2. Communion: Ancient Church Growth Strategy for Unity & Community

Introduction: The Lord’s Supper—celebrated the New Testament way—is a growth strategy of the ancient church designed by Jesus for supernatural unity, loving community and second-coming purity. Churches today often don’t get the same results that Jesus intended because the Lord’s supper has become the lost supper. The strategy Jesus left the church with was to celebrate communion as an actual meal, every week, with a future focus.  

— Section One —
A Fellowship Feast with a Future Focus

Context: Just before the Last Supper, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the Passover feast (Luke 22:7-13). How much food was typically eaten in the Passover feast? See Exodus 12:1-11, 14, Deuteronomy 16:1-8. The Passover feast was a true feast, an actual meal, and a joyful time.

— Luke 22:14-16 —

****Jesus had eaten Passover meals annually his whole life. According to Luke 22:14-16, why did Jesus keenly desire to eat this particular Passover with His apostles? It was to be His last supper with them, 22:16.

1. When we observe the Lord’s Supper, we rightly remember something that happened in the past (Jesus’ death on the cross). What can you find in Luke 22:16 that is forward looking?

2. In Luke 22:16, what does the English word “until” mean? Here it carries the idea of “before” or “up to the time that.” It is a forward-looking word (heos hotou) and establishes a time frame (a future reference). “Until” has to do with when something will happen.

Jesus said he would not eat the Passover again “until” (22:16) what happens? He will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom.

Prophetic Type: What does the use of the word “fulfilled” (22:16) imply about this Passover/Last Supper? The word “fulfilled” suggests that the Lord’s Supper functions as a prophecy, or type, of something that is yet to come.

3. Jesus said that the Passover/Last Supper would be “fulfilled” in the kingdom of God (Lk 22:16). When and how might this fulfillment take place? See Revelation 19:7-9.

NAS Revelation 19:7-9 Let us rejoice and be glad . . . for the marriage of the Lamb has come . . . Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

1 In seminary such things as the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the Lutheran idea of consubstantiation, the Baptist view of the Supper as a memorial, and the Reformed position of Jesus’ spiritual presence are studied. These are very important subjects, but by focusing so much on such historical debates, an important aspect of the Lord’s Supper is often neglected: how the early Christians celebrated the Lord’s Supper: as an actual Supper.
Isaiah described the coming kingdom feast in this way: “the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined . . . He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken” (Isa 25:6-8).

Why should the Lord’s Supper be a banquet? 

Reason #1—The first reason is because the best way to picture the future marriage banquet of the Lamb is with a banquet now.

Backward and Forward Looking: “The Passover celebrated two events, the deliverance from Egypt and the anticipated coming Messianic deliverance.” So too, the Lord’s Supper celebrates two events, our past deliverance from sin through Jesus’ death on the cross and the anticipated Second Coming.

Future Focus: Thus it is not unusual that Jesus would have also cast a forward look to the Lord’s Supper. Jesus, our sacrificial Passover lamb, promised to come back for His bride, the church, and to set up His Kingdom. The Passover (turned Lord’s Supper) is a foreshadowing of the wedding banquet of the Lamb (Re 19). Celebrated as an actual meal, the Lord’s Supper is like rehearsal dinner for the marriage banquet of the lamb.

The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000: “The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming” (italics mine).

Why should the Lord’s Supper be a banquet? 

Reason #2 relates to the Biblical imagery for heaven.


Matthew 8:11 . . . many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Luke 14:15 Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!

This Jewish idea of heaven being like eating in God’s presence may stem from the Sinai experience. Mount Sinai shook as thunder sounded, lightening flashed, a trumpet sounded and smoke clouds enveloped it. God warned that any living thing which touched the mountain would be killed (Ex 19:16-23). However, in contrast to this:

ESV Exodus 24:9-11 Moses . . . and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel . . . And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank.

Why should the Lord's Supper be a banquet? 

Reason #2—The Biblical picture of heaven is one of feasting in the kingdom of God. When Jesus returns, we'll experience heaven on earth.


****5. It is common knowledge that Jesus passed around the cup during the Last Supper. According to Luke 22:17-18, why did Jesus have them partake of this cup (what reason did He give)? The reason given is because Jesus would not partake of it again until the kingdom of God comes, 22:18. He said nothing here about it representing His blood (although it clearly does).

The Point: Yet again we see a forward looking aspect of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus associated partaking of the cup with the thought that Jesus Himself would partake of it again in the future.

•“until” (22:18): As before, the Greek for “until” is heos hotou and simply indicates when something will happen in the future.


****What, even in 22:19, is forward looking? The bread represents His body, given for us, and is backward looking. Arguably, the forward-looking aspect of 22:19 lies with the word “remembrance”.

In English, what is a “remembrance” (Lk 22:19)? In English, a remembrance is like a memorial. Example: “The flowers were given in remembrance of the late Mrs. Smith.” It brings to mind something from the past. It is only backward looking. However, the Greek word for “remembrance” is anamnēsis (364); an means “not”; amnēsis (“amnesia”) means “forget”. A “remembrance” is literally “not amnesia”. Significantly, while, anamnēsis can indeed mean “remembrance,” it fundamentally simply means “reminder”.

6. In English, what is the difference between a “remembrance” (Lk 22:19) and a “reminder”? A remembrance is only backward looking. A reminder can be backward looking, but it can also look forward.

Example: You might tie a string around your finger as a reminder to do something in the future (like to buy milk on the way home).

Fact: The Greek word anamnesis can mean either “remembrance” or “reminder.”

The Question: Is the reminder to remind of something in the past (Jesus’ death on cross), or is the reminder to remind of something in the future (Jesus’ return to eat it again with us)?

A Reminder for Jesus

7. The literal Greek in Luke 22:19 reads: “unto my reminder” (see an interlinear). Whose reminder is this? To whom could this reminder belong? Who owns it? Is this “reminder” designed to remind us about something? Or, could it be to remind Jesus about something? Explain.

Suppose you heard me say, “That’s my picture!” What could I mean? If I were pointing to Monet’s painting of water lilies, I would mean that the picture belongs to me. I own it. On the other hand, if I were pointing to a picture in which I was the subject, I would mean that it was about me, but not necessarily that I owned it. So too, the reminder could BELONG to Jesus, or it could be ABOUT Jesus.

The Issue: Does Jesus own the reminder or is Jesus in the reminder?

Word Study: The standard Greek word for “my” is mou; mou is grammatically ambiguous; the reminder could be about Jesus or it could belong to Jesus. However, the word mou is not used here. Instead, the more emphatic Greek word emos is used here rather than the more common mou. The possessive pronoun (emos) was used when emphasis was desired (as any basic Greek grammar will confirm, such as Learn to Read New Testament Greek by David Alan Black, page 158). emos more specifically denotes possession.

That Jesus said emos, not mou strongly suggests that the reminder actually belongs to Jesus. He owns it. The word “emos” in the Greek is possessive, suggesting that the reminder is not just about Jesus, but that it belongs to Jesus. If mou had been used, there would be more ambiguity of meaning. The phrase might then have been translated, “do this to that you (the church) might remember me.” The word emos, however, denotes possession (in this case, Christ’s memory, not the church’s, is in view). Thus, the bread of the Lord’s Supper is specifically designed to be a reminder for Jesus.

J. Jeremias (Professor of Theology, University of Leipzig) understood Jesus to use anamnésis in the sense of a reminder for God: “The Lord’s Supper would thus be an enacted prayer”.

--- God Remembers Covenant Promises ---

It is good biblical theology to state that God remembers covenant promises.


****In Genesis 9:12-16, who gets reminded when the rainbow is seen in the clouds?

---

ESV Genesis 9:12-16 And God said, ". . . I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant . . . When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant . . ."

According to the text, it is Jehovah God who gets reminded. Notice that this reminder concerns the future. A reminder can remind about a past promise to do something in the future.

***In Exodus 2:23-25, who got reminded of promises of the Abrahamic covenant?

ESV Exodus 2:22-24 During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help . . . God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham . . .

It was God who remembered.

***In Ezekiel 16:59-60, who it is who remembered the Sinai covenant with Israel?

ESV Ezekiel 16:59-60 "For thus says the Lord GOD: ". . . I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth . . ."

The Lord Himself did the remembering. Is that not amazing?!

The Point: God remembers covenant promises. Does God forget things? Of course God does not forget; these are anthropomorphic statements. Yet biblically, is good theology to say God remembers His covenant promises. This is very important as we consider the Lord’s Supper. Jesus said, “Do this unto my remembrance”. Arguably, the remembrance aspect of the Lord’s Supper has to do with reminding Jesus of his new covenant promise to return and eat it again with us.

Truth: God remembers covenant promises. Just like with the rainbow, Jesus sees us eating the Lord’s Supper and He remembers His promise to come back and eat it again with us. Jesus remembers covenant promises. The reminder is forward looking.

Most prayers we say—the Lord’s Supper is a prayer that we do.

J. Jeremias (Professor of Theology, University of Leipzig) understood Jesus to use anamnésis in the sense of a reminder for God: “The Lord’s Supper would thus be an enacted prayer.”

9. What would the bread (22:19) remind Jesus to do? The bread serves as an object-lesson prophecy/prayer designed to remind Jesus to fulfill His promise to return so as to eat and drink “again” (22:16,18) of the Passover (i.e., “do this so as to remind me”). The bread thus serves to remind Jesus that He has not yet finished (“eat it again,” 22:16) what He started (“body given,” 22:19). He still needs to return with His kingdom!

---

According to 1 Corinthians 11:26, what are we doing when we eat the bread and drink the cup?

10. Exactly to whom do we “proclaim” (11:26) the Lord’s death? See Luke 22:16. Based on the Greek behind “in remembrance of me,” it may be to Jesus Himself that we are proclaiming His death. Once again we see that the Lord’s Supper is a reminder to Jesus that His own death on the cross initiated the new covenant (making certain our forgiveness) and reminds Him to fulfill (Lk 22:16) His promise to return (“until he comes,” 1Co 11:26).

11. Additional Prophetic Aspect of the Lord’s Supper: Based on 1 Corinthians 11:26, why are we to proclaim the Lord’s death (for what purpose)? The wording of the text suggests we are to do it so that the Lord will come (purpose).


In English, I might say that I used an umbrella “until” it stopped raining (denoting a mere time frame); the umbrella had nothing to do with causing the rain to stop. We’ve already seen this usage of the word “until”. It was when Jesus, in Luke 22:16, said, “I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” This means that Jesus will not eat the Lord’s Supper again before the kingdom of God comes. It is a time frame. The Greek for “until” in such usages is heos hotou. It simply indicates how long a condition will last.

However, the Greek for “until” in 1 Corinthians 11:26 is achri hou. When used along with an aorist subjunctive verb, it grammatically can denote a goal (it is a different word than is used in Luke 22:16). Much more than a mere time frame, the Greek behind “until” in 11:26 refers to an objective (“until the goal is reached”),6 The purpose of the proclamation of the Lord’s death through the bread and the cup is in order to persuade Jesus to come back!

Prophecy Passages: achri hou, used in conjunction with the aorist subjunctive and with reference to a goal or objective, is also used in several other eschatological passages:

NAS Luke 21:24 . . . Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

NAS Romans 11:25 . . . a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.

NAS 1 Corinthians 15:25 . . . He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet.

J. Jeremias (Professor of Theology, University of Leipzig) understood Jesus to use anamnêsis in the sense of a reminder for God: “The Lord’s Supper would thus be an enacted prayer”.7

---

The Lord’s Prayer: The eating that is associated with the coming of Christ’s kingdom may also be reflected in the model prayer suggested by Jesus. In reference to the kingdom, Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done” (KJV, Luke 11:2). The very next request is “Give us each day our daily bread” (NIV, 11:3). The Greek underlying Luke 11:3 is difficult to translate. Literally, it reads something akin to, “the bread of us belonging to the coming day give us today.” Thus the NASV marginal notes read, “bread for the coming day.” Linking together both 11:2 and 11:3, Jesus may have been teaching us to ask that the bread of the coming Messianic banquet be given to us today. That is, Let your kingdom come — Let the feast begin today! Athanasius explained it as “the bread of the world to come.”

The didaché, an early Christian document, associated the Lord’s Supper with the second coming, praying maranatha (“Come, Lord”) when observing communion.

Second-Coming Excitement

Application: Another benefit of understanding the prophetic aspects of the Lord’s Supper is that it generates second-coming excitement and purity:

ESV 1 John 3:2 . . . we know that when he appears we will be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.

ESV Titus 2:11-13 . . . the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ . . .


****In Luke 22:20, what did Jesus say another time He passed the cup?9 See Matthew 26:28. It represents the “new covenant” in His blood. Arguably, the sign of the New Covenant is the Lord’s Supper. The purpose of a covenant sign is to remind both parties of their covenant obligation. Thus, Jesus said the Lord’s Supper is “reminder”. It is a sacred, covenant meal.

Gospel: The death of Jesus on the cross was no accident. It was the whole purpose for which he came to earth. Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin. Jesus became sin for us, our substitute, giving up His life so that we could have eternal life. Thus Matthew recorded, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28).

13. In relation to the bread, when did Jesus pass this other cup (Lk 22:20)? See Matthew 26:26. Jesus took up this other cup “after they had eaten” (the bread), Luke 22:20. Matthew tells us that Jesus passed the bread during the course of the meal:

NIV Matthew 26:26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread . . .

9 Jewish tradition suggests that Jesus may have passed one cup around four different times. Only two of the four are referenced in Scripture.
**Timing:** Timing is everything. The bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper were given in the context of a full meal, not separated from it.

**Review:** What does the word “supper” (1Co 11:26) mean? “Supper” (as in Lord’s Supper) is from *deipnon*, which means “dinner, the main meal toward evening, banquet.” It does not mean snack, appetizer, nor *hors d’oeuvres*!

NIV Luke 14:16 A certain man was preparing a great banquet (*deipnon*) and invited many guests . . .

NIV Revelation 19:9 Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper (*deipnon*) of the Lamb!

**Why should the Lord’s Supper be a banquet?** Reason #3—The Last “Supper” grew out of the Passover feast. The Twelve rightly understood that the Lord’s Supper would also be an actual feast.


****In Luke 22:28-30, what food-related activity did Jesus picture the apostles doing in His future kingdom?**** He said they would be eating and drinking at His table, 22:30.

Review: In Jewish thought what, symbolically, did it mean to eat and drink at the Messiah’s table in His kingdom (22:29-30)? Compare Exodus 19:16-23, 24:9-11, Matthew 8:11, Luke 14:15, Revelation 3:20, 19:7-9. It meant you were accepted into the kingdom to enjoy the full fellowship of the host.

14. What is the significance of Jesus picturing the disciples eating and drinking at His table in the kingdom (Lk 22:29-30)? This imagery was consistent with the Jewish idea of heaven: to eat at God’s table. It is very important to appreciate why the Lord’s Supper was originally an actual meal: it is a picture of heaven.

The Main Point: The last supper has numerous forward looking aspects to it (Lk 22:16, 18-19). As a full meal it evidently prefigures the future feast of the coming Messianic kingdom (22:16, 18, 19, 30), that is, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Application: What better way to typify the coming Messianic banquet than with a banquet?

So Say The Scholars . . .

Donald Guthrie: [Paul] “sets the Lord’s supper in the context of the fellowship meal.”

Gordon Fee: “from the beginning the Last Supper was for Christians not an annual Christian Passover, but a regularly repeated meal in ‘honor of the Lord,’ hence the Lord’s Supper.”

---

10 The word supper is not in the ESV or the NAS in Luke 22:20. It is found in the KJV and the NIV. This is because the verb form (*deipneo*) was used by Luke, which means “eat, dine” (BAGD, p. 173).

Leon Morris: “Holy Communion was not simply a token meal as with us, but an actual meal. Moreover it seems clear that it was a meal to which each of the participants brought food.”

J.G. Simpson: “The name Lord’s Supper, though legitimately derived from 1 Cor 11v20, is not there applied to the sacrament itself, but to the Love Feast or Agape, a meal commemorating the Last Supper, and not yet separated from the Eucharist when St. Paul wrote.”

(Simpson here acknowledges that the New Testament teaches the Lord’s Supper as a meal, but that it was later replaced by bread and wine services with the name 'the Lord's Supper' then being used not of the meal, but of the bread and wine service that replaced it when the meal was phased out by the early church fathers.)

I. Howard Marshall: “This simple rite was observed by His disciples, at first as part of a communal meal, Sunday by Sunday.”

John Gooch: “In the first century, the Lord’s Supper included not only the bread and the cup but an entire meal.”

John Drane: “The early church observed the Lord’s Supper as an exclusive community meal.”

15. What is the scholarly consensus as to how the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper? Why does this consensus matter? The scholarly consensus matters because it leaves little doubt as to how the early church celebrated the holy meal: as an actual feast.

Application: Why are we not celebrating the Lord’s Supper in the same way the New Testament church did? Rhetorical.

Why should the Lord’s Supper be a banquet? Reason #4—Because that is how the New Testament church celebrated it.

ESV Nehemiah 8:10 Eat the fat and drink sweet wine ... for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.

— Acts 2:42-47 —

16. If Acts 2:42-47 refers to the Lord’s Supper, how would you describe the mood of these meals? They were associated with fellowship (2:42) and gladness (2:46). It is no accident that communion and community are from the same root word.

---

17 The New Lion Encyclopedia, 173.
17. Why are the words “the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42) commonly associated with the Lord’s Supper? *See Luke 22:19.* It is because all the synoptic Gospels recorded that Jesus “broke” the bread of the Lord’s Supper; thus the connection.  

**Application:** When the early church celebrated the Lord’s Supper, it was a time of fellowship and gladness. It did not seem to carry a funeral atmosphere as in modern observances of the Lord’s Supper.

ESV Acts 2:42 . . . they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Study the punctuation of Acts 2:42. Notice the “and” between “teaching” and “fellowship,” and between “bread” and “prayer,” but not between “fellowship” and “bread.” In the oldest Greek texts, the words “fellowship” and “breaking of bread” are linked together as simultaneous activities (the “and” is missing). They had fellowship with one another as they broke bread together. It was “fellowship in the breaking of bread.” As has been stated above, in Jewish thought to eat with someone was the perfect picture of fellowship (see also Revelation 3:20).

**Summary of Section One:** Should the Lord’s Supper be understood as a wake or a wedding? As a memorial or a marriage? The biblical evidence suggests that the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated as a full feast that is focused on the future, and that the bread and wine uniquely serve as a sign of the New Covenant to remind Jesus of His promise to return and eat it again with us.

Why should the Lord’s Supper be a banquet? *Reason #5—It serves as a wonderful time of edification through fellowship.*

— SECTION TWO —

The Purpose of a Church Meeting
Why One Cup & One Loaf?
Another Prophetic Aspect of the Lord’s Supper

18. Acts 20:7 is one of the few places in Scripture where the purpose of a church meeting is stated. Why did the church at Troas come together? They met “to break bread.” The phrase “to break bread” is, in Greek, a telic infinitive that denotes a purpose or objective. The reason for the meeting evidently was in order to eat the Lord’s Supper.

**Application:** Their meeting was a meeting! Similarly we should meet to eat.

The **Primary Purpose of a Church Meeting: The Lord’s Supper.** This passage suggests that the main reason the church at Troas met each Lord’s Day was to eat the Lord’s Supper. If this is reflects the general practice of the early church, it should also be the main reason for our church meetings today.

---

The **Secondary Purpose of a Church Meeting: Teaching.** Paul took advantage of the already existing practice of the church to gather in the first day and he used it as an opportunity to speak to the gathered saints.

**First Day of the Week:** The early church at times met daily, but its most regular practice was to meet on the first day of the week, as indicated in Acts 20:7.

Early church father Justinian, about A.D. 160, stated that “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place . . . when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought . . . and everyone participates in that over which thanks have been given.”

— 1 Corinthians 10:17 —

**** In 1 Corinthians 10:17, what theological significance was given by Paul for using a single loaf of bread for the Lord’s Supper? It has to do with unity (10:17). At the very least the one loaf symbolizes our oneness in Christ. The common practice of using many pre-broken crumbs pictures disunity and division.

NIV 1 Corinthians 10:17 Because there is one loaf [cause], we, who are many, are one body [effect], for we all partake of the one loaf.

19. Look carefully at the prepositions in 1 Corinthians 10:17; what is cause and what is effect? Using one loaf at the Lord’s Supper actually creates unity within a body of believers! In this sense, it is more than a mere memorial or an object-lesson prayer. Some type of grace unto unity is actually conferred.

Consider the opinions of well-known Bible scholars concerning this verse:

Geoffrey Wainwright wrote that the bread “both signifies and causes churchly unity” (emphasis his).

Gerd Theissen (University of Heidelberg): “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.”

Robertson and Plummer: “The single loaf is a symbol and an instrument of unity.”

Gordon Fee wrote of the “solidarity of the fellowship of believers created by their all sharing ‘the one loaf.’”

---

This view is also shared by C.K. Barrett, F.W. Grosheide, Leon Morris, and the majority of scholars.  

**Application:** In our Lord’s Supper celebrations, it is important that we all see and partake of the one cup and one loaf. At the very least this pictures the unity that God’s people have in Christ. Moreover, it is used by God to actually create unity in a body of believers. 

If one cup and loaf symbolizes Christian unity, what does a tray of individual wafers and a tray full of shot-glasses represent? It pictures division and isolated individualism.

— 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 —

****According to 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, why were the meetings of the Corinthian church doing more harm than good? The rich did not want to eat with the poor. Unfettered by employment constraints, the rich arrived for the Supper in advance of the poor, specifically so as not to have to eat with the poor. It was a similar problem as that dealt with in James 2:1-7 (the church paid special attention to the rich man and neglected the poor man). The sin of division (11:18) led to the sin of some going home hungry (11:21a) and others getting drunk (11:21b).

20. An Actual Meal: What in 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 indicates that the Corinthians ate the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal? That some went away hungry demonstrates that they came to the meeting expecting to be filled. That some became drunk shows that more than a thimble full of wine was used!

Observation: Paul wrote to the Corinthian church some twenty years after Jesus first turned His Last Supper into our Lord’s Supper. Just as the Last Supper was an actual meal so also the Corinthians celebrated the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal.

Thought-provoking Observation: It was a sin to come to the Lord’s Supper with divisions in their hearts. It was a sin to get drunk (especially at the Lord’s Supper), and it was a sin that some went home hungry from the Lord’s Supper. If people go home hungry from the Lord’s Table at your church, then your church clearly is not observing it the way the early church did.


It is obvious from 11:20 that the Corinthians came together for the purpose of eating the Lord’s Supper. What had they done wrong that made it cease being the Lord’s Supper? 11:21-22. Their divisions had turned the “Lord’s Supper” (deipnon) into their “own supper” (deipnon, 11:21).

---


25 The Lord’s Supper is also a time of “participation” (10:16, koinonia, #2842) with both Christ (1Co 10:14-17) and His people (in Acts 2:42, “fellowship” is also from koinonia). The bread of presence in the Old Covenant was not eaten by the people. In contrast, the bread of presence in the New Covenant is to be eaten!
ESV 1 Corinthians 11:20-21 When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

SECTION THREE

Eating & Drinking in an Unworthy Manner (11:27-32)


22. From the greater context of 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 (the whole section), what “unworthy manner” (11:27) made some in Corinth guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord? How should this impact us today? Notice that it was not the people themselves who were said to be unworthy (though they were) but rather their “manner” that was unworthy. The unworthy manner consisted of eating the Lord’s Supper with unresolved divisions so extreme that the rich ate all the food before the poor arrived (causing them to go away hungry). Others were so insensitive to the sacred nature of the meal that they had become drunk from the wine. More modern parallels might be Chinese Christians refusing to eat with Japanese Christians, or white believers avoiding eating the Lord’s Supper with black Christians, or an upper class Christian in India not eating the sacred meal with a brother from a lower class.

The KJV has “unworthily” (1Co 11:27). This is misleading, confusing. The actual Greek is from anaxios, which means “in an unworthy manner”. Thus, the ESV has “unworthy manner”, the NASV has “unworthy manner” and the NIV has “unworth y manner”.

Remember: The root problem was division, and that division resulted in the unworthy manner.

23. How does eating the Lord’s Supper in a “unworthy manner” make one guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1Co 11:27)? Compare 1 Corinthians 10:14-17. Jesus gave His body and spilled His blood to buy us forgiveness and to make us one body of believers. The divisions and selfishness of the Corinthians ran directly contrary to everything Jesus died to accomplish. Such division is almost blasphemous.

24. According to 1 Corinthians 11:28-30, in what sense should a man examine himself prior to the Lord’s Supper? It is not to search his soul for unconfessed sin, but to be sure he realizes both what the Supper is all about, and that it is his brothers who constitute the “body of the Lord” on earth. The Lord’s Supper is not just another meal. It is a holy, sacred, covenant meal.

What penalty can result if we fail to examine ourselves? Failure to recognize this truth can lead to judgment, sickness and death.
25. What, in 1 Corinthians 11:33-34, was the inspired solution to the Corinthian abuse of the Lord’s Supper (11:17-22)? The solution was not to cease holding the Lord’s Supper as a true meal, but simply to wait for each other (see 11:21). Those so hungry that they could not wait for the others to arrive were instructed to “eat at home.”

C.K. Barrett: “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 . . . those who are so hungry that they cannot wait for their brothers should satisfy their hunger before they leave home, in order that decency and order may prevail in the assembly” (underlining mine).

26. Based on 1 Corinthians 11:33, why did the Corinthians come together each week? They came together as a church in order “to eat” (another telic infinitive).

Observation: This is the only reason ever given in the New Testament as to why the early church came together each Lord’s Day. See also Acts 20:7a, 1 Corinthians 11:20. Doubtless they did other things when met besides eat, but the driving purpose behind their gatherings was to celebrate the holy meal.

— Synthesis —

27. What evidence is there as to the frequency with which the early church ate the Lord’s Supper? Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:18-20, 33.

28. What was the original form of the Lord’s Supper (symbolic token or actual meal)? One loaf or pre-broken cracker remnants? Feast or famine? Explain.

Why are each of these forms important?

29. In the modern church’s Lord’s Suppers, the deacons who carry the bread and wine of the Supper are more like pallbearers! Was the overall focus of the Lord’s Supper originally intended to be past looking (funeral mode) or forward looking (wedding atmosphere)? Fellowship or funeral? Why?

30. What were the original functions of the Lord’s Supper? The functions were 1) to serve as a reminder to Jesus of His promise to return, 2) for the fellowship of the saints, and 3) in order to create unity among a body of believers.

Poor Results: Image someone going to a weight trainer to put on muscle. The trainer prescribes a certain regimen five times a week. A few months later, however, there was no difference. Upon inquiry, the trainer learned that rather than doing the sets five times per week, the man only did them once a month. To get the results Jesus intended, a church needs to not only celebrate the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal, but every week!

— Summary —

The elements of communion look back to Jesus’ death on the cross to pay for sin. The *agapé* adds a forward look. When celebrated as an actual feast in a joyful wedding atmosphere, the Lord’s Supper typifies the wedding supper of the Lamb. It is a reminder of Jesus’ promise to return and eat it with us. A major benefit of celebrating the Lord’s Supper as a holy banquet is the fellowship and encouragement experienced by each member of Christ’s body. This relaxed, unhurried fellowship meal with God’s family is a significant means of edifying the Church, building community, cementing ties of love, and supernaturally creating unity.

1. The Lord’s Supper is the **primary purpose** for which the church gathers each Lord’s Day. Indeed, it is the **only** reason ever given for a church meeting.
2. The Lord’s Supper should be **eaten as a full meal** to typify the wedding supper of the Lamb. We deny that taking the Lord’s Supper as a snack is a legitimate option.
3. Typifying the wedding supper, it is thus **forward-looking** and is to be eaten with a **wedding atmosphere**, not a funeral atmosphere. It is the original “happy meal”!
4. A major benefit of eating the Supper weekly as a meal is the **fellowship and edification** of the church. It is the Christian equivalent of the neighborhood pub.
5. Within the context of the full meal, there should be **one cup and one loaf** from which all partake so as to **create unity** within the church. These are also **symbolic of Jesus’ body and blood**, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.
6. The wine and loaf serve to **remind Jesus** of His promise to return.

**Why We Should Follow the Early Church’s Example**

Even though the evidence presented here is informative, and even beyond a reasonable doubt, no compulsion to follow this New Testament example is felt. Since Jesus never commanded that we do it this way, they feel it is optional.

All believers want to obey the teachings of the Bible. Parallel to the teachings found in the Bible, there are also traditions found in the Bible. A tradition is an inherited way of doing things. Jesus and the apostles gave us a tradition for how we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Most people see such traditions as purely optional. However, the following command should be taken seriously:

**ESV 2 Thessalonians 2:15** . . . stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.

The Thessalonians were specifically commanded to follow, to hold to, the “traditions” of the apostles, whether received by mouth or by letter (whether oral or written).

Today we do not have any apostolic information received by mouth, but we do have their letters. We are to hold to the traditions found in those letters. This would include both their theology and their practice.

Notice also that the word “traditions” is in the plural form. Paul had in mind all of the traditions he passed on to the church.
If the Bible directly commands something, then we obviously ought to follow that command. *Significantly, the Bible commands adherence to the traditions of the apostles.*

The real question thus is not, “Do we *have* to do things the way they were done in the New Testament?” The question is: “Why would we want to do things any other way?!” The burden of explanation and concerned questions ought to fall upon those who deviate from New Testament patterns, not upon those who seek to keep them.

**Humorous Example:** During the Battle of Chickamauga (Georgia, September 19-20, 1863), a chaplain rode out to encourage the men to fight harder. Private Sam Watkins of the First Tennessee Regiment records that, “He was eloquent and patriotic. He stated that if he only had a gun he too would go along as a private soldier. You could hear his voice echo and re-echo over the hills. He had worked up his patriotism to a pitch of genuine bravery and daring that I had never seen exhibited, when fliff, fluff, fluff, fluff, FLUFF FLUFF—a whir, a BOOM! a shell screams through the air . . . the reverend . . . says, ‘Remember, boys, that he who is killed will sup tonight in Paradise.’ Some soldier hallowed at the top of his voice, ‘Well, parson, you come along and take supper with us.’ Boom! whir! a bomb burst, and the parson at that moment put spurs to his horse and was seen to limber to the rear, and almost every soldier yelled out, ‘The parson isn’t hungry, and never eats supper.’”

Don’t be like this parson with respect to the Lord’s Supper! It is to be celebrated weekly.

**Extra Thoughts**

1. **How can the Lord’s Supper be celebrated like a wedding banquet when the threat of death is made (1Co 11:27-30) and when 1 Corinthians 10:20-21 speaks of eating with demons (even more frightening!)?**

2. **How can the cup and loaf be integrated into the meal so that they are not seen as separate from the rest of the feast?** Some have found that taking the cup and loaf prior to the meal separates it from the meal too much as a separate act. It is as if the Lord’s Supper is the cup and loaf, and everything else is just supper. To overcome this false dichotomy, try placing the cup and loaf on the table with the rest of the food of the Lord’s Supper. The cup and loaf can be pointed out in advance of the meeting and mentioned in the prayer prior to the meal, but then placed on the buffet table with everything else. This way, folks can partake of it as they pass through the serving line. This is a freedom issue; do what works best for your church.

3. **What bearing should the practice of the early church have on how the contemporary church celebrates the Lord’s Supper?**

4. **What blessings is a church missing by not celebrating the Lord’s Supper as an actual holy meal?**
Celebrating the Lord’s Supper as an actual meal is never commanded, nor is observing it weekly. Why should we do something not commanded even if it is a New Testament pattern? Sometimes it is charged that it would be an extra biblical standard of conduct to teach that churches should celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly and as an actual meal. It is opined that a command has been issued beyond what the Master intended. The final answer to this question is to be found in how the various biblical texts on apostolic “traditions” are dealt with (see this workbook’s lesson on Apostolic Traditions).

When in history did the church stop celebrating the Lord’s Supper as a holy meal? It appears that from the mid-third century (A.D. 250) onward the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper were separated from the meal. However, even though the two were separated, the church continued to practice both until sometime after Constantine (who died in A.D. 337). Perhaps the love feast would have continued on down to the present had the original apostolic tradition (keeping the two together) not been broken.

— Practical Issues —

a. Exactly what type of beverage was in the cup (Lk 22:18)? Jesus called it the fruit of the vine.

What in 1 Corinthians 11 indicated whether the “fruit of the vine” (Lk 22:18) was wine or grape juice? See 1 Corinthians 11:21.


What do you think Jesus will be drinking when he finally drinks “again” of the cup at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb?

How would Romans 14:21 apply to using wine in the Lord’s Supper?

Joke: What is the difference between Baptists and Presbyterians? Two Presbyterians would speak if they happen to see each other in a liquor store!

b. Should all drink out of the same cup? The Anglicans have done this for centuries without obvious harm to their health! However, another option is to pour from the same container, or to dip one’s bread into a common cup.

c. Should the bread be unleavened? The Jews ate unleavened bread in the Passover meal to symbolize the quickness with which God brought them out of Egypt. Certainly Jesus used unleavened bread in the original Last Supper. However, nothing is said in the New Testament about Gentile churches using unleavened bread in the Lord’s Supper. Though sometimes in the New Testament yeast is associated with evil (1Co 5:6-8), it is also used to represent God’s kingdom (Mt 13:33). It is a matter of freedom.

d. Should unbelieving children or adults be allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper? Many churches practice closed communion and doubtless can make a compelling argument for it. These same churches usually also observe it as a ritual, not a full meal. Celebrating
the Lord’s Supper as it was celebrated in the New Testament, as a full meal, arguably changes one’s perspective on the presence of unbelievers. Certainly, the Lord’s Supper, as a sacred, covenant meal, has significance only to believers. Yet to nonbelievers, it is merely another meal. It is clear from 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 that unbelievers will occasionally attend church meetings. Unbelieving adults and our own children too young to believe get hungry just like believers do, so invite them to eat too. Love them to the Lord! The danger in taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner applies only to believers (1Co 11:27-32).

If an unbelieving child desires to drink the grape juice just because he likes grape juice—no problem. However, if the parents purposely give it to an unbelieving child as a religious act, then that would be a violation of what the Lord’s Supper is all about. It would be closely akin to the error of infant baptism.

e. It is necessary for ordained clergy to officiate at the Lord’s Supper? This notion is foreign to the New Testament and perhaps is a holdover from Catholicism. All believers are priests under the New Covenant.

f. Should the meal be planned out? Should it be pot luck? Many churches have found excessive planning to be wearisome. In over twenty years of eating the Lord’s Supper as a full meal, one church has been following the “pot luck” (or pot providence) method. It has served them very well. Only once did everyone bring a dessert! Ask folks to bring plenty of something to share with everyone else. Remind them to see this as a giving expense, a ministry, an offering to the Lord.

To help with cleanup, consider using paper plates and plastic cups and forks.

-----------------------------

Structural Summary:
1. There are more forward looking aspects to the Supper than is commonly recognized. Examples: Luke 22:15-16 & 17-18 (“until” and “fulfillment”) & 1 Corinthians 11:26 (“until he comes”).
2. Eating the Supper as a full meal is important because it pictures the Hebrew idea of heaven and looks forward to the wedding banquet of the Lamb, Luke 14:15, 22:30 Revelation 3:20 19:7-9.
3. Eating a sacred meal was already associated with a biblical covenant, Exodus 24:9-11.
5. Anamnesis can clearly mean either remembrance (past) or reminder (future).
6. The “my” of Luke 22:19 denotes possession (emos) and suggests that the reminder belongs to Jesus.
7. Paul’s solution for Corinthian abuses was that they wait for each other (1Co 11:21), not that they abolish the meal. The “eat at home” remedy was second best, for those who felt they could not wait for the others (the best option).
8. The word “until” in 1 Corinthians 11:26 is from two Greek words that (when used with an aorist subjunctive verb) can mean “goal” or “objective”.
9. The lack of imperatives about the Lord’s Supper weekly as a full meal is dealt with in our chapter on apostolic tradition, which we are commanded to hold to, 2 Thessalonians 2:15. Virtually no ecclesiology is commanded in the New Testament, but the pattern is clear for many of the things they practiced. Scholarly sources generally agree that the church ate the Supper weekly, as a full meal. I see this as part of the “tradition” the apostles laid down and to ignore it is to refuse a blessing!

10. Arguably, the word deipnon (“supper”) never refers to anything less than a full meal, and is so used throughout the Scriptures.

-- Wording for Announcements to Create Interest:

The Lord’s Supper is a growth strategy of the ancient church for supernatural unity, strong community, and seconding-coming purity?

Did you know . . .

• The early church ate the Lord’s Supper as a fellowship feast that looked both back to Jesus’ death but also forward to the wedding supper of the Lamb?
• The Ancient Church’s way of observing the Lord’s Supper resulted in strong community?
• God confers grace unto unity through the one cup and one loaf?
• The Lord’s Supper is a second-coming prayer we enact?
• The main reason the New Testament church met every week was to eat?
• Communion is to be more of a celebration than a funeral?

Further Study: NTRF.org has a video, an mp3 and PPTs on the Lord’s Supper as rehearsal dinner for the wedding banquet of the lamb.

Next Lesson: E-mail the next set of discussion questions out to the class (or print them up and hand them out at the end of this lesson). Ask them to consider the issues, answer the questions and be prepared to discuss them at the next meeting.

Teacher Preparation: To help you prepare to teach this, go to sermonaudio.com/ntrf and our series on Early Church Practice to find this lesson.

**** = Ask this question before having someone read the text aloud.

• You can view NTRF’s video on this topic on NTRF’s YouTube channel.

• You can hear an mp3 on this topic at SermonAudio.com/NTRF.

• You can read about this topic at NTRF.org

Stephen E. Atkerson
NTRF.org
Revised 09/24/2020