

The Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Prayer – Father, I am grateful that you make places where you promise to meet your saints. You don't make us hunt for you like some mystics in the fog, but you give us means of grace where you promise to meet us. And I pray today that you would do as you promise and meet us in the means of prayer, your Word, and in your Sacraments, like the Lord's Supper. We thank you that you are true to your promises. You are a faithful God. You are a gracious God. So, Father, we ask that you would help us to understand your means of grace, and in particular, the Lord's Supper today. It is in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Intro Every week, here at Redeemer, we gather together to sing songs toward Jesus, to hear the Word of God preached, to pray with one another. Some of you are all in for announcements, and that's what keeps you coming back. But then, in the middle of it, we stop what we are doing, every week, and get some guys up here to grab some brass plates with little bits of bread (and fun fact, here at Redeemer, it's pie crust made by a faithful member who has been making that same recipe for decades) and little cups of juice that are filled by faithful, serving members every week. Then, we pass those plates, and we tell baptized believers in Christ to take that bread and juice, and all together, we eat that bread and juice.

Those of us who take this meal, the Lord's Supper regularly, have some familiarity with the practice and can predict the beats somewhat, but if you're here and you've never seen us practice the Lord's Supper, you may wonder what we are doing? Is it divine snack time? Are we a bunch of hobbits, and its time for second breakfast or elevensies? Well, no, it is a sacred meal for us, a holy practice, and a means by which we believe God gives us grace. But even if you've

taken the meal with us or another church a thousand times, there may be questions you have about the Lord's Supper. I can't explain them all this morning, but I do want to show some of what is going in this sacred meal.

One of the best ways to think about the Lord's Supper that I've heard is this to think about what the meal does in three tenses:

Past Tense

Present Tense

Future Tense

Past Tense¹

Paul starts with the past tense when he writes.

²³ 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."

Paul is recounting a meal that Jesus had with his disciples on the last night before he was crucified. Jesus got his closest disciples together, and they shared a seder or Passover meal which in the Old Testament was a meal God's people would share yearly to remember what God had done in rescuing them from captivity and slavery in Egypt. And Jesus takes part of this very complicated and ornate meal, part of this meal that does not involve meat, a bloodless

¹ This outline taken from Barcellos, Richard C. 2018. *The Lord's Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory*. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor. This is perhaps one of the more helpful ways of thinking about how the Lord's Supper focuses our attention on Christ's work throughout the ages.

part of this meal, and Jesus changes the imagery of that part of that meal. He fulfills the meaning of Passover when he says, “this bread is my body given for you, this cup of wine is my blood which is blood and is a new covenant, a new promise for you.”²

Now Jesus doesn't mean that bread and wine is physically his body and blood. How do we know that? Because Jesus is sitting with the disciples when he says this. What he is saying though, is that you, the disciples will have something you need to remember. You need to remember my body and blood. As these guys are sitting with him, they might not understand yet what he is saying, but from our perspective, and from Paul's perspective, we know that Jesus is saying this meal is given to you to remember the cross. This meal for us is a weekly rehearsal and memory of Jesus giving up his body on the cross to be destroyed for us in order to pay our debt for our sin before God. Weekly, we proclaim, as Paul also say, Jesus' death to ourselves because his death is our hope. His death forms a new covenant of friendship and fellowship between God and us, making those who receive Jesus' sacrifice with faith, righteous with God, not because of anything we bring to the table, but because of what Jesus brings to the table. Like Israel remembering God's rescue of his people from slavery in Egypt, we remember his rescue of us from the enslaving power of sin.

But is this memorial aspect all that there is to the Lord's Supper? Are we simply rehearsing a historical act? No, because the Lord's Supper has implications in the present tense.

Present Tense

² J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, English-language., trans. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2008), 802-3.

There might be a temptation to take the “remembering” part of the command as a purely cognitive act. If you’ve ever lost a loved one, perhaps you and family members get together annually to eat a meal in that person’s honor. But the Lord’s Supper is not so much like that. It’s more like an anniversary dinner. You eat the anniversary dinner with the person you are remembering. You do that so that you can remember you’re history together, your highs, your lows, why you fell in love, and to remember the promises you made at your wedding day. The Lord’s Supper is like that. It remembers and recommits weekly to the covenant promises made.

As Jesus says, the covenant is in his blood. O Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as a sovereign promise sealed in blood. Through what Jesus has done, God has entered into a new covenant with his people that is distinct from but related to his old testament covenant with his people. We remember the covenant when we take the Lord’s Supper with him. We are sitting at his table. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 10 that we are participating in the body of Christ. The word under that is *koinonia*, fellowship with Christ. In 10:1-5, Paul compares our relationship with Jesus in this covenant meal with food and drink that God gave his people in the wilderness after he rescued them from slavery and captivity in Egypt, and they had been baptized in the Red Sea. Paul says their spiritual food was Christ. When we take this meal, we are taking this meal with Jesus, but we are also taking Jesus as our spiritual food. The cross continues to sustain and nourish God’s people and uniquely so in the Lord’s Supper. God blesses us and gives us grace in this meal. That is God’s promise, his covenant to us, and he keeps his promise.

Now God’s covenant is initiated by God according to His grace for his people, but his covenant comes with obligations that his people must follow. Having been baptized into Christ,

as David preached last week, we are supposed to look like Christ. We are supposed to take on his character. But there is a dissonance that happens. Sometimes God's people don't act very Godly.

That's what is actually bothering Paul when he writes 1 Corinthians. The whole letter is a painful corrective to a dysfunctional church. Paul compares the Corinthians, more or less, to the ancient Israelites, baptized in the Red Sea, fed spiritual food, and still were overthrown in the wilderness because they "sat down to eat and rose to play." Their fundamental character was unchanged. They did not look like God and God disciplined the people as a whole and killed certain individuals that were toxic to the covenant community because they did not live up to the covenant obligations.

One of the most important parts of the Lord's Supper, of us participating in the body and blood in an active examination of our lives. Now will we, in prayer discover one week that we've made it? Actually, I hope not! The more our lives conform to Christ, the more we will become aware of our shortcomings, of our sin against God. But we have the freedom to be honest with the way we've fallen short and then celebrate the fact that Jesus' body and blood has paid for our sins! Sometimes Christian who know that something is wrong but want to take corrective steps and begin again to live as though Christ has a claim to their life will want to get rebaptized, but actually that's not the sacrament for Christians returning to the Lord. The Lord's Supper is! We come back to him open-handed weekly, acknowledge our sin, and celebrating God's continuing grace. But what we must not do is take this meal with no intention of repenting or turning away from sin, with no intention of allowing our lives to conform more to

Christ's, with no intention of living as though Christ as our Lord. We can't take the Lord's Supper for granted.

Sometimes we're asked why get so specific as to say baptized believers when set up the Lord's Supper. Well, one of the reasons is that is the normative process laid out in Scripture. When Paul talks to the Corinthians about how they should take the Lord's Supper, why they shouldn't act divisive and treat each other disrespectfully, it's because they, like the Israelites did, share the same baptism. He'll go on and deal with how the Corinthians poorly treat Spiritual gifts and say the same thing in chapter 12:13. **For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.** Paul is relying on the shared baptism as their point of reference for why they live like Christ. The Lord's Supper is the opportunity to reflect on our baptism. There is also some logical relationship between Baptism and The Lord's Supper in the New Covenant and Circumcision and Passover in the Old Covenant, and Exodus 12:48 tells us that in order to partake in regular Passover feasts, one had to be circumcised.³ Gentlemen, thankfully, Jesus gave us unbloody signs, so baptism is sufficient. Don't make any doctors appointments yet. But the point is that the first sign of the covenant, baptism precedes the Lord's Supper like circumcision precedes participation in Passover. One way to think of it is like going on date night but never getting married. If you're a believer in Christ, let's get baptized. The next one time we'll do that at Redeemer is at Easter, and we'd love to celebrate your union with Christ. After that, we'd love to take communion with you every week. And if you want to take the Lord's Supper, but avoid

³ John D. Currid, *Calvin and the Biblical Languages* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2006), 97.

baptism, my question is why? Why will you not let God speak to you in baptism but want him to speak to you in communion? Why will you hold that one part of your life back and not put on Christ, so to speak? If you want to come to the Lord's table, you need to give Jesus lordship over your life, starting with baptism. You can let us know you're interested in baptism by going to redeemerchristianchurch.com/baptism or talking to your Gospel Community leader or one of our staff or elders.

That's also why at Redeemer, and in the church almost universally for 2000 years, we've said one must be a believer to take the Lord's Supper. We aren't just sharing a meal with one another; we are sharing a meal with Jesus as our Lord and to be able to examine ourselves, we must be working with Christ's lordship as our assumption. We must have the eyes of the Holy Spirit to examine ourselves and the gospel honestly. If you're not a follower of Jesus, hey we're glad you're here! We hope you drink our coffee, we hope you hear the gospel message preached and see what Jesus has done to bring you into relationship with him if you'll receive that work by faith. We want your kids to enjoy Redeemer Kids. We hope you join a Gospel Community here at Redeemer and share meals and lives with believers. Our hope is that you join us in following Jesus! We want you to know you're welcome! This meal, however, is different. It is a covenant meal for God's covenant people. We don't want you to take this meal casually or just fit in, just as we shouldn't take this meal casually.

I have my 5-year-old in service almost every week after she spends time with Redeemer Kids in the morning, but I don't give her the bread and the juice. And it's because she's not a baptized believer in Christ yet. What I do with this meal is use that as opportunity to talk with her, much like I did with her older sister, about what Jesus has done in dying for her if she'll

receive his gift by faith. If you're not eating this bread and juice, because like my daughter, you're not a baptized believer in Christ, I hope you would still hear the Good News that this meal declares. We were enemies with God, but God has made a way for us to be his friends, to eat at his table, through what Jesus has done. But there must be peace made before we come to that table. Christ is there for you; he is available, take him up, be baptized into him, washed by his blood, then come to his table where he promises to meet us.

Future Tense

And Redeemer, we don't merely come to his table and eat with Jesus Spiritually. In Matthew 26:19, Jesus tells us **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.**" Paul says that when we take this meal, **We proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.** One of the best things about the Lord's Supper that we take weekly is that it is a rehearsal for another meal coming in the future that we will have with Jesus not just in the Spirit, but again face-to-face with him.

We have a big meal coming up this week. We're getting ready for Thanksgiving, right. Thanksgiving...takes practice. I was sick last week, so I didn't get prep very well for Thanksgiving. But if I had been well, I would have eaten Thanksgiving dinner with my Gospel Community and another one. I would have eaten Thanksgiving with Redeemer College Mission. I would have eaten Thanksgiving at my daughter's school. See what I'm missing out on?

Don't feel too bad for me; people sent or brought me leftovers. Luckily I still get to eat Thanksgiving with my family on Wednesday before finally taking the dive and eating Thanksgiving with my in-laws on Thursday. We're good, we're good!

Point is, we get excited for and look forward to Thanksgiving every year. The Lord's Supper is a practice round of sorts for a future meal we will share with Jesus that will last an eternity. Revelation 19:6-9 describes this meal that will happen when Jesus returns:

⁶ Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

**"Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.**

**⁷ Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;**

**⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—**

for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

⁹ And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Now Jesus is not planning on leaving us with a cracker and juice forever. He sustains us now on his spiritual presence in the Lord's Supper. One day, he will return, along with all those saints who have gone before us in death, and likely including us, and he will be reunited with his bride the church in a New Creation, an earth restored to its purpose of magnifying his glory. And Jesus will share that feast with us forever, face to face, across the table.⁴

As a believer in Christ, you can take the Lord's Supper looking forward to that day. Every time you take the Lord's Supper, and you receive the promise of grace from God through the body and blood of Jesus, he sustains you and nourishes you and lets you practice for this final,

⁴ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrim's On the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 800-801.

ultimate celebration. If you're a not yet a Christ-follower, I want to you invite you to that final meal. We want to walk with you. Let someone; you can grab a prayer leader in a few minutes, an elder, staff member, the friend, or co-worker that brought, let them pray for you, and begin talking with you about what it means to follow Jesus. Receive by faith the peace with God that Jesus gives through his death and his resurrection, let's walk together for a season and then take on the outward signs of the amazing thing God is doing spiritually within you. Within us all who love Jesus.

Works Cited

- Barcellos, Richard C. 2018. *The Lords Supper as a Means of Grace: More than a Memory*. Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Mentor.
- Currid, John D. *Calvin and the Biblical Languages*. Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2006.
- Horton, Michael. *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrim's On the Way*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011.
- van Genderen, J., and W. H. Velema. *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*. 1992. English-language. Translated by Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas. Philipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing Co., 2008.
- Venema, Cornelis. "The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper in the Reformed Confessions," *MTJ* 12 (2001): 81-145.

1. How can the Lord's Supper help you reflect on the reality of Jesus coming and dying?
2. How does the Lord's Supper help you examine yourself? In your need? In God's provision?
3. In what way does the Lord's Supper help you look forward to Jesus return? Why is anticipating Jesus return so important?