (And they shall sit before the two of them, each) according to [his rank] in their camps and their journeys. And all the heads of the ma[gi]strates of the Congrega[tion with [their] sage[s and their knowledgeable ones] shall sit before them, each according to his glory. And [when they] (solemnly) meet together [at a tab]le of the Community [to set out bread and new w]ine, and to arrange the table of the Community [to eat and] to dri[nk] ne[w w]ine, no man [shall stretch out] his hand to the first portion of the bread or [the new w]ine before the priest; fo[r he shall] bless the first portion of the bread and the new w[ine, and shall stretch out] his hand to the bread first of all. And aft[er (this has occurred)] the Messiah of Israel (מִשְׁחֵיחַ יִשְׂרָאֵל) [shall stret]ch out his hands to the bread. [And after that] all the Congregation of the Community [shall ble]ss

¹¹Cf. 19:9, 19.

¹²Luke 22:30: “that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel”; although it is possible that “judging” here may instead mean “ruling over,” or “deciding between disputes.”

¹³Carson, 202.

¹⁴“The special meals at Qumran may have been in some sort regarded as anticipations of this future meal,” Bruce, *History*, 109.

(and partake), each ma[n according to] his glory. And [they] shall act according to this statute whenever (the meal) [is arr]anged, [when] as many as ten me[n] (solemnly) meet together.¹⁵

Here we have a banquet presided over by Messiah, as well as rules of banquet etiquette. The question is, What relationship (if any) does this meal have with the meal of the Lord's Supper?

Marshall cautions against making too much of the parallels between Qumran and the Last/Lord's Supper. The similarities, he argues, are fewer than the differences.¹⁶ Jeremias agrees with Marshall that the community meals of the early church could not have been influenced by the community meals at Qumran on the basis that "the external differences between the two are too great for this."¹⁷ Nevertheless, although it is unlikely that the early church mimicked the meals of the Qumran community, there may be a parallel in the eschatological outlook of each, as even Marshall admits.¹⁸ Indeed, both "Qumran and the Eucharist . . . have a Messianic theme in their interpretation of the meal."¹⁹ According to Forkman, the meals at Qumran were "connected with eschatological expectations."²⁰ Townsend shows Qumranic similarities with the eschatological aspect of the Lord's Supper in *The Rule of the Congregation* which contains "a picture of the 'last days' when the Messiah himself would preside at a community meal," but rejects this being a real antecedent on the basis that the eschatology of the Christian Eucharist is of a different character: "That which is hoped for at Qumran as a rule for the 'last days' has here come to pass; the church is the eschatological community. . . Essentially then, the Eucharist is a sacrament connected with the death of the Messiah."²¹ Perhaps this is so, but this aspect of the Eucharist (viz., as ἀνάμνησις [*anamnēsis*]) should not be placed over against the anticipatory aspect of the Lord's Supper—that of the Messianic Banquet which accompanies the *eschaton*.²² Townsend recognizes this when he notes that the common meal practiced in conjunction with the Eucharist "cannot be thought of as a specific setting forth of the death of the Messiah."²³ We will examine this point in more depth momentarily.

NT Antecedents to the Messianic Banquet

The NT is replete with allusions to an eschatological feast. In addition to the ones already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter²⁴ we might add a few others. Luke 12:35-38 speaks of the *parousia* parabolically as a wedding banquet (the parable of the master/servant), as does Matt 25:1-13 (the parable of

¹⁵1QS*a* ii 11-22, reproduced from James H. Charlesworth and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Rule of the Congregation," *The Dead Sea Scrolls: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek Texts With English Translations*, vol. 1, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 1994), 116-117.

¹⁶Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 26.

¹⁷Jeremias, 31.

¹⁸Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 26.

¹⁹Kilpatrick, 65.

²⁰Forkman, 56.

²¹Townsend, 359.

²²See below under "The Eschatological Focus in the Pauline Tradition."

²³Townsend, 359.

²⁴Matt 8:11; 22:1-14; 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 13:29; 14:16-24; 22:16, 18, 29-30.

the ten virgins). Luke 15:22-32 recounts how the Father will celebrate by holding a feast when his prodigal son returns. Jesus gives us a preview of this provision in the feeding of the crowds (Matt 14:15-21; 15:32-38 and parallels). He demonstrates his messiahship here (as in the Messianic Banquet) by virtue of providing an abundance of food. Indeed, the very first sign which Jesus performs is replete with eschatological and messianic significance (John 2:1-11).²⁵

Wainwright proposes that the Banquet can be found in the Lord's Prayer; namely, in the phrase: τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον (Matt 6:11) (or τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν [Luke 11:3]). He surveys the various views of the meaning of the phrase, τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον, which include "bread suited to our nature," "daily bread," and "excellent bread" among others.²⁶ It cannot be stated with certainty just what this phrase means. The word ἐπιούσιον (*epiousion*) is nowhere else found in any extant ancient manuscript (although it may have occurred in a fragment of a now-lost Egyptian account book) and so its meaning is dubious.²⁷ It probably carries the basic meaning, "bread for the coming day," but whether it is meant the chronological next day or the eschatological messianic day is unclear. Yet, as France points out, "if the whole prayer is taken eschatologically, this last meaning seems required."²⁸ Wainwright makes a compelling case for taking this phrase eschatologically, rendering it as "bread for the coming day"²⁹ for which he adduces evidence from a significant number of the Fathers who either read it this way³⁰ or knew of this reading.³¹ On this view, the Lord's Prayer must be seen as a petition to God to bring about the consummation. France rejects this eschatological interpretation on the basis that the bread is requested for "today," and suggests that ἐπιούσιον should be taken as "daily provision."³² Yet the fact that the request is for "today" does not militate against the eschatological meaning (as France supposes) since on this view the petition for the eschatological bread is given in the hope that "today" is the day the banquet consummates (i.e., the day that the "kingdom comes"). Indeed, the very fact that this phrase is preceded by ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου ("let your kingdom come") strongly suggests that the two phrases together form one eschatological plea.

The Meaning of Ἀνάμνησις (Anamnēsis)

Having traced the idea of an eschatological feast throughout the OT, Qumran, and the NT, we may now return to Luke's account of the Supper and ask one more question of relevance; namely, What does Luke mean by the phrase τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν ("do this in remembrance of me" [Luke 22:19])? The focus of the Supper has traditionally been derived from this phrase, which in turn has been interpreted to mean that the Supper is to be a time during which we are to focus on the death of Christ; a

²⁵The wedding banquet setting, the miracle surrounding the wine, and Jesus' statement that *his* "hour" to supply an abundance of wine had not yet come.

²⁶Wainwright, 30-31.

²⁷See R. T. France, *The Gospel According to Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 135.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Wainwright, 32. So also Jeremias (*Abba* [Göttingen, 1966], 165-67), and to some extent Marshall (*The Gospel of Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 460).

³⁰Wainwright, 32-34. Included here are Jerome (*Comm. in Ezek.* VI), Peter Chrysologus (*Sermon* 68, 70, 71, 72), and John of Damascus (*The Orthodox Faith*, Book 4, 13).

³¹Wainwright, 32-33. Included are Origen (*De orat.*, 27), and Cyril of Alexandria (*In Luc.*, 11:3).

³²France, 135.

conscious reliving of what Christ had to suffer in order to redeem us. This suggests that the Supper, by extension, be a time of solemn reflection. The focus then is historical; a looking back, as it were, to the horrors of the cross.

The question is, Does this interpretation fit well with all that we know about the Supper? Indeed, does it fit even the context of Luke 22:14-20? If the focus of the Supper is a looking back to the death of Christ, then there is no question that the general mood surrounding the Supper should be one of solemn reflection. There are, however, problems with this understanding.

One such problem may be found in Acts 2:46. Here Luke recounts the practice of the early churches; that they “broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.” That this is a reference to the Lord’s Supper is evident from Luke’s use of the phrase “break bread” elsewhere (e.g., Acts 2:42, 20:7).³³ It is noteworthy that Luke here describes the general mood of the early church as they partook of the Lord’s Supper.³⁴ It was not with solemn reflection, but rather with “gladness” (*ἀγαλλιάσις* [*agalliasis*]) that they ate the Supper. *Ἀγαλλιάσις* (a word unattested in secular writings) in its various forms often denotes the exultation that accompanies messianic expectations. Luke 1:44 records the “joy” of the fetal John the Baptist over his first close encounter with the fetal Christ. Jude 24 likewise speaks of the “great joy” which will be ours when we are presented before Christ at the *eschaton*. In its verbal form (*ἀγαλλιάω* [*agalliaō*]) this word denotes the “gladness” of anticipating the eschatological prospect of rewards in heaven (Matt 5:12), the “rejoicing” of Abraham to see the day of Messiah (John 8:56), the “rejoicing” of Christians in anticipation of the *parousia* (1 Pet 1:6, 8; 4:13), and the “gladness” that accompanies the heavenly multitude at the inception of the messianic wedding (Rev 19:7).

It is the case, then, that when the NT writers want to express joy because of messianic expectations, *ἀγαλλιάσις* is often used. While this meaning does not account for all the instances of this word,³⁵ it certainly sheds light on the mood of the church when partaking of the Lord’s Supper in Acts 2:46. In any event, this is hardly the word one would expect Luke to use to describe Christians who were reflecting on the horrors of the death of their Lord!³⁶ On the contrary, “the primitive community of Jerusalem began the daily breaking of bread . . . in eschatological joyful anticipation.”³⁷

Moreover, the context of Luke 22:14-20 itself hardly favors an interpretation which views the Lord’s Supper as a focusing on the past. On the contrary, the tenor of this passage is eschatological. We have already noted that Luke twice records Jesus’ eschatological prospect of eating and drinking again in the kingdom (Luke 22:16, 18).³⁸ In light of this, it seems odd that Jesus would then abruptly shift the focus of the Supper to a memorial of Him (i.e., a looking back) that does not also include an eschatological element.

But then what did Jesus mean by the phrase *τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν* (“This do into my remembrance”)? Jeremias offers an intriguing explanation. Jesus’ words must be viewed in their Passover

³³See chap. 5 of this book.

³⁴The “mood” at the Lord’s Supper is nowhere else recorded for us.

³⁵Cf., Luke 1:14, 10:21; John 5:35; Acts 2:26, 16:34; Heb 1:9. Arguably even most of these passages have messianic expectations in view, albeit not as explicitly as those cited above.

³⁶Unless the reflection is on the depth of love expressed in sacrificial death, and the “joy” is in response to this. Still, while the idea of sacrificial death cannot be excluded from messianic expectations (the Messiah’s death makes possible the new covenant and therefore the Messianic Banquet—see under “The Eschatological Focus in the Pauline Tradition” later in this chapter), it is worth noting that any reflection void of messianic expectations would likely have used the more common word for “joy,” *χαρά* (*chara*) (used some 131 times in the NT) rather than *ἀγαλλιάσις* (used some 16 times).

³⁷Kasper, 136.

³⁸“The next meal of Jesus with his disciples will be the Messianic meal on a transformed earth,” Jeremias, 217.

setting.³⁹ It was (and is) the belief of the Jews that the Passover itself was not only a looking back at what God had done for Israel, but also a looking forward to future deliverance by the Messiah. A common saying of the rabbis during the Passover was, “On this night they were saved, and on this night they will be saved.”⁴⁰ This same sentiment is echoed in the Midrash:⁴¹

On that same day, too, Joseph was released from captivity; for this reason did this night become one of rejoicing for the whole of Israel, as it says, “It was a night of watching unto the Lord.” In this world the miracle was performed at night, because it was of a transitory nature, but in the Messianic Age, night will become day. . . . Why does He call it “a night of watching”? Because, on that night, He performed great things for the righteous, just as He had wrought for Israel in Egypt. On that night, He saved Hezekiah, Hananiah and his companions, Daniel [*sic*] from the lions’ den, and on that night Messiah and Elijah will be made great. . . . So Israel has eagerly awaited salvation since the rising of Edom.⁴² God said: “Let this sign be in your hands: on the day when I wrought salvation for you, and on that very night know that I will redeem you; but if it is not this night, then do not believe, for the time has not yet come.”

Jeremias’ thesis turns on the word ἀνάμνησις (“remembrance”). He argues that this word is not to be seen as *our* remembrance of Christ (as it is traditionally understood); rather it is to be understood as *God’s* remembrance of Christ. The wording in the Greek is rather vague; literally “do this εἰς (*eis*) (for? toward? with a view to?) my remembrance.” The question becomes, Who is to remember whom? The Greek allows three options: (1) our remembering Christ (the traditional view); (2) God remembering the Messiah (Jeremias’ view); or (3) Christ remembering us—which, I will argue, is preferable over the other two.

NT Parallels

The word ἀνάμνησις in the nominal form is used only four times in the NT,⁴³ three of which are parallel sayings of Jesus at the Supper. The one instance where the Last Supper is not in view is Heb 10:3: ἀλλ’ ἐν αὐταῖς ἀνάμνησις ἁμαρτιῶν κατ’ ἐνιαυτὸν (“But in them is an annual *reminder*⁴⁴ of sins”). Here the meaning is clearly “reminder,” not “memorial.”⁴⁵ The verbal form, ἀναμνησκῶ (*anamimnēskō*), can mean either “to call to mind for oneself”⁴⁶ or “to remind another.”⁴⁷ Jeremias adduces evidence from the

³⁹The question of whether John places the Passover before or after the crucifixion need not concern us here since it is clear that Luke places it before. Yet Goguel (330-31) does not seem too far wrong in his assertion that “both the Synoptics and John saw in the eucharist the Passover of the new covenant, but they do not express this idea in the same way. The Synoptics show Jesus distributing the cup and the bread within the framework of the paschal meal. John, by making Jesus die at the precise moment when the law ordered the paschal lamb to be slain, pictured Christ as the true paschal lamb.”

⁴⁰R. Joshua Ben Hananiah, מֵקִלְטָא (Mekilta of R. Yishma’el) on Exod 12:42.

⁴¹Exodus (Bo) 18:11-12, *The Midrash Rabba*, ed. and ETr. H. Freedman and M. Simon (New York: Soncino Press, 1977), 227-28.

⁴²Normally taken as a reference to Rome, *ibid.*, 228.

⁴³Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24, 25; Heb 10:3.

⁴⁴D. R. Jones (“Ἀναμνήσις in the LXX and the Interpretation of 1 Cor 11:25,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 6 [1955]: 186) sees this as a reminder to *God* rather than to man.

⁴⁵See BAGD. Cf. also Héring (118) who sees this meaning for ἀνάμνησις in the Lord’s Supper texts as well.

⁴⁶E.g., Mark 14:72; Heb 10:32.

⁴⁷E.g., 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:6.

word μνημόστυνον (*mnēmosunon*) in Acts 10:4 where the meaning “reminder” is likely; Cornelius’ prayers and gifts to the poor serve as a “reminder” to God to send the gospel to Cornelius via Peter. It is difficult to see, however, just how the use of μνημόστυνον establishes the meaning of ἀνάμνησις. In any case, it is not needed; Heb 10:3 is sufficient to establish the meaning “reminder” as a viable option for ἀνάμνησις in the NT. Moreover, if the meaning “memorial” to the death of Jesus is what Luke had in mind, his purpose would have been better served by using the word μνημεῖον (*mnēmeion*), which means quite literally “token of remembrance,” especially for the dead.⁴⁸

OT Parallels

The nominal form of ἀνάμνησις in the LXX is rare in comparison to such words as μνημόστυνον.⁴⁹ Moreover, many of the instances of ἀνάμνησις are obscure as to their precise meaning. Lev 24:5-8 reads:

Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. Along each row put some pure incense as a *memorial* (ἀνάμνησις) portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant.

Although on the surface ἀνάμνησις (אָנָמְנִיָּה [ʾazkáráhl]) seems to be referring to the bread as a “memorial,” it need not be taken this way. The μνημόστυνον (מִנְחָוָה) (memorial offering) of Lev 2:2, 9, and 6:15 “is that part of the offering which was burnt probably in order to *bring to God’s mind* the total offering and the offerer”⁵⁰ [italics in original]. This may very well be the case in Lev 24:7. The memorial offering is a “perpetual reminder of the covenant” whereby Israel appeals to Yahweh to maintain his covenant faithfulness.⁵¹ In other words, these sacrifices provide God with a “reminder” of his covenant people. This same God-ward ἀνάμνησις is found in Num 10:9-10:

When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be *remembered* by the LORD your God and rescued from your enemies. Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed feasts and New Moon festivals—you are to sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a *memorial* for you before your God. I am the LORD your God.

What the *NIV* has translated as “remembered” (v. 9) and “memorial” (v. 10) in this passage is (respectively) the verbal and nominal forms of ἀνάμνησις (אָנָמְנִיָּה, זִכְרוֹן [zákár, zikrón]). It is clear that v. 9 refers to a God-ward ἀνάμνησις (man remembered by God). The reference in v. 10 is less certain; does it refer to God remembering man or man remembering God? Perhaps it is a combination of both. Nevertheless, as Brown notes, “the expression ‘before the Lord’ coupled with the context of the previous verse suggests that the remembering here too has a God-ward reference which indeed is primary, although the man-ward reference is implicit.”⁵²

⁴⁸BAGD. See also K. H. Bartels, “Remember, Remembrance,” *NIDNTT*, 246.

⁴⁹Colin Brown, “Remember,” 239.

⁵⁰Wainwright, 66.

⁵¹Brown, “Remember,” 239.

⁵²Ibid. Jones (185-86) disputes this conclusion on the basis that ἀνάμνησις here implies no specific “object of recall”; however, he does allow that the word could bear this meaning.

The idea of ἀνάμνησις as “reminder” is seen even more clearly in other OT passages. The LXX heading of Ps 37 (38) is one such instance: Ψαλμὸς τῷ Δαυιδ, εἰς ἀνάμνησιν περὶ σαββάτου (“a Psalm of David for a reminder concerning the Sabbath”). Here it is unlikely that David means to establish a memorial to the Sabbath. Instead, he seems to be introducing a psalm as a reminder to keep future Sabbaths.⁵³ In other words, ἀνάμνησιν serves as a “reminder” of some future action. Likewise in the heading of Ps 69 (70): Εἰς τὸ τέλος, τῷ Δαυιδ εἰς ἀνάμνησιν, εἰς τὸ σῶσαί με κύριον (“For the end, by David, for a reminder, in order that the Lord might save me”). Here εἰς ἀνάμνησιν likely means “for a reminder [to God].” In this case it is a reminder to God to save David. Other passages that carry this same idea of reminding God to act include Pss 24 (25):6-7; 73 (74):2; 118 (119):49; 131 (132):1; and Exod 32:12-14 where God is called upon to “remember” his covenant mercies (though in each case μνημονεύω is used instead of ἀνάμνησις).

Passover Parallels

The eschatological idea of the rabbis that God would send the Messiah on the Passover probably stems from the fact that the Passover was יְהוָה לַיְהוָה (ἐορτὴ κυρίου), “a feast to the Lord” (Exod 13:6), which served “to put Yahweh in mind of His people.”⁵⁴ The rabbinical understanding of the Passover was “a looking forward to the coming deliverance of which the deliverance from Egypt is a prototype.”⁵⁵ The Passover, then, served as a forum to issue an ἀνάμνησις (i.e., a reminder or petition) to God to send the Messiah.⁵⁶

But just what does it mean that God “remembers” to send the Messiah? This is where the Passover *Haggadah* is helpful for our understanding. The *hallel* portion of the *Haggadah* reads:⁵⁷

We beseech Thee, O lord, save now!	:נְשָׂא הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּ
We beseech Thee, O lord, save now!	:נְשָׂא הוֹשִׁיעָה נָּ
We beseech Thee, O lord, make us now to prosper.	:נְשָׂא הַצְלִיחֵנוּ נָּ
We beseech Thee, O lord, make us now to prosper.	:נְשָׂא הַצְלִיחֵנוּ נָּ

Since the Last Supper was (at least for Luke) a Passover, it seems certain that Jesus’ words were meant as a play on this customary petition to God. All their lives the disciples had learned that the Passover was an opportunity to petition God to send the Messiah—now here he was, eating the Passover with them! Jesus is in effect saying, “You have been petitioning God to send the Messiah? Very well, here I am. Now I am going away, but I will be back once again to eat this meal with you in my kingdom. In the meantime, continue to eat this meal as a reminder (petition) to me that this meal is yet unfulfilled.” The ἀνάμνησις is therefore a

⁵³Although the exact relationship of the title to the content of the Psalm itself remains uncertain, some have seen in this an appeal designed to remind Yahweh of the distress of his people (see Brown, “Remember,” 239).

⁵⁴Wainwright, 66.

⁵⁵Jeremias, 206 (italics in original). See also Harris (27): “For the Jews the Passover was also a pointer to the Messiah’s coming and an anticipation of the banquet to be celebrated in the Messianic Age.”

⁵⁶So Jeremias, 252.

⁵⁷Reproduced from Arthur Silver, *Passover Haggadah: The Complete Seder* (New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 1980), 49. The *hallel* is based on Pss 113—118, and esp. 118:25-26: “O LORD, save us; O LORD, grant us success. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD. From the house of the LORD we bless you.”

reminder to Christ himself to return and to bring the Last Supper/Lord's Supper to its fulfillment in the Messianic Banquet.⁵⁸

At this juncture it will be necessary to distinguish Jeremias' view from the view of this book. Jeremias has argued that the petition of the Lord's Supper is to God (the Father) to remember to send the Messiah a second time. But this seems unlikely on several counts. While it is true that the *Haggadah* implores God to send the Messiah, the Greek phrase used by Luke in his Last Supper account seems to militate against a petition to anyone other than Jesus himself.⁵⁹ Luke records Jesus as saying: εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (Luke 22:19). It is significant that Luke uses ἑμός (emos) rather than μου (moi). The use of the latter would have made the phrase more ambiguous and the exegetical options less certain. Mou ("of me") is flexible enough to be taken in a number of ways, and lends itself equally to the *memorial* view of this passage (potential objective genitive—"do this so that you [the church] might remember me"), Jeremias' view (potential objective genitive—"do this so that God might remember me"),⁶⁰ or the view of this book (potential subjective genitive—"do this so that I'll remember you" or "do this so as to remind me" which is based on the possessive "do this into my reminder"). Ἐμός, on the other hand, seems always to denote possession ("the memory *belonging to me*"), which seems on the surface to militate against both the *memorial* view and Jeremias' view.⁶¹ It is Jesus' remembering of his church that is in view here, not the church's or God's remembering of Jesus. It is difficult to see how this phrase could easily be rendered otherwise.⁶²

Jesus seems to be instructing his apostles to remind him of something. Just *what* is not clear from this verse alone. Yet the context bears considerable weight in determining the content of this reminder. Jesus has already told his apostles that he would never again eat the meal or drink the cup until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:16, 18). The phrase, τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἑμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, follows immediately on the heels of this pledge of abstinence (v. 19). It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the content of the "reminder" is for Christ to come again and to inaugurate the Messianic Banquet in fulfillment of the Lord's Supper currently being inaugurated.

One objection to this view might be to question the need for Christ to be reminded of anything. In light of his omniscience, is there any chance he will forget what he has promised to do?⁶³ On the surface this seems to be a reasonable criticism. Upon closer examination, however, this criticism loses substance. Of course, Christ (being God) does not forget anything. Yet to reject this view on the basis that God's omniscience precludes his needing to be reminded of anything is surely to prove too much; for on that basis, as Wainwright rightly observes, "every kind of thanksgiving and intercession would go by the board as well."⁶⁴ David prayed more than once that God would "remember" him or his righteous deeds (e.g., Pss 25:6-7; 89:50; 106:4). Moses himself appealed to God to "remember" his covenant promises and so to spare Israel from divine wrath (Deut 9:26-27). Nehemiah repeatedly appealed to God to "remember" him for his

⁵⁸See below for an explanation of why God should need to be reminded of anything.

⁵⁹So Conzelmann, 199.

⁶⁰Jeremias, 162.

⁶¹Conzelmann (199 n. 65) argues that ἑμός here is the *object* of the "remembering" on the basis of Mark 14:9, Wis 16:6, and Sir 10:17. But only one of these references contains ἀνάμνησις, and none of them contains ἑμός. In light of this, it is difficult to know just how Conzelmann's point can be sustained.

⁶²Though, admittedly, the *memorial* view may be salvaged if we allow ἀνάμνησις the meaning "memorial"; the possibility of this meaning is here conceded. Yet, in light of the fact that in the only other place it is used in the NT independently of the Lord's Supper texts (Heb 10:3) the meaning seems clearly to be "reminder," the meaning "memorial" here seems somewhat tenuous.

⁶³See Jones, 190 n. 3.

⁶⁴Wainwright, 66.

righteous deeds (Neh 13:14, 22, 29, 31). Jesus himself urged us to pray persistently to God: “And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, *who cry out to him day and night*? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly” (Luke 18:7-8). Jesus’ point seems to be that God acts as he sees *persistente* in the petitions of his people. This persistence is demonstrated in our reminding God of our plight and thereby petitioning him to act in our favor. This seems especially to be true of God’s covenant promises:

During that long period, the king of Egypt died. The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. God heard their groaning and he *remembered* (רָמַזְ [zākar]) his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac and with Jacob. So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them (Exod 2:23-25).

Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have *remembered* (רָמַזְ [zākar]) my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment’ (Exod 6:5-6).

God “heard” Israel’s plea in Egypt when they cried out to him for help. As a result, God “remembered” his covenant he had made with the patriarchs and acted to rescue his covenant people.⁶⁵ The Passover, as we have seen, served not only as a reminder of how God saved his people out of Egypt, but also as a *reminder to God* to save Israel from all her enemies by sending the Messiah. The Passover was the cult meal of the Old Covenant that embodied this petition to God.

The petition of the Lord’s Supper is no different. By repeatedly partaking of the Supper (the cult meal of the New Covenant) we are “reminding” Christ of our plight that we are still without a host at our banquet and that the Banquet itself is still in its unfulfilled state. The Lord’s Supper, then, is an appeal to Christ—a reminder, as it were—to return and bring this meal to its fulfillment⁶⁶ (viz., the Messianic Banquet in the inaugurated kingdom).

The Eschatological Focus in the Pauline Tradition

But what of the obvious connection of this ἀνάμνησις to Christ’s death in 1 Cor 11:23-26? Paul writes:

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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 (ἀνάμνησιν) of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever (ὁσάκις [hosakis]) you drink it, in remembrance (ἀνάμνησιν) of me.” For (γὰρ) whenever (ὁσάκις) you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim (καταγγέλλετε [katangellete]) the Lord’s death (θάνατον [thanaton]) until he comes (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ [achris hou elthe]).

Here Paul makes a direct connection between ἀνάμνησιν and τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου (“the Lord’s death”). Γὰρ may be used in v. 26 to show that v. 26 serves as an explanation of v. 25; or perhaps it is used by Paul to introduce his commentary on the entire tradition found in vv. 23-25. More likely, however, it is used

⁶⁵See M. H. Sykes, “The Eucharist as Anamnesis,” *ExpT* 71 (1960): 115-118, passim. Other appeals for God to “remember” and “save” include 1 Sam 1:11; Judg 16:28; 2 Kgs 20:3. Appeals to God to “remember” his *covenant relationship* include Jer 14:21; Exod 32:13; Deut 9:27; 2 Chr 6:42.

⁶⁶Even Jones (191) does not deny the eschatological element in the Lord’s Supper when he writes, “it is in no sense merely a looking back.” See below for other scholars who share this view of ἀνάμνησις.

to show that v. 26 serves as an explanation of ἀνάμνησιν in vv. 24-25. The pivotal term here is ὁσάκις, found in both v. 25 and v. 26. In v. 25 Paul seems to include this word, along with εἰς, to show the *purpose* of drinking the cup: τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὁσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. (“When you do it, it is to be done *for the purpose of* [εἰς] ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν). He uses ὁσάκις again in v. 26 to explain that purpose—ὁσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ—hence making the two passages hang together.

It seems, then, that Paul wants to make a point in v. 26 about ἀνάμνησιν in v. 25.⁶⁷ The ἀνάμνησις is for Paul a “proclamation of the Lord’s death.” But does this not suggest (as the *memorial* view holds) that the ἀνάμνησις has a historical rather than eschatological focus? There are many indicators given by Paul in this very passage that his theology of the Lord’s Supper is little different than what we have argued is Luke’s theology.⁶⁸ For instance, it is difficult to determine, if we are to adopt the *memorial* view (viz., that we are to remember Christ’s death), to whom we are “proclaiming” Christ’s death. To unbelievers?⁶⁹ To ourselves? The former seems unlikely because in the early church the meetings were made up almost exclusively of believers.⁷⁰ While the latter seems possible, it is not without difficulties. It would seem strange that Christians are to “remind” each other that Christ died.⁷¹ Moreover, just what form this proclamation would take is not readily apparent.⁷² While neither of these objections is conclusive, both of them militate against the *memorial* view to some degree.

In light of Luke’s eschatological focus, Paul’s words make equally good sense if we view this “proclamation” as a petition to Christ. As we have noted, Paul explains in v. 26 just what the ἀνάμνησις is that he referenced in vv. 24-25; it is a proclamation of Christ’s death. Christ’s death in the Lord’s Supper texts is virtually synonymous with the initiation of the New Covenant: “This cup is the new covenant *in my blood*” (1 Cor 11:25; cf. Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20). It does not seem too far wrong, then, to say that this “proclamation” acts as a “reminder” to Christ; that is to say, whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper we are “proclaiming” to Christ (reminding him) that he has initiated the New Covenant *by means of his death*,⁷³ and that we now want him to bring it to its consummation by coming again and inaugurating the Messianic Banquet in his kingdom. In the words of Jeremias:

⁶⁷If this much is granted, then, by extension, Paul likely has in mind his mention of ἀνάμνησιν in v. 24 as well.

⁶⁸The fact that Paul’s tradition is so similar to Luke’s account demonstrates this point. This is not all that surprising given that Paul and Luke were traveling companions and probably shared a great deal of theology and tradition in common. Nelson (229) also points to Luke’s knowledge of Paul’s letters and tradition of church practice as a formative influence in Luke’s Last Supper account.

⁶⁹So Marshall (*Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 113) who thinks this is a verbal proclamation of the gospel and that the Lord’s Supper is a set occasion for preaching the good news. He states that “the action of the church in celebrating this meal is a proclamation of the gospel to all who are present to see and hear what is happening,” idem, 148. But this betrays a contemporary view of the church as a place where unbelievers are commonly present. This was probably not the case in the first century (see next note below).

⁷⁰Paul does entertain the possibility of an unbeliever walking in (εἰσέρχομαι [*eiserchomai*]) during the meeting (1 Cor 14:23-24); but it is unlikely that this was the norm given the fact that the *normal* place of meeting for the first-century church was in private homes, not public buildings (cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42, 16:40, 20:20; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1-2; 2 John 10).

⁷¹But perhaps this reminding comes in the form of the significance and benefits of that death.

⁷²The view advanced by Bruce (*1 Corinthians*, 113-14) and Grosheide (273) that the “proclamation” here refers to the symbolic act of the breaking of bread is unlikely since καταγγέλλω always seems to be associated with a verbal proclamation in Paul (see Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 270; and Conzelmann, 201). Barrett (270) opts for a verbal narration of the events of the Passion. Higgins (53) sees this proclamation not as a re-enactment (as with the Mass) but a preaching of Christ’s death.

⁷³“The cross made possible the new covenant and the kingdom,” David Wenham, “How Jesus understood the Last Supper: a parable in action,” *Themelios* 20 (1995): 14.

The proclamation of the death of Jesus is not therefore intended to call to the remembrance of the community the event of the Passion; rather this proclamation expresses the vicarious death of Jesus as the beginning of the salvation time and prays for the coming of the consummation.⁷⁴

This may be an overstatement on Jeremias' part. It very well could be the case that the reason the phrase, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν, is so ambiguous is precisely because both ideas are intended.⁷⁵ Whatever historical element is involved, it is clear that Paul in 1 Cor 11:23-26 intends an eschatological element as well.⁷⁶ This may be seen in the phrase, ἄχρι οὗ ἔλθῃ (“until he comes”),⁷⁷ in v. 26 by which Paul conveys “the prospect of the attainment of the eschatological goal.”⁷⁸ This phrase, used with the aorist subjunctive and without ἄν, *always* denotes the prospect of such a goal.⁷⁹ Here it produces the awkward “until the goal is reached that he comes,” and means, “until the *goal* of the proclamation is reached—namely, his coming.”

Hence, the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper is to sound a plea for the second coming:⁸⁰ “As often as the death of the Lord is proclaimed at the Lord's Supper, and the *maranatha* rises upwards, God is reminded of the unfulfilled climax of the work of salvation ‘until (the goal is reached, that) he comes.’”⁸¹ As Wainwright notes: “At every eucharist the church is in fact praying that the *parousia* may take place at that very moment.”⁸² Each time the church comes together for the Lord's Supper, Christ is reminded that he is still not “eating” and not “drinking” (Luke 22:16-18), and that the heavenly banquet which the Lord's Supper prefigures has not yet been “fulfilled in the kingdom”:

This means that the command to repeat the rite is not a summons to the disciples to preserve the memory of Jesus and be vigilant (‘repeat the breaking of bread so that you may not forget me’), but it is an eschatological oriented instruction: ‘Keep joining yourselves together as the redeemed community by the table rite, that in this way God may be . . . [regularly] . . . implored to bring about the consummation in the *parousia*.’⁸³

⁷⁴Jeremias, 253.

⁷⁵Although the eschatological element may well be prominent.

⁷⁶So Nelson, 229. Contra Goguel (339) who says, “Paul destroyed the eschatological character of the eucharist.” Although not a proponent of Jeremias' view, Higgins (37) concedes that Paul's tradition of the Last Supper “preserve[s] the eschatological thought enshrined in it.”

⁷⁷“It points beyond itself to the greater meal,” Geoffrey W. Bromiley, “Six Certainties About the Lord's Supper,” *Christianity Today* 15 (1971): 956.

⁷⁸David Adamo, “The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-34,” *Africa Theological Journal* 18 (1989): 46.

⁷⁹Barrett, 270. Cf. Rom 11:25; 1 Cor 15:25; Luke 21:24.

⁸⁰This does not diminish the sovereignty of God in determining the time of the *parousia*. We are elsewhere enjoined by Peter to “hasten his coming” (σπεύδοντας τὴν παρουσία) (2 Pet 3:12). It is noteworthy (although the point cannot be pressed) that Peter's words here come on the heels of his allusion to the Lord's Supper (συνευωχούμενοι ὑμῖν, “feasting with you”) in 2:13. It may be that Peter has the Supper in mind in 3:12.

⁸¹Jeremias, 253.

⁸²Wainwright, 67.

⁸³Jeremias, 255.

Μαραναθα (maranatha) and the Lord's Supper

At the end of his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul makes the somewhat disjointed exclamation, μαραναθά (“Come, O Lord!”),⁸⁴ a phrase which Higgins and others believe accompanied the Lord’s Supper.⁸⁵ There is some question as to whether μαραναθά here is to be taken as an imperative or a perfect. The problem rests in determining the underlying Aramaic from which the Greek is transliterated: Is it to be read as ܡܪܢܐ ܬܗܐ (μαρανα θα [marana tha]) or as ܡܪܢܐ ܐܬܗܐ (μαραν αθα [maran atha])? Both are possible (ܡܪܢܐ ܐܬܗܐ is also possible). The former is an imperative clause (“Our Lord, come!”) which would refer to the *parousia*, while the latter is a perfect clause (“Our Lord has come!”) which would refer to the incarnation. The option in parentheses is likewise an imperative clause. Still others take the perfect as present-referring and see in this phrase a statement of the “cultic presence of Christ” in the eucharist.⁸⁶

In spite of all the uncertainties surrounding this word, it seems best to take it as an imperative paralleling the statement found in Rev 22:20, ἔρχου, κύριε Ἰησοῦ (“Come Lord Jesus!”).⁸⁷ The earliest church writings seem to have taken it this way.⁸⁸ The *Didache* gives explicit instructions for the activities surrounding the Lord’s Supper.⁸⁹ Remarkably though, in those places where the Supper is most mentioned it is never connected with the death of Christ.⁹⁰ Yet, as Goguel notes, there are at least two places where the instructions for the Lord’s Supper in the *Didache* have eschatological dimensions.⁹¹ They are as follows:

As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and became one, so let thy Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom.⁹²

*Remember, Lord, thy Church, to deliver it from all evil and to make it perfect in thy love, and gather it together in its holiness from the four winds . . . into the kingdom which thou hast prepared for it. . . . May grace come and may this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. . . . Maranatha.*⁹³

It is likely that the writer understood μαραναθά in the imperative sense (“Our Lord, come!”) rather than in the perfect sense (“Our Lord has come!”) for several reasons. As Goguel has noted,⁹⁴ there is a conspicuous

⁸⁴1 Cor 16:22.

⁸⁵Higgins, 60. So also Bruce, *1 Corinthians*, 114; Barrett, 271; Conzelmann, 202. It is equally possible that μαραναθά, at least in the context of 1 Cor 16:22, is an invocation for the Lord to return and to rectify wrong (ἀνάθεμα [anathema]) and to establish right (Brown, “μαραναθά,” *NIDNTT*, 897).

⁸⁶Wainwright, 70.

⁸⁷Wainwright, 70. See also Wilhelm Mundle, “μαραναθά,” *NIDNTT*, 896.

⁸⁸Although later church writings almost uniformly take it in the perfect sense (Mundle, 896).

⁸⁹Chaps. 9, 10 & 14, Lightfoot and Harmer, 232-34. All subsequent patristic references to μαραναθά are based on 1 Cor 16:22 (Mundle, 895).

⁹⁰So Goguel (346): “There is nothing either in Chapters IX-X or in Chapter XIV which sets up a relationship between the eucharistic and the Last Supper or the death of Jesus.”

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²*Did.* 9:4.

⁹³*Did.* 10:5-6.

absence of anything resembling a historic outlook here.⁹⁵ On the contrary, everything in these passages seems to point to a future hope. An appeal is made to God to “gather together” the church “into thy kingdom.” God is implored to “remember” (μνημονεύω) his church and to “deliver” it from “all evil.”⁹⁶ Another appeal is made for grace to come and for the present world to pass away (an obvious request for the inauguration of the kingdom). The exclamation “hosanna!” (ὠσαννά) is historically tied to the *hallel* of the Passover⁹⁷ and means “O, save,” indicating “an imploring cry to Yahweh to bring to reality that which the liturgy has depicted.”⁹⁸ The fact that μαρναθά falls so closely on the heels of all this makes the imperative meaning (“Our Lord, come!”) likely. Indeed, the perfect (“Our Lord has come!”) follows awkwardly at best.⁹⁹

To summarize, then, the Lord’s Supper is eschatologically oriented, not simply (nor even primarily) historically oriented. It is intended to prefigure the feast that we will enjoy with the Lord himself at the Messianic Banquet. Until the Messianic Banquet comes at the inauguration of the kingdom we are to partake of this banquet—as a banquet—in absentia, via the Lord’s Supper, as a petition and a reminder to Christ to return. We petition him by *proclaiming* to him that his *death* has initiated the New Covenant and that we long for him to bring it to its consummation (“Maranatha!”). Each time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated it *reminds* Christ that the Messianic banquet remains in its prefigure form (i.e., as the Lord’s Supper), that he is still “not eating” and “not drinking” with his church, and that the “fulfillment” of the Supper has not yet come. The implications of such a focus for the community-setting of the Lord’s Supper are addressed below.

⁹⁴See above.

⁹⁵Nor is there support here for the Catholic understanding; viz., “our Lord is now present.”

⁹⁶A direct allusion to Matt 6:13: “and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one,” which we have already argued (see “daily bread” above) is set in an eschatological context. It is noteworthy that the writer of the *Didache* connects this with the *eschaton* in the next and subsequent clauses.

⁹⁷See above.

⁹⁸J.A. Motyer, “ὠσαννά,” *NIDNTT*, 100.

⁹⁹Ignatius may also connect the Lord’s Supper with a plea for the parousia. In his letter to the Ephesians he advises the church to assemble frequently for the εὐχαριστία Θεοῦ (eucharist of God), by which the “powers of Satan” are “destroyed” (καθαίρω) (Ign. *Eph.* 13, Lightfoot and Harmer, 109). It may be the case, however, that Ignatius means to “overpower” Satan’s powers in the present age.

CHAPTER 8

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COMMUNAL FORM OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper, as we have seen, looks forward to the coming Messianic Banquet in the kingdom. In fact, it anticipates and prefigures that banquet and is therefore intended to foreshadow it.¹ In that sense the Lord's Supper epitomizes the "biblical pattern of promise and fulfillment"²—the *already* and the *not yet*.³ "In its entire execution," therefore, "the eucharist should be a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God."⁴

The Lord's Supper as a Banquet

The most obvious implication of this principle is that the Lord's Supper itself should take the form of a banquet. The biblical imagery associated with the eschatological banquet is one of celebration and abundance of food (Isa 25:6-8; Matt 22:4; Luke 15:22-32; Rev 19:9); and indeed, this is just what we find in the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:46). As we have already shown, the word δέιπνον in every instance in the NT refers to nothing less than a full meal—and arguably always refers to a banquet or feast.⁵ Nor will it do to view the Lord's Supper (κυριακὸν δέιπνον) as merely a *symbolic* meal, for what Paul calls κυριακὸν δέιπνον in 1 Cor 11:20 is nothing less than a full-blown meal held in common.⁶

In spite of this emphasis in the NT, some scholars reject the notion that the Lord's Supper must take the form of a full meal. Stagg for instance observes that, "the supper anticipates the messianic banquet at the end of the age, but it is not itself that banquet."⁷ This is true, but the reason it anticipates the banquet is precisely because it prefigures it. A symbolic meal can prefigure the banquet only with difficulty. It would not be too far wrong to say that only a banquet can *meaningfully* prefigure a banquet. This may be compared to other biblical promise/fulfillment concepts. The sacrificial death of Christ was prefigured by a *real* death, not a symbolic one. The eternal rest into which we enter when we come to Christ was foreshadowed by a *real* sabbath rest (Heb 4:1-11). The church as a whole has not "usually done justice to the theological implications of the fact that the eucharist is a meal."⁸

¹The Lord's Supper "anticipates the heavenly banquet of God's eternal realm," Ringe, 59.

²Wainwright, 41.

³Ibid., 150: "At the eucharist, the future is invading the present."

⁴Kasper, 136.

⁵See under "Paul's Concept of 'The Lord's Supper'" in chap. 4 of this book.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Stagg, 7.

⁸Wainwright, 18.

One may still question whether this association of a meal with the Eucharist is a valid one. Could it not be argued, for instance, that a meal was the proper expression of community for the social setting of the first-century world, but that other expressions of community may be more appropriate for social settings of different times and places? It must be conceded up front that this is indeed possible. If this is adopted, on the other hand, one must ask larger questions of biblical imagery. Is there really going to be a Messianic Banquet at the end of the age, or is the idea of a banquet merely an illustrative device designed to convey festive joy in the kingdom? (If indeed “kingdom” itself is not merely the first-century expression of God’s reign—perhaps a more appropriate term might be used in non-monarchical societies). Is the culture of the church at this point based on the surrounding culture or is it based on eschatological reality? If in fact there is going to be a Messianic Banquet at the end of the age, and if that banquet (as we have seen) is rooted in eschatological reality, then we must see the biblical imagery of a communal banquet as independent of Hellenistic society: “The notion of the Eucharist as a presiding of the Messiah over the banquet table in the kingdom must be kept strong because it is scriptural.”⁹ But if this is the case, then it is difficult to imagine how one can argue that the meal-aspect of the Lord’s Supper is culturally relative. On the contrary, it seems rather that the meal-aspect of the Lord’s Supper, insofar as it prefigures the Messianic Banquet, is as timeless as the Banquet itself: “Even now God’s lost children may come home and sit down at their Father’s table.”¹⁰ Indeed, even today there are very few societies that do not view table fellowship as a rich expression of community.

The Primary Focus of the Lord’s Supper

R. P. Martin has identified three features of the Lord’s Supper in the early church: (1) a common meal; (2) the bread and wine; (3) an eschatological hope.¹¹ This eschatological focus of the Lord’s Supper in the early Christian community can be seen in Acts 2:46 which speaks of the “gladness” (“messianic joy”)¹² with which the early Christians partook of their meals together. Cullman rightly sees this jubilation as incompatible with the idea of recalling the somber events of the Last Supper.¹³

Yet, as Higgins observes, this eschatological element of the Lord’s Supper has often been excluded in the modern church.¹⁴ Käsemann, too, discerns a shift in the focus of the Lord’s Supper from a primarily eschatological outlook (an anticipation of the Messianic Banquet) to an inter-advent ordinance “tied to the ‘time of the church’” which pertains only to the church while here on earth.¹⁵ This current focus has acted to “minimize . . . the believers’ present communion with one another and with the risen Lord and their anticipation of the messianic banquet at the second coming of the Lord.”¹⁶ This is unfortunate for the church and detrimental to the theology of the Lord’s Supper. Once the church abandons the outward expression of a

⁹Sloyan, 450.

¹⁰Jeremias, 262.

¹¹Martin, *Worship*, 122. Sloyan (448) has identified three of his own: “The Lord’s Supper . . . is part memorial and part anticipation as well as present reality. All three elements or stages are marvelously fused in it.”

¹²See under “The Meaning of Ἀνάμνησις” in chap. 7 of this book.

¹³Cullman, 9. His solution, unfortunately, is to adopt Lietzmann’s view of two separate types of Lord’s Supper in the NT. For a discussion of this jubilation in the “memorial” view see previous chapter.

¹⁴Higgins, 54.

¹⁵Käsemann, 122.

¹⁶John Newport, “The Purpose of the Church,” in *The People of God: Essays on the Believers’ Church*, ed. Paul Basden and David S. Dockery (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 26.

NT practice, all too often the underlying theology of that practice is likewise abandoned. This is the case with the Supper as well. Since anything resembling the eschatological banquet is rarely to be found in the context of the Supper within the modern church, so too the accompanying eschatological joy is rarely to be found. Instead, the mood is much more that of a funeral. Rather than the early-church practice of “praying that the parousia may take place at that very moment”¹⁷ in an attempt to “speed his coming” (2 Pet 3:12), many (most?) churches today focus on the historical element of Christ’s death and the recalling of personal sin in the lives of the recipients.¹⁸ The eschatological element, it seems, can be found only within the ivory towers of the scholarly world; and, sadly, this is where it is likely to remain.¹⁹

*The Intended Frequency and Centrality
of the Lord’s Supper*

Since one of the primary foci of the Lord’s Supper is an eschatological plea for the *eschaton*, one might assume that its practice should be frequent. After all, if it is true that our Lord left his church with the means to *remind* him to fulfill his covenant promises then it would seem that those who “love his appearing” (2 Tim 4:8) would want to use it often to remind him often. Does the NT give us any indication as to the frequency with which the Lord’s Supper was—or, *is to be*—practiced?

Some have looked to Paul’s words in 1 Cor 11:25 for the answer: “do this, *as often as* (ὡσάκις) you drink it, in remembrance of me.” Grosheide sees here an injunction of sorts to partake of the Lord’s Supper often: “Drink frequently the cup of the Lord and do so always in remembrance of me.”²⁰ But this is to go beyond Paul’s intent. The imperative is in the words, τοῦτο ποιεῖτε . . . εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν (“do this into my remembrance”), and not in ὡσάκις ἕαν πίνητε (“as often as you drink”). Put another way, there is no injunction to “do this *often*” here, nor in Luke, nor anywhere else in the NT. The most that can be gleaned from these words is that Paul *assumed* there would be regular repetition of the Lord’s Supper.²¹ Just how frequent this repetition was or should be is not told us here.

But to ask whether there is an injunction that shows the frequency of the Lord’s Supper is perhaps to ask the wrong question. It seems evident that the early church partook of the Lord’s Supper on either a daily basis or a weekly basis.²² Luke records of the church: “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts” (Acts 2:46). This verse traditionally has been understood to mean that the early church partook of the Lord’s Supper on a *daily* basis, at least at the beginning and at least in Jerusalem. Kilpatrick, however, suggests an alternative way of taking this verse, according to which “daily” is not seen as applying to the verse as a whole but only to “meeting in the temple.”²³ This gains strength if we take καθ’ ἡμέραν (*kath’ hēmeran*) as a coordinating clause to κατ’ οἶκον (*kath’ oikon*), rather than the latter as a subordinating clause to the former. The Greek might then read:

¹⁷Wainwright, 67.

¹⁸The latter is usually based on a misreading of 1 Cor 11:27-29. But see Fee (558-561) for a full discussion.

¹⁹A similar fate occurred with the concept of “worship” in the NT church. In spite of I.H. Marshall’s article (“How far did the early Christians *worship* God,” *Churchman* 99 [1985]: 216-229) written over ten years ago to clarify the issue, there is barely an evangelical church to be found today that does not still call its Sunday morning meeting a “worship” service.

²⁰Grosheide, 272.

²¹So Fee (555) who notes that ὡσάκις implies “a frequently repeated action.”

²²“The early church did not celebrate the Lord’s Supper according to the Passover ritual, nor yet only once a year, but daily or on each Lord’s day,” Jeremias, 62.

²³Kilpatrick, 37.

καθ' ἡμέραν τε
 προσκαρτεροῦντες ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ,
 κατ' οἶκον τε
 κλώντες ἄρτον, μετελαμβάνον τροφῆς ἐν ἀγαλλιάσει καὶ ἀφελότητι καρδίας.

According to Kilpatrick, “this seems on the whole more probable.”²⁴ If we are to adopt this view we must then look elsewhere to ascertain how frequently the early church partook of the Supper.

Perhaps the best place to look is Acts 20:7: “On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.” Several observations can be made about this passage. First, Luke likely intends to record more than mere historical narrative here. While it is true that Luke is recording the history of the church, he certainly does not include *all* that the church did. Instead, he is selective about what he records, including only those events that would best meet his redactional need of instructing the early churches in apostolic teaching. He makes a point to mention that it was on the “first day of the week” that they came together and that the activity included “breaking bread.” It is not so much the mere mention of this early-church practice that is significant here; rather, it is the way it is presented. True, Luke mentions the practice only once; but his one mention betrays an *assumption* that this was an ongoing practice. The Greek reads: Ἐν δὲ τῇ μιᾷ τῶν σαββάτων συναγμένων ἡμῶν κλάσαι ἄρτον, ὁ Παῦλος διελέγετο αὐτοῖς (“On the first day of the week, *our having assembled* to break bread, Paul began to lead a discussion with them” [translation mine]). Luke’s point is not simply that the church met together, and incidentally this week it happened to be on Sunday. Rather, Luke’s statement is more accurately rendered as, “On the first day of the week, when [as normal] we assembled to break bread.”²⁵

This passage has direct implications for the frequency of the Lord’s Supper. Luke does not tell us merely that the normal practice of the church is to meet on the first day of the week; he also tells us the *purpose* of that meeting—“to break bread” (κλάσαι ἄρτον). The infinitive here is telic and is more accurately rendered, “*in order to* break bread.” This purpose for the meeting occurs also in Paul. In 1 Cor 11:17, Paul introduces his discussion about the Lord’s Supper. He begins by chiding the Corinthians because their “meetings” (συνέρχασθε) do more harm than good. That Paul has in mind the normal, regular meetings of the church is clear from v. 18 where he speaks of the divisions that prevail when they “come together as a church” (συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ). In v. 20 Paul picks up on that same idea, but this time connects it with the Supper: “*When you come together*, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat”²⁶ (συνερχομένων οὐκ ἔστιν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν). What is significant here is that the telic infinitive is again used. The church was to come together κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν—“*in order to eat* the Lord’s Supper.”

This purpose clause occurs once more at the end of this pericope, again showing that the purpose of the church meeting is to partake of the Lord’s Supper: “So then, my brothers, when you *come together* (συνερχόμενοι) *to eat* (φαγεῖν), wait for each other” (11:33). This last instance is perhaps even stronger than the other two, for here the telic infinitive is bolstered by the inclusion of εἰς (συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν) removing any ambiguity as to the purpose of the meeting. Interestingly, these three passages (Luke 20:7; 1 Cor 11:20, 33) are *the only places in the entire NT that use a purpose clause in relation to the meeting of the church*. Whatever other purpose the church may have had for coming together (worship, mutual edification, etc.), no purpose clause is ever used for any activity except the Lord’s Supper.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵The specific mention of the first day together with the purpose of the evening meeting being to break bread suggests that this was a regular occurrence in the church at Troas,” Lincoln, 383.

²⁶“Paul’s criticism, ‘when you eat together, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper,’ implies that it should be,” Ervin Bishop, “The Assembly,” *Restoration Quarterly* 18 (1975): 225. See also my discussion in chap. 4 of this book.

The foregoing point is significant because it links (perhaps even inextricably) the Lord's Supper with the meeting of the church. One cannot speak about the frequency of observance of the Lord's Supper without also speaking of the frequency of the church meeting itself. Put another way, once we have determined that the *purpose* of the church meeting is to partake of the Lord's Supper, then in order to determine the frequency of the Supper we need only determine the frequency of the church meeting. As Marshall notes: "In line with what appears to have been the practice of the early church in the New Testament the Lord's Supper should be celebrated frequently in the church, and there is good reason for doing so on each Lord's Day."²⁷

Indeed, that reason may very well be bound up in the similarity of titles for both the Supper and the Day. As we have already seen, the church adopted the first day of the week as the regular day of meeting for the church, even assigning it a specialized title—the "Lord's Day."²⁸ While we do not know with certainty why this day was chosen, it is likely due to its association with the resurrection of Christ²⁹ and his subsequent appearances to his disciples,³⁰ as well as to the belief of the early church that the *eschaton* and the general resurrection would likewise occur on that day.³¹ Whatever the reason for the title, it remains clear that the word κυριακὸν (κυριακῆ ἡμέρα, "the Lord's Day," Rev 1:10) is found in only one other place (1 Cor 11:20) where it is used in the title, "the Lord's Supper" (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον). It may very well be the case that the reason the same word is used for both the Supper and the Day—and never in any other context in the NT—is precisely because the Supper and the Day are inextricably linked to each other.³² The Lord's Day is so called because it is the day that the Lord's Supper—the precursor to the Messianic Banquet—is enjoyed. Conversely, the Lord's Supper is so called because it is the supper that is celebrated on the Lord's Day. The Lord's Day commemorates the resurrection of Christ, whose resurrection guarantees the promise of the eschatological resurrection. The Lord's Supper likewise anticipates the second coming and offers a plea toward that end. The Lord's Day is the day the church comes together to petition Christ to return; the Lord's Supper is the means to that petition. As Wainwright notes: "[The] link between the day and the meal is already made in the New Testament and is of importance for the eschatological content and bearing of the eucharist."³³ In light of this emphasis on the connection between the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper—both in the practice of the apostolic church and in the practice of the post-apostolic church—Evangelicals should perhaps "rethink the order of worship toward . . . an increased use of the Lord's Supper as the focal point of worship."³⁴

²⁷Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 155. Harris (24) has identified another reason as that "the weekly Jewish sabbath . . . rather than the annual Passover . . . provided the model for the frequency of the Christian observance of the Lord's Supper."

²⁸Rev 1:10. See the discussion under "Agape as a Specialized Term" in chap. 4 of this book; also see the protracted discussion by Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 222-245.

²⁹Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1.

³⁰Luke 24:13-16; John 20:19; 20:26.

³¹For a thorough discussion see Bauckham, "The Lord's Day," 240-245; also Lincoln, 384-386. Though Rev 1:10 is no doubt a reference to Sunday, it is significant that the only instance of κυριακῆ ἡμέρα is in the context of an *apocalyptic* book. This likely contributed to the connection of the Lord's Day to an eschatological hope in the minds of the early Christians (cf. Barnabas' eschatological eighth day, *Barn.* 15:8-9, Lightfoot and Harmer, 284).

³²This seems also to be the case with the early post-apostolic church. The *Didache* gives instructions to the church to "gather" (συναγω) on the "Lord's own day" (κυριακῆν Κυρίου) and "break bread" (κλάσατε ἄρτων) (Lightfoot and Harmer, 223).

³³Wainwright, 75.

³⁴Newport, 26-27.

*The Significance of the Church Setting for Community
in the Lord's Supper*

One final consideration that should be mentioned here is the physical setting of the church when partaking of the Lord's Supper. Perhaps one of the reasons that the modern church has largely abandoned the community aspect of the Lord's Supper (a meal held in common) is because its structure is ill-conducive to such a practice. One must not underestimate the importance of size and structure when considering the feasibility of any practice of the early church. As Filson notes:

The New Testament Church would be better understood, if more attention were paid to the actual physical conditions under which the first Christians met and lived. In particular, the importance and function of the house church should be carefully considered.³⁵

One of the reasons that the Lord's Supper as a meal could be conducted with so little difficulty in the early church is because the physical setting lent itself to such activities: "Private homes provided the meeting places for the distinctive Christian acts of worship."³⁶ The NT portrays the church in terms of a family. The church collectively is the "household of God."³⁷ Individually, we are the "children of God"³⁸ born into his family.³⁹ Consequently, we are to relate to one another as brothers, sisters, mothers, and fathers.⁴⁰ No other setting can bear the theological implications of *church as family* like the home. Indeed, it might well be argued that "it was the hospitality of these homes which made possible the Christian worship, common meals, and courage-sustaining fellowship of the group."⁴¹ It should come as no surprise then that the setting for the early church meeting was the simplicity of the homes of its members.⁴²

Nor should it be of great surprise that the Lord's Supper was a primary activity of these home meetings. Luke informs us that the early churches "broke bread in their homes" (Acts 2:46). The setting was small and intimate,⁴³ which itself contributed to the fellowship of community around the Lord's Table:

³⁵F. V. Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *JBL* 58 (1939): 105-106.

³⁶Ladd, 349.

³⁷Eph 2:19; cf. Gal 6:10.

³⁸1 John 3:1.

³⁹John 1:12-13.

⁴⁰1 Tim 5:1-2; cf. Rom 16:13.

⁴¹Filson, "House Churches," 109.

⁴²Cf. Acts 2:46; 5:42; 16:40; 20:20; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phlm 1-2; 2 John 10. While it is true that the church also met in the temple (Acts 2:46; 5:42), this practice seems to have been confined to Jewish converts in Jerusalem who wanted to preserve their heritage (cf. Acts 21:20-25).

⁴³"There is no evidence that so large a group could assemble in a single place. The pattern is rather that of many smaller 'house-churches'—separate congregations, analogous to Jewish synagogues," Ladd, 349. Cf. also Robert Banks (*Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980], 41-42) who notes that, "it is unlikely that a meeting of the 'whole church' could have exceeded forty to forty-five people, and many may well have been smaller"; in any case, these meetings of the church "were small enough for relatively intimate relationships to develop between the members."

Thus the meal that they shared together not only reminded the members of their relationship with Christ and one another but actually deepened it, much as participation in a common meal by a family or group not only symbolizes but really cements the bond between them.⁴⁴

While the modern evangelical church longs to emulate the NT church in its theology and practice of the Lord's Supper, the community-aspect of the Supper remains conspicuously absent. No doubt the church setting plays a prominent role in this. Indeed, it would be exceedingly difficult and impractical—if not altogether impossible—to adopt the apostolic practice of the Lord's Supper in the large church, for such a setting militates against the intimate community that was such an integral part of the Supper. Instead, the modern church has *adapted* the Lord's Supper to fit the setting. This is unfortunate, for adaptation normally entails the loss of theological significance (whether intentional or not). For instance, the adaptation of the Supper to accommodate a large community requires that intimacy of table fellowship be sacrificed. Similarly, the singularity of the bread and cup which we have seen *causes* unity in the body has given way to bread that is already broken and wine that is poured beforehand; hence, the form of the bread and wine in the modern church is not only incapable of *causing* bodily unity, but is also incapable of *symbolizing* unity. The meal-aspect which prefigures the Messianic Banquet must be substituted with a token (or *symbolic*) meal. In short, theological significance has been displaced by logistics.

None of this is to lay blame on the modern church; to a very large extent the church today is merely a product of its forerunners. We have inherited the problem. Indeed, the theological shortcomings of the current practice of the Lord's Supper can hardly be avoided given the setting of the modern church. The church has likely done its level best to faithfully carry out the practice of the NT church in the context in which it finds itself. Perhaps, though, the answer lies not in adapting the Lord's Supper to accommodate the current setting of the church; perhaps instead it lies in adapting the current setting of the church to accommodate the theology of the Lord's Supper.

⁴⁴Banks, 86.

CONCLUSION

This book has attempted to show how the community-aspect of the early church held significance and was operative in the context of the Lord's Supper. Most of what we know about this aspect of the Supper comes from the pen of Paul who defines the Lord's Supper in a number of very specific ways. At the very outset, the Supper must enjoy the voluntary unity of its participants, without which it ceases to be the Lord's Supper. Yet voluntary unity is not enough. The Supper must also visibly express that unity through the singularity of the bread and cup. When this visible expression is present, we find that the singularity of the bread and cup actually *causes* bodily unity. This unity aspect persists throughout the early existence of the church and finds support in a number of patristic sources as well.

Perhaps the most important aspect for community in the Lord's Supper is the fact that the Supper was originally a full meal. Indeed, what Paul refers to when he coins the title "Lord's Supper" is the *meal*, of which the bread and wine are prominent elements, and apart from which the Lord's Supper cannot properly be called a "supper." The separation of the meal from the elements occurred sometime after the apostolic age and, contrary to popular belief, was quite unintended by Paul. Whatever may have been the relationship between the bread and wine and the meal in a later age, "they belonged together in New Testament times."¹ This meal, also known as the *Agape*, is alluded to by both Jude and Peter, and was widely practiced by the early post-apostolic church. The fact that the Supper received no fewer than two specialized names argues strongly for its apostolic endorsement. These two names, in addition to other phrases assigned to the Supper (such as "breaking bread"), show the universal acceptance of the Supper in the early church, so that it will not do to postulate that the meal-aspect of the Supper was characteristic of Pauline churches only.

The Supper held a wide range of purposes. First, it served as an expression of concern for the poor in the believing community. In all likelihood, the Supper was a potluck of sorts provided by the rich to show their love for less fortunate Christians. It is probably this purpose that resulted in the adoption of the title *Agape*. A second dimension of the Supper is that it compelled the Christian community to live out the theology of equality of status in Christ, violating the Hellenistic societal norm to hold homogenous banquets where class distinctions were acutely recognized. Closely related to this, the Supper also erased ethnic divisions between Jew and Gentile, forcing the Jewish Christians to regard as "clean" what God himself has declared clean.

Another very important, yet oft-missed aspect of the Supper is its eschatological focus. The Lord's Supper prefigures the Messianic Banquet and acts as a means to petition Messiah to come again. The Supper is to be repeated on a regular basis in order to sound this petition and to give the participants the opportunity to proclaim with one voice, *Maranatha!* This is not far different from the practice of Israel during the *hallel* of the Passover *Haggadah* to petition God to send the Messiah the first time.

This focus has direct implications for the form, frequency, and centrality of the Supper. If the Supper is to prefigure the abundance of food in the Messianic Banquet, then the Supper itself must have the form of an actual meal. Moreover, if the focus of the Supper is to sound a plea for the *parousia*, then it is natural to suppose that the church practiced it whenever it met together. As it turns out, the regular gathering of the church in the NT seems to be on a weekly basis, and on the first day of the week. We also find that the very

¹Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 145.

purpose of the regular meeting of the church was to partake of the Supper, and this leads us to believe that the Supper, too, was practiced on a weekly basis. This is not surprising, however, given that both the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day have very similar titles, perhaps even by design.

Finally, we found that the physical setting of the church played a significant role in the early practice of the Lord's Supper:

The Lord's Supper in the New Testament is a meal. The appropriate setting for the sacrament is a table. . . . The linking of the Supper with a meal may offer a form of fellowship that could contribute to the edification of the church today.²

The house church was conducive to the kind of intimate table fellowship demanded by the Supper. Because this setting is absent in most evangelical churches today, the intended theology of community at the Supper is also conspicuously absent. What is needed is not more adaptation of the Supper to accommodate our contemporary settings; what is needed is more of a willingness to conform our structures to accommodate the Lord's Supper. Until we do, much of the theology of the Supper will remain lost to us—and with it, its benefits for community.

²Ibid.

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