

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-25 IN MEMORIAM

“I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”¹

Whenver I serve the Communion Meal, I make a point of noting for the benefit of those participating that this is a *Meal of Anticipation*, for we are to continue observing this meal “until [Christ] comes” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:26]. Though no particular period between observances is provided, it does indicate an ongoing observance in which participants anticipate the return of the Master to receive His own. Those who understand the significance of sharing the Meal look forward to Jesus’ return. Those participating in the Meal draw encouragement from this knowledge.

Again, before distributing the elements, I note that it is a *Meal of Fellowship*, taken as declaration of our fellowship with one another because of our fellowship in Christ. “Communion” is a declaration of sharing our lives, and so the Meal is intended for those who share their lives in the congregation as members together. For this reason the Meal is referred to as “Communion” [see 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16 KJV contra NET BIBLE]. This is a church ordinance and not a Christian ordinance, in which participants confess their unity in the Faith, particularly in sharing their lives through their mutual ministries.

There is a third reference I make whenever I serve this Meal, and that is that this is a *Meal of Remembrance*. This powerful truth will serve as the focus for our study this morning. “Do this in remembrance of Me,” the Master commanded His disciples as they were gathered for the last Passover Meal He would share with them [see LUKE 22:18]. Since the time of His resurrection, wherever the Faith is maintained believers gather to observe the Communion Meal on an ongoing basis. Central to each observance is the knowledge of our Saviour’s sacrifice because of our sin. As we prepare to observe the Memorial Meal this day, I invite each participant to focus his or her attention on the significance of the sacrifice our Lord has provided and which we have received.

THE ORDER AND PURPOSE OF THE MEAL WERE ESTABLISHED BY THE LORD JESUS — “I received from the Lord...” Carefully consider this important truth. Though the Table is under the administration of the local congregation, the establishment of the Meal was by the Lord whom we worship. Paul makes it clear that he did not initiate the Meal, nor did he simply repeat what others had communicated to him. Rather, the Apostle was faithful to the instruction of the Lord, carefully stating that it was Jesus Himself who communicated to him the conduct and the purpose of the Meal. Consequently, the Meal did not arise from the fertile imagination of grieving Christians attempting to create a new order of worship. Jesus Himself gave the Meal to His disciples, and Paul asserts that He was instructed by Jesus concerning the order and the purpose of the Meal.

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Perhaps you imagine that Paul relied upon either Mark's account or Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper. If you imagine that, you would be wrong. When we read the account of the institution of that Meal in the Synoptic Gospels, we note that Matthew and Mark agree substantially in what was said. Listen to the two accounts as they are read in succession. Matthew's account will be first. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom'" [MATTHEW 26:26-29].

Now listen to Mark's account. "As they were eating, He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "'Take; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God'" [MARK 14:22-25].

Jesus' statements recorded in these two accounts are virtually identical. Compare, "Take, eat; this is My body," [Matthew] with "Take; this is My body" [Mark]. In our text, Paul attests that Jesus said, "This is My body," clarifying the intent by noting that the Master added, "Which is for you." Compare what Paul wrote with what is provided in Luke's account of the institution of the Meal. "When the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, 'Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'" [LUKE 22:14-20].

Luke, who apparently heard Paul's account, recorded under the guidance of the Holy Spirit that Jesus said, "This is My body, which is given for you." Likewise, in contradistinction to the other Evangelists, Luke records Jesus as referring to the cup as "the New Covenant in My blood" rather than "the blood of the Covenant" or "My blood of the Covenant." In other words, Mark and Matthew appear to have used a common source, and Luke and Paul shared a separate, fuller source. We know that Mark served as amanuensis to Peter; and so it is reasonable to conclude that he received his information from Peter, who was present at the institution of the Meal. The Gospel of Mark was written prior to Matthew's account and quite likely served as a source for Levi to supplement his own observation and memories.

However, Paul declares that the Lord Jesus Himself was the source of his information. Add to this that Luke was in all likelihood schooled by Paul in this matter. Memory fades with time, but Paul asserts that the One who instituted the Meal was also the One who communicated to Him what was said and what was done on that evening. Thus, Paul makes a significant claim for precision in transmitting a factual account of the establishment of the Lord's Table. Thus, Luke's Gospel, written later than either Mark's account or Matthew's Gospel, likely reflects what Paul learned from the Master.

This background information is important because it informs us that observance of the Lord's Table is so much more than mere ritual; this is an act of worship that Jesus Himself gave to the churches. Since He gave it, we are informed of the manner in which He seeks to be worshipped; this means that our actions at the Table either honour Him or dishonour His memory. Whether we are faithful to His instruction or whether we add our own fanciful imaginations determines the degree of honour given to the One whom we claim to worship. As is true throughout the whole realm of Christian worship and service, the acceptability of the worship we offer is determined by our faithfulness to His command. Obviously, then, what we do at His Table is of great importance.

The rite of the Lord's Supper has become encrusted with formality with the passage of time, and the intent of the Master has in many instances been obscured. Prayers are prescribed, ornate dress is stipulated and magnificent rituals required in what can only be seen as an apparent effort to awe participants. Religious organisations set themselves up as keepers of the rite, instituting rules and regulations that were never imagined from the words of the Master. Too often the observance of the Meal has become a carefully choreographed ritual that hides the simple majesty of congregational worship of the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Reacting to this obvious error, some churches have gone to an opposite extreme in attempting to deny the ritualism that characterises the ceremony among churches seeking greater and more complex formality. Consequently, for these churches the Meal becomes a ten minute act that is tacked onto the conclusion of the service that is required because ... well, just because! Throughout Canadian Christendom, the ceremony is observed with regularity—either weekly, monthly, quarterly or even annually, but few of the participants are able to say precisely why they are partaking of the Meal.

Extreme positions are difficult to justify under the best of circumstances. Though we do not wish to obscure the intent of the Master, neither do we wish to fall into a trap that reduces the worship to a thoughtless act, as does either extreme in this instance. Surely, none of us wish to simply go through the motions of a rite and claim that we have worshipped. Neither do we wish to forget why the Meal is important for us as Christians.

Jesus said we were to eat the bread and to drink the cup in remembrance of Him. Do you not find it somewhat strange that the Master should find it necessary to instruct the churches to remember Him? He gave Himself because of our inability to save ourselves. Paul writes, "***While we were still weak***, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that ***while we were still sinners, Christ died for us***" [ROMANS 5:6-8]. Focus on the fact that we could do nothing for our own salvation; Christ provided all that is required because we could not do anything to make ourselves acceptable to God.

In another place, the Apostle has written, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, ***who loved me and gave himself for me***" [GALATIANS 2:20].

In love, the Master sacrificed Himself for us. Surely, one would imagine that we would never forget such love! One would think that it would be impossible to forget the grace that we have received! However, it is a tragic truth that we are fallen beings, and though we are saved, we are still sinners. Consequently, we fall under the condemnation of which Isaiah wrote:

“All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.”

[ISAIAH 53:6]

It is not merely that we once turned aside to pursue our own desires before we came to faith, but we are inclined to continually stray despite being saved. But for the grace of God and the urging of His Holy Spirit, each of us would continually neglect the Master who gave His life for us. We become focused on the immediate demands of daily life and forget that we are called by Christ’s Name; so, we need to be reminded of the love Christ has displayed for us. If we were able to remain focused, perhaps we would need no reminder. However, we do stray and forget; thus, we need to remember.

The Communion Meal as an act of worship is carried out within local churches, for it is those congregations who have been divinely appointed to instruct participants in the worship expected and to ensure that all approach the Table with a proper understanding. It is not sufficient for an individual to say, “Well, I have studied on my own and I will make my own decision whether I wish to partake of the Meal or not.” That church which hosts the Meal is responsible to ensure that all are instructed and that all are cautioned against presumption whenever this act of worship is presented.

It is necessary to again point out for your sake that this is a church ordinance entrusted to the churches by the Master. This means that local congregations are responsible to provide oversight of the Meal. It is not a Christian ordinance in the sense that it was not intended that individual Christians should provide oversight of the Meal. Was that the case, it would mean that any Christian can participate whether in fellowship with the congregation or not. This is a church ordinance with the assemblies of our Lord designated to oversee the Meal as a declaration of corporate fellowship growing out of personal fellowship with the Risen Son of God, as a statement of anticipation of His return to receive His people to Himself, and as a commemorative meal in which participants remember the loving sacrifice of the Master.

On this point, I need but point out that when our Lord instituted the Meal, He ate it with His apostles. He did not invite all those who had followed Him. He did not even invite those women who would soon brave the hostility of an enraged mob to stand near His cross, nor did He invite His own mother. He restricted the Meal to His apostles.

Participating in the Meal will not make you a Christian—the Meal is intended as a means for those who are already Christians to worship, remembering the sacrifice Jesus offered in their place. Participating at the Lord’s Table will not make you a better Christian—grace is neither added if you participate nor removed if you fail to participate. You do not have more of the Saviour if you partake, nor are you less spiritual if you do not partake. The Lord’s Supper is an act of worship shared by believers who are covenanted together as churches of our Lord Jesus.

Let me stress the order and purpose of the Meal. This continuing ordinance was instituted by the Lord Jesus Himself. The elements of the Meal are bread and grape juice, with which we remember the sacrifice of the Master. The primary purpose of the Meal is to aid those who are members of the Body to remember that sacrifice.

THE MASTER’S INTENT HAS BEEN FAITHFULLY TRANSMITTED TO THE CHURCHES — Paul wrote, “I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” In other words, he states in boldest terms that he faithfully transmitted what Christ communicated to him. This teaching has come to us through the written Word of God. First, we have the accounts that inform us of the establishment of the Meal following the last Passover Jesus shared with His disciples. Then, we see the various accounts in the Book of Acts that relate the ongoing act of worship among the apostolic Christians. At last, we are given this fuller explanation by Paul. Moreover, he attests that the information he conveys was given to him by the Lord Jesus Himself. We have, in the Book, a faithful transmission of the will of the Saviour concerning the Meal, and we do well to honour that teaching.

Whatever else is true, we may derive a great deal of information concerning the Meal from what the Apostle has written. We know the purpose of the Meal is to memorialise the sacrifice of the Master. We know also that the Meal is to be observed as Christians are assembled [cf. 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17, 20]. We know that participating in the Meal is a declaration of fellowship—both fellowship with the Risen Saviour and fellowship with those sharing the Meal. We are also made aware that this is to be an ongoing observance [see 1 CORINTHIANS 11:26], and that we should renew anticipation of the imminent fulfilment of His promise to return. We know that participating without discerning the One whom we worship invites His judgement [see 1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-32]. To say that we do not know the will of the Master concerning this Meal is to deny what has been clearly and faithfully communicated to the churches throughout this age.

Jesus sought to introduce His people into the blessing of worship. Through committing this Meal to the churches, He transformed the pedestrian act of eating bread and drinking juice into an act of worship. His instruction teaches us that every aspect of life may be seen as worship—if we approach a given act with an attitude that recognises the presence of the Living God. Moreover, we see that the elements of this life should not be taken for granted, for all that we enjoy is to be received as a gift for our benefit.

In the routine of life is the basis for glorifying the Saviour. You may either work at a job, or you may see your labour as an opportunity to glorify His Name. You may either perform your work, anticipating that you will receive money in exchange for what you do, or you may see that God is at work through you bringing glory to His Name.

The story is told of three masons working on one of the great cathedrals that occupy the English countryside. The first was asked, “What are you doing?” He replied, “I am placing these stones one atop the other, fixing them in place with mortar.” His answer was accurate, if somewhat uninspiring.

The second mason was asked, “What are you doing?” He answered, “I am erecting a wall that will ensure a safe environment for those who gather in this building.” Undoubtedly, he had a more fulfilling grasp of his work, but it is nevertheless somewhat limited in its ability to stir the imagination.

When the third man was asked what he was doing, he replied, “I am advancing the Kingdom of God by building a cathedral to the glory of God.”

Each of these men performed the same work, but the answer given by the third man demonstrated that he understood that his work was more than mere labour. Because he saw that he was a co-worker with God and thus working to the glory of the Saviour, his labour was transformed into something of eternal value.

So it is that your work, routine though it may seem to you, is transformed into that which is of eternal worth if your attitude is right. You do not merely do housework, but you transform your house into a place of worship as you prepare it to receive guests and to make friends comfortable. Your workbench is not simply a place where you toil, but it is an opportunity to reveal the power of Christ as you transform the mundane through presenting your labour as an offering to Him. For the Christian, life is not segregated into the sacred and the secular, but all of life is sacred if we recognise the presence of the Lord and seek to glorify His Name. There is no labour that is devoid of opportunity to glorify Him; but if our labour were to dishonour Him, then we should not do that work.

The preacher toils to prepare a message to the people of God. He can construct a sermon, or he can invest the energy and study required to prepare a message. The former is readily accomplished through applying communicative skills available to anyone, whilst the latter requires time spent with God seeking His will and permitting His Spirit to speak through the Word. It is not that the messenger should excuse poor communication skills, but without a message a sermon is ultimately meaningless.

Again, through using bread and juice to worship, Jesus has taught us that the necessities of life are a gift to be received with gratitude and to be employed to His glory. As an aside of some significance, the question is sometimes asked whether the juice should be fermented or whether it should be unfermented. I would not get into a fight with others over this issue, but I do note that the Meal was instituted at the Passover celebration after all leaven had been removed from each house. The bread was unleavened and there was no yeast to be left in the house, so it is difficult to imagine that the wine was fermented since that also would mean that it still had yeast in it.

To return to the point that I made before that excursus through the esoteric question of the composition of the elements, because the Lord used what was common to the people at that time, He has surely demonstrated the majesty of the mundane. There is no aspect of life that is beneath the dignity of offering it to Christ as an act of worship, and all that we have must be seen as a gift to be employed to His glory. Paul asked the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive" [1 CORINTHIANS 4:7]? The anticipated answer is, "Nothing!" The Master taught that God "makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" [MATTHEW 5:45]. His words are no doubt foundational for an assertion Paul made during his address to the Athenians on the Areopagus. God "Himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything" [ACTS 17:25]. Indeed, the Lord "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" [1 TIMOTHY 6:17].

God is generous toward all mankind, giving us richly all that is necessary for life. Therefore, not only the riches that makes life as Canadians so pleasant for us, but the necessities of life are transformed by this understanding from mere possessions into divine gifts from the hand of God who is gracious to all. Therefore, we cannot lay claim to anything we hold, but rather we must see that we possess all things as a stewardship and therefore we must seek wisdom in administering all that we have to His glory.

Therefore, even in the act of worship through participating in the Lord's Supper, we tacitly acknowledge that God has richly given us all things. Indeed, this is the Eucharist, the Thanksgiving Meal that we enjoy, for we remember that God has shown Himself generous toward us. If there is no gratitude, then we should be rebuked and seek to remember His generosity through showing ourselves generous.

REMEMBERING JESUS' SACRIFICE — “The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’” Thus, the Apostle points us to the heart of the Communion Meal, insisting upon the commemorative or memorial aspect.

The banquet of worship we know as Communion demands that participants actively recall the love demonstrated by the Master. Focusing our memory on His sacrifice, we remember His love for us. This statement anticipates that each participant in the Meal will be truly born from above and into the Family of God. As we review in our minds the love of Christ, recalling the kindness we have each experienced through His effectual calling to life, we glorify Him. In remembering in this way His sacrifice because of our sinful condition, we worship the Master. Thus focusing on the love of Christ displayed through His sacrifice does not deny the element of thanksgiving inherent in the observance, nor does it negate the personal impact the Meal has upon those participating. However, it does focus our attention on the event that purchased our salvation—the sacrifice of Christ the Lord because of our sinful condition.

At any given moment, the best we can provide through a message is a snapshot of what is happening. If we focus exclusively on the remembrance aspect of this Meal without reinforcing that it is also a declaration of fellowship and an opportunity to renew anticipation, we deprive ourselves of blessing and expose ourselves to embracing error. Nevertheless, we must not permit ourselves to fall into a trap of reducing this worship, this recalling the love of the Master, to a monotonous, routine act in which we mouth the words that we remember without actually recalling His sacrifice. There must always be that quality of renewing our devotion to Him in response to remembering His sacrifice.

Preparing to worship through sharing in this Feast, it is essential that we take time to remember Jesus' love. First, we read that He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, saying, “This is my body which is for you.” Because of the Master's words, some have fabricated fantastic theories known as transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Catholics believe that the bread, though it still appears to be bread, is actually the physical body of the Lord Jesus, and the wine, though it yet appears to be wine, is actually the physical blood of the Saviour. Luther, reading these same words, saw Christ's body and blood “really present in, with and under the wine.” Lutherans, together with many Anglicans, still hold to this view. Many evangelicals have also reduced the ordinance to a moment tacked onto the end of the service that is tolerated once a month or once a quarter.

It seems the most natural understanding, to say nothing of the most defensible, that we should understand Christ's words when He spoke of the bread as representing His body and the fact that He pointed to the juice as the new covenant, as figurative language. Remember, Jesus was physically present with His disciples when he spoke these words. Therefore, it would be necessary to suspend logic in order to believe that the disciples understood Him to mean that the pita was actually the One who was handing it to them! When Jesus spoke of the cup as the new covenant in His blood, it is not only illogical but utter foolishness to imagine that they thought that without drinking from that cup they had no part in the new covenant. The bread and the cup are symbols; and though they are powerful symbols, we must avoid ascribing magical qualities to them.

Later, when Paul cautions the Corinthians, and all who read his words, that those eating or drinking without discerning the body of the Lord eat and drink judgement on themselves [1 CORINTHIANS 11:29], He is not saying that we must see the physical body of the Lord or that we must see the physical blood of the Lord. He is, however, cautioning that those who eat without recognising the Body of Christ—the corporate entity which He created out of His sacrifice and by the power of the Spirit, do so to their own detriment, for the Lord will not excuse mistreating His church, which is His Body.

There was purpose in Christ death, for through His sacrifice He redeemed a people for His Name. This congregation, the Body of Christ—and each congregation where Christ dwells by Faith—worships Him as the Head of the church. If those eating at the banquet table of the Lord fail to discern His work and fail to show respect to this new creation—His Body, they invite His judgement. In remembering Jesus, we recall what He accomplished.

In a sense, when we worship the Risen Son of God, we glorify Him through renewing our appreciation of His Body, the church. Those who despise the church—choosing to treat her as a convenience to be used as they desire, or holding themselves aloof without committing themselves to her, or seeing her only as a socio-political entity—invite judgement on themselves. We are called to remember the sacrifice of the Master, and in remembering to rejoice in all that was accomplished through that sacrifice.

Do you recognise the body of the Saviour? Do you indeed remember His sacrifice? If you have never confessed His reign over your life, it is not likely that you know Him. If you know Him, are you walking with Him? The Word of God calls each person to life in the Risen, Living Son of God. Paul declares, “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ believing in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.” Paul concludes that portion of Scripture with a quote from the Prophet Joel that tells us, “everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord shall be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13 author’s translation].

Our plea is that each listener this day would be saved. If you have never confessed Christ Jesus as Lord over your life, this is a day of salvation. If you have never obeyed His command to follow Him in baptism as a believer, this is a day in which you can declare your intent to obey Him. The doors to this church, to this Body of Christ, are now open for all who will come into the fellowship of this congregation through confession of faith and baptism, through transfer of church letter from a church of like faith and practise, or through a statement of Christian experience. This is our invitation. Come now, while there is time and while it is day. Amen.