

## PREFACE

What Paul tells the Corinthian church in vv17-22 of his letter—and surely in person when he was there—regarding their behavior during the church's common meal and Lord's Supper was a revolutionary concept for those who had been raised in a Greco-Roman culture, and now living in a multi-cultural, cosmopolitan city. It was so revolutionary that it would be tantamount to telling a southern democrat cracker in the early sixties that he had to sit next to a black man at the lunch counter. But just as did Martin Luther King in the fifties and sixties, Paul was trying to get them to understand that they were now brothers—and sisters. In the Lord there are no longer the divisions set by this fallen world. In the next chapter Paul will expand on this.

**Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-14.**

To the Galatians Paul will write much the same thing.

**Read Galatians 3:26-29.**

We now begin the second section of the three that comprise the second half of this chapter:

vv17-22: Paul describes the problem with the Lord's Supper in Corinth

**vv23-26: What the Lord's Supper is to mean**

vv27-34: Paul's commands regarding the Lord's Supper

*John MacArthur:* These verses are like a diamond dropped in a muddy road. One of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture is given in the middle of a strong rebuke of worldly, carnal, selfish, and insensitive attitudes and behavior. The rebuke, in fact, is of Christians who have perverted the very ceremony that these verses so movingly describe.

**Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.**

## v23A

*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,*

Paul ties this verse to the previous with *yap*—in all of our translations, “For.” Look at v2 of this chapter.

**Read v2.**

There he praises them because they remember and “hold firmly to” the traditions he delivered to them. But in v17 and v22 he says, “*I do not praise you*” for what you are doing with this tradition I left with you. And in v23 he begins his “why.”

Paul's source for what he "received from the Lord" was *not* the written gospels, most of which, at best, were in the process of being written about this same time. Neither did he receive it by means of a supernatural vision, as on the road to Damascus. Here he simply states in a little different way what he had said earlier in Chapter Seven. [Go back to Chapter Seven](#). There he draws a distinction between his considered *opinion* as an apostle, and what he instructs or commands as something passed down from the Lord. We see the first in v6 and v12.

### Read v6 and v12.

But what he says in v10 is from "the Lord."

### Read v10.

So Paul opens this section by explaining that what follows is *not* his opinion, but a command from the Lord. He also states that he has told them this before.

**Sidebar:** As he has previously in this letter, Paul does not include this paragraph as an historical account, nor is he teaching the Corinthians anything new. One could get lost—and many scholars have—in the minutia about how vv23-26 differ from the gospel accounts of the Last Supper, but that misses the point. Paul raises this as the means to illustrate what *should be* going on at their suppers. His purpose is not historical, but to remind the church that Jesus Himself established the tradition that they are presently violating.

### 23B-24A

*...that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said,*

Everything up to the middle of v24—the words of Jesus—is customary for any Passover meal: the taking of the bread, giving thanks for it, the breaking of it for its subsequent consumption. What is not at all customary, indeed revolutionary, is what Jesus says about the bread at this point.

### 24B

*"This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."*

Literally, "This of mine is the body which is for you."

There is nothing in the text to warrant the Catholic position of transubstantiation—that the bread (and wine) literally become the body (and blood) of Christ. From *Life in Christ: Instructions in the Catholic Faith* (1966):

It has been the constant, infallible teaching of the Church that in the Eucharist the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ are contained under the appearances of bread and wine.

*To whom did Jesus give the power of changing bread and wine into his body and blood?*

Jesus gave this power to the apostles at the Last Supper. He gives it to his priests in the sacrament of Holy Orders.

*What happens when the priest pronounces the words, "This is my body; this is my blood," over the bread and wine?*

At these words the actual bread and wine cease to exist. In their place is the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ.

*Are both the body and blood of Christ present under the appearance of bread alone?*

Yes. It is the living Christ who is present in the Eucharist.

*Gordon Fee:* The identification of the bread with the body is Semitic imagery in its heightened form (as seen in 1 Corinthians 10:4, "the rock *was* Christ," and Galatians 4:25, "Hagar *is* Mount Sinai"). As in all such identifications, he means "this signifies/represents my body." The presence of Jesus with them as He spoke these words would have made any other meaning impossible.

David Garland puts it pithily, "Arguments about transubstantiation and consubstantiation have no substantiation in the intention of the text."

#### **Sidebar: "broken"**

*A. T. Robertson:* Which is for you (*to hyper humon*). *Klomenon* (broken) of the *Textus Receptus* (King James Version) is clearly not genuine. Luke (Luke 22:19) has *didomenon* (given) which is the real idea here. As a matter of fact the body of Jesus was not broken (John 19:36). The bread was broken, but not the body of Jesus.

As useful and pertinent as this information is, what follows that opening phrase of "This is My body," is far more pertinent to the context.

*"This is My body, which is for you"*

Here once again is the marvelous paradox that is our God. The one speaking these words was responsible for the very creation of this world and its people. He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and eternal, spanning time and space. Yet this God willingly takes on uncomfortable flesh and willingly dies a horrible death upon a Roman cross—for sinners.

Jesus' words hearken back to what Isaiah wrote about the Messiah.

### **Read Isaiah 53:12.**

Verse 5 is more explicitly detailed.

### **Read Isaiah 53:5.**

Again, scholars have debated precisely what Jesus means by this, but in the context of this letter Paul's point is to draw the contrast between Christ's unselfish sacrifice, and the Corinthians' self-centered treatment of others in the church; the contrast between Christ doing this for ugly sinners who did not yet even know of Him, and the elite in the church despising those they already knew well.

v25

*In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood;*

Here is Jeremiah's prophecy fulfilled (Jeremiah 31:31). From Genesis on the Lord God established that covenants with Him would be made through the shedding of blood, because "the life of the flesh is in the blood."

### **Read Jeremiah 31:31.**

And Jesus was saying that not only was He announcing the inauguration of this new covenant, of which Jeremiah speaks, but that it would be *His* blood that would make it effective. At the Last Supper Jesus "borrowed" the bread and wine of Passover for the regular remembrance of His sacrifice—someone had to die for a covenant to go into effect. (Of course, from a Christian perspective Jesus did not borrow, but *took possession* of the elements from Passover.)

*do this...in remembrance of Me.*

In this narrative of the event, twice Jesus says, "do this...in remembrance of Me."

*Garland:* What is to be remembered, as far as Paul is concerned, is that "the crucified one" gave His body and sacrificed His blood in an expiatory death that brings the offer of salvation to all persons. By partaking of the bread and the cup, they recall that sacrifice and symbolically share in its benefits.

The word "remembrance" encompasses more than just the mental activity to recall that something happened. The Passover rite was meant to almost *reenact* the original Passover night and next morning. And when the church joins together for the Lord's Supper it is to be a time when each individual mentally but actively remembers not just Christ, but what He did.

The Lord's Supper "is not simply 'in memory of *Him*,' but it is eaten as a 'memorial' of the salvation that He has effected through His death and resurrection" (Fee). Holding that bread and wine in our hands we are to close our eyes and see Him being scourged, see the crown of thorns pressed into His head, see His suffering on the cross—but also to see and rejoice in His coming out of the tomb, see Him returning to the Father to sit at His right hand, exalted and glorified.

*Do this, participate in the memorial, Jesus is saying, to remember that I shed my blood and gave all of my body over to death—for you.*

v26

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.*

In v20 Paul wrote, "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." He has just recited the account of Christ's Last Supper to show that that is *not* what the Corinthians have been doing. Instead, they are to be proclaiming the Lord's death. If they are doing this, "they will not overindulge themselves, despise others, shame them, or allow them to go hungry" (Garland).

*Garland:* The Lord's Supper is founded on the sacrificial death of Jesus for others, and the attitude that led Him obediently to that death should pervade the Supper for Christians ever after. The way the Corinthians conducted their supper, however, gave witness to a culture of selfishness and status-mongering. To conduct their supper in this way and to have the temerity to call it the Lord's Supper can lead only to their condemnation.