

The Lord's Supper: Remember Everything – 1 Cor 11:23-34

1 Cor 11:23-26 (p. 958); If you've just joined us, we started a mini-series last week on

The Lord's Supper – something we celebrate and observe so often . . .

It's important we know what it is, what it means, and why we do it

So follow along with me as I read v23-26 (**Part 1**)

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 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." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

It's all about remembering; And last week I encouraged you to . . .

Remember the setting (v23b)

• Because it connects The Lord's Supper with the Lord's death

Otherwise, you're left with an empty ritual; Or at the very least, a ritual whose meaning isn't clear; Not only that, but the setting . . .

• (Because it) reminds you of the Lord's suffering

Christ suffered *immensely* on our behalf, and we honor him for enduring it to the extent that we remember it; And then . . .

Remember the background (Ex 12:21-27; Lk 22:1-20)

• Because The Lord's Supper is based on the most significant celebration in the Old Testament – the Passover meal

Referring to the meal that was intended to celebrate and remember God's liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, around 1500BC

That point in time when they were saved by the blood of the lamb, and their faith in it, as demonstrated by their obedience to put its blood on their doorposts

And they were to eat that meal of remembrance every year thereafter, preceded by ridding their homes of leaven, representing sin and the pagan culture around them . . .

And then eating only un-leavened bread the week *afterwards*

Something I mis-spoke about last week, saying that the 7 day Feast of Unleavened

Bread came *before* the Passover meal; That's incorrect

They were to consecrate their homes first, then eat the Passover meal, then continue to eat unleavened bread for the week that followed (Ex 12)

I apologize for any confusion I might have caused in that respect

In any case, the Passover *meal* became the most significant means to celebrate and remember The Passover, right up until the time of Christ

Providing the basis for what we do now, b/c it's the very meal that Jesus and the 12 were eating in the upper room . . .

When he reinterpreted it, infused it with new meaning, and instituted what we now call The Lord's Supper

That's the second reason to remember the background . . .

• Because the Passover meal for the Jews, was the last supper for Christ, and became the Lord's Supper for us

And we look forward to eating it *with* him, at the marriage supper of the Lamb in heaven

And then third, remember the background . . .

• Because Christ is our Passover Lamb

No longer do we focus on the lamb small "l", but the Lamb, capital "L"

Our Passover Lamb, who shed his blood, applying it to the "doorposts of our heart" through faith and repentance . . .

That we might be *saved* from death and the bondage of sin, and made alive in him*****

That was Part 1 – when it comes to The Lord's Supper, remember the setting and remember the background; Next, is the meaning

Remember the meaning (v24b, 25; Jn 6:48-63)

There are two phrases in verses 24 and 25 here in 1 Cor, that form the core of what Jesus was saying about The Lord's Supper . . .

This is my body which is for you (24); And *this cup is the new covenant in my blood* (25)

The meaning of which is a bit nebulous at first glance

Which is why those two phrases have divided the church as much as any other . . .

And been misconstrued and misunderstood as much as any other, in all the Bible

Often times endowed with *more* meaning than what's intended, and sometimes less

So first of all, when it comes to the meaning, remember . . .

• That the bread symbolizes Jesus' death for our life

His death, so that we might live; His death, so that we wouldn't die – spiritually speaking

That's the idea of his first statement in v24 – *This is my body which is for you.*

Or as Matthew says it (**Mt 26:26**) – *Take, eat; this is my body.*

Or Mark (**Mk 14:22**) – *Take; this is my body.*

Or Luke (**Lk 22:19**) – *This is my body, which is given for you.*

All essentially saying the same thing – that this piece of bread symbolizes the death of my body, on your behalf; My death for your life, Jesus said *****

One of the reasons for which, is the setting that we talked about last time

He said these words the night before he died on the cross, sealing the connection between them and his death, for all time

And then there's the background of the Passover; And then Paul's reference to him as *our* Passover Lamb who was sacrificed on our behalf

3 reasons that the bread symbolizes Jesus' death for our life

And if that were all, that would be enough

But there's one more reason, and that's found in **Jn 6:48-51**; Where Jesus says . . .

I am the bread of life . . . the living bread that comes down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.

Referring to his death – the death of his body, his flesh

That's what he *gave*, for us, that we might have life *****

Remember that; Remember that the bread symbolizes the death of Jesus for our life

And second, remember . . .

• That the cup symbolizes the salvation that Jesus' death offers and secures

This cup [he said in v25] *is the new covenant in my blood*

Or in Matthew's gospel (**Mt 26:28**) – *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*

Or Mark (**Mk 14:24**) – *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.*
Or Luke (**Lk 22:20**) – *This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.* The Lord's Supper received widespread coverage; It's no peripheral issue

And once again, we find 4 ways, with slightly different nuances or emphases, to essentially say the same thing
That this cup and what it contains, is symbolic of God's new promise of salvation, his new assurance of forgiveness and eternal life . . .
Offered and guaranteed by virtue of the shed blood of Jesus on our behalf *****

So when we eat and drink The Lord's Supper, we're remembering the death of Jesus on our behalf, and the salvation he offers and guarantees b/c of it
That's the symbolism of the bread and the cup

- But some religions teach otherwise – that they're not symbolic; That Christ's body and blood are actually *present* in the bread and cup
For instance, Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy teach that the bread actually turns *into* the body of Jesus, while retaining the outward, visible characteristics of bread
And the wine actually turns into the *blood* of Jesus, while retaining the outward characteristics of wine, like taste and appearance
They call it *transubstantiation* – a big word that simply means physical change

Meanwhile others, like Lutherans, say no, the elements don't turn *into* Jesus, but his flesh and his blood are right there alongside them
With the bread and wine; Or *in* the loaf and the cup
It's what they call *consubstantiation* – referring to a physical co-existence

And then, as if that weren't enough, there's the *instrumental* perspective, espoused by many Presbyterians, and some Reformed traditions . . .
Who say that the presence of Jesus in the bread and cup is *real*, but not physical
Rather, it's a *spiritual* presence
And that by eating and drinking his spiritual presence, literally – we are somehow united with him in heaven

- All of which are called *sacramental* views of The Lord's Supper
Where the participants receive God's grace and blessing, through the actual *acts* of eating and drinking
That's a sacrament in those circles – a physical act that God uses to convey his grace
And they're *required* in order to receive some aspect of God's grace or God's salvation

Which is a problem, b/c it makes the act or the ritual, a *work* – something *you* do, to earn, gain, or keep God's favor; Something *external* that you do, to get saved or stay saved
None of which is biblical

Eph 2:8-10 says we are saved *for* good works, but not *by* good works
And **Titus 3:5** says that – [God] *saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness* [not b/c of acts or rituals, even if they're done with the best of intentions], *but according to his own mercy*
And **Rom 3:28** says that – *One is justified by faith apart from works of the law*
So the whole idea of sacraments is unbiblical; Including The Lord's Supper *****

- But I want you to see where that thinking comes from, in order to expose the error of it, and keep you from it
B/c wrong thinking in this respect, leads to a false sense of security – that you're right with God and the recipient of his grace, when you're really not
And it leads to an *idolatrous* view of God – that he's like a genie who gives you what you want and need, if you only rub his lamp the right way

So turn with me if you would, to John 6:53-63 (p.892)
In addition to 1 Cor, this is the other passage that leads some people to advocate a sacramental view of The Lord's Supper
It's where Jesus, in response to the arguments/questions about eating his flesh, says . . .

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [That sounds pretty sacramental, doesn't it?]
54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. 57 As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. 58 This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like the bread the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”
59 Jesus said these things in the synagogue, as he taught at Capernaum.*

6 times in 7 verses, Jesus says feed on me – eat my flesh and drink my blood
And if you were to stop there, it could certainly lead you to believe in something like transubstantiation or consubstantiation; But don't; B/c the explanation follows

60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, “This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?” [B/c they obviously took it literally, didn't they? As if he were advocating cannibalism and the worst sort of heathenry] 61 But Jesus, knowing in himself that his disciples were grumbling about this [which is the first clue that a literal interpretation is incorrect], said to them, “Do you take offense at this? 62 Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?

He first addresses their objection to his coming down from heaven, that we read earlier, asking them rhetorically, whether it would help if they saw him returning there
Which he knew he would at his ascension

And then he takes up the matter of eating his flesh and drinking his blood in v63, saying . . .
It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.
IOW eating and drinking literal flesh and blood is moot; It's no help at all when it comes to eternal life; It's the *Spirit* who gives life; The Holy Spirit
That's the second clue that he's not speaking literally in v53-58

The third, is his next statement in v63 – *The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*
Spirit, small s, in the sense that he was using physical realities to convey spiritual truths
The words that I have spoken to you are spirit – they're not intended to be taken literally
And they're life, in that we need to internalize those truths, that is, believe in his words, if we're going to reap the benefits *****

So far from taking his words literally, and coming up with all kinds of strange explanations – Jesus himself tells us it’s just the opposite
Therefore, “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood” are metaphors or word pictures – intended to get our attention, express spiritual truths . . .
And convey the extent and depth to which we must believe and internalize all that he says and promises
Just like we eat and internalize food and drink at The Lord’s Supper

That’s the first of **4 Reasons The Lord’s Supper is Symbolic** (and not sacramental)

1. Jesus was explicit that his words were spiritual, not literal (Jn 6:63)

The words that I have spoken to you are spirit (Jn 6:63)

Second, and going back to 1 Cor 11 . . .

2. It’s the most natural sense of the statements (1 Cor 11:24-25)

When Jesus first said, *this is my body which is for you*; And *this cup is the new covenant in my blood* . . .

He was holding and referring to the bread and the cup in his hand – two things that were distinct and separate from his physical body
So the most natural way to take his statement is symbolic

He didn’t hold out his arm to them, or cut off a piece of his flesh and say “this is my body;” Nor did he cut his finger and let it drip into a cup saying “this is my blood”
If that were the case, he *would* have spoken literally; But he didn’t, and therefore wasn’t

It would be like me holding up a picture of myself, like the one on my license here, and saying, “This is me”

Do I mean that this picture is *literally* me? Not at all; That would be absurd

I mean that this picture *represents* me; It *symbolizes* me

That’s the most natural sense of *my* statement, and the same is true of Jesus’ statements

3. It’s the most consistent way to interpret the passage

When Jesus says – *this cup is the new covenant in my blood* . . .

Nobody believes that the *cup* itself, wood, brass, or gold – is the actual new covenant
Once again, that would be absurd

The new covenant is God’s promise of salvation for those who believe; It’s not a cup
The cup and what it contains, is symbolic of the blood of Christ, that offers and *secures* the new covenant; It’s not the covenant itself

And if the *cup* is symbolic, then the bread is symbolic

B/c the two statements are right next to each other, and spoken in the same context, by the same person, in the same way

So a symbolic view is the most consistent way to interpret the passage

4. Jesus made similar statements that were symbolic

Like *I am the vine*, or *I am the true vine* from John 15

Does that mean that Jesus is an actual vine growing in a garden?

Or that everything else we call a vine isn’t really a vine, b/c he’s the *true* vine?

Of course not; B/c he’s speaking figuratively; Symbolically

Just like he did at the last supper

Or how about, *Truly, Truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep* from Jn 10

Does he intend for us to think that he’s an actual door?

Or that he’s *like* a door? A door through which we must enter to be saved?

It’s the latter, right?

In which case he was once again speaking figuratively and symbolically

Something he *often* did regarding himself, in order to make a point and convey a truth

So it’s not like his statements at the last supper were a rare occurrence (**List Summary**)

- All of which makes The Lord’s Supper a symbolic *ordinance*, and not a physical *sacrament*; It’s an ordinance

A symbolic ritual, just like baptism, that Jesus commanded, the apostles taught, and the early church practiced – in order to express our faith and remember our salvation

And while there’s no *automatic* benefit just b/c you participate, God does intend that your relationship or *communion* with him deepens . . .

And your fellowship with others, strengthened

The very thing we saw in 1 Cor 10, where Paul said . . .

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16-17)

IOW The Lord’s Supper is an identification and association with him and his sacrifice on our behalf

And *because there is one bread* [Paul says], *we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

We are knit together as one, b/c we all partake of the same Bread of *Life*, and show it by eating the same bread of communion (**Summary of Parts 1&2; Servers & Seth**)

So while there’s no *automatic* benefit just b/c you participate in the ordinance of The Lord’s Supper, there’s still a relational blessing that God intends . . .

As we express our faith and remember our salvation