

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

PROCLAIMING THE LORD'S DEATH: AN EXEGESIS OF 1 COR 11:17-34
IN LIGHT OF THE GRECO-ROMAN BANQUET

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Current Task

Dennis Smith raises the questions, “Why did early Christians meet at a meal?” and “What kind of meal did the early Christians celebrate?”¹ Those inquiries are hardly revolutionary or groundbreaking in the realms of historical, theological, ecclesiastical, and liturgical studies. His findings, however, do propose a re-thinking of eucharistic origins. The conclusion Smith puts forward is that the “earliest Christian meals developed out of the model of the Greco-Roman banquet.”² Such a proposal contradicts the views put forward by scholars who argue that the eucharist should be seen through the lens of other prototypical meals. Joachim Jeremias places the Last Supper clearly in the light of a Passover meal.³ Hans Lietzmann in his seminal work *Mass and Lord's Supper* develops two strands of eucharistic development: one celebrated by the Jerusalem church and one by the churches of Paul.⁴ Other proposals for the origin for the eucharist include the *chabura*, or fraternity meal, of Second Temple Judaism and the communal meal of the Essenes. Gregory Dix claims “that the last supper was a *chabura* meeting seems to arise straight from the New Testament evidence.”⁵ Karl Kuhn argues that the meal at Qumran is the most influential in eucharistic development.⁶

¹Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 279.

²*Ibid.*, 287.

³Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharist Words of Jesus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955).

⁴Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, trans. Dorothea H. G. Reeve (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953).

⁵Gregory Dix, *The Shapes of Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 232.

⁶Karl G. Kuhn, “The Lord's Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl and J. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 65-93, 259-265.

seems to arise straight from the New Testament evidence.”⁵ Karl Kuhn argues that the meal at Qumran is the most influential in eucharistic development.⁶

So, for Smith to argue that the most influential elements pertaining to the church’s communal meal come from various surrounding banquet practices of the Hellenistic world cuts against the grain of scholars seeking more simplified origins organically related to Judaism. This study is important, for it gives shape and life to the meetings of the early Christians. The communal meal was a defining factor of what Paul described as a church (1 Cor 11:18).⁷ Since Paul held the meal and its eucharistic ties in such high esteem, and since it was the central act of worship in the early Jesus movement, it is of value to current thought and practice to uncover and examine possible influential meal types. Therefore, this thesis will seek to answer the following question: “Was the communal meal at Corinth modeled upon the existing Greco-Roman banquet?”

To move toward answering this question, the theory of Dennis Smith will be put to the test by evaluating the eucharist in Corinth as described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. The text will first be presented exegetically, detailing what can be known about the Corinthian meal through studying the grammar. Then, a chapter will color the background of the Greco-Roman banquet, illuminating the form and function of Hellenistic supper/symposium structure. After the data has been put forth, an analysis will then be made of the apparent parallels between the communal meal at Corinth and the banquet meal-type. By the end, it will be shown that an understanding of the

⁵Gregory Dix, *The Shapes of Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 232.

⁶Karl G. Kuhn, “The Lord’s Supper and the Communal Meal at Qumran,” in *The Scrolls and the New Testament*, ed. K. Stendahl and J. Charlesworth (New York: Crossroads, 1992), 65-93, 259-265.

⁷Joseph Fitzmeyer, *First Corinthians*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 426.

Hellenistic banquet will prove fruitful in interpreting Paul's condemnation of the Corinthian church's fellowship meal.

Introducing the Problem

On the night he was to be betrayed, Jesus gathered his followers in a guestroom to celebrate a final meal. The events of the supper, the themes it incorporates, the authenticity of the accounts, and the manner in which it was emulated in the early church have all been areas of debate throughout the years.

This meal is important for many reasons. For one, it should be seen as the culmination of the table-fellowship that Jesus exhibited throughout his ministry.⁸ The practice of Jesus sharing meals with sinners is accepted, even by the most liberal of scholars, as being historically reliable information depicting the actions of Christ.⁹ This theme, of Jesus gathering with the outcasts around a meal table, is often lost in current eucharistic thought and debate. N. T. Wright sees the action of Jesus sharing a meal with the outcasts as a pictorial presentation of the inauguration of the kingdom.¹⁰ The eucharist, then, should be seen as a call to grace; a remembrance that God still invites the unworthy to sup at his table.

⁸Edward Foley, "Which Jesus Table? Reflections on Eucharistic Starting Points," *Worship* (Jan 2008): 41-52; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 554.

⁹John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (San Francisco: Harper, 1991), 344.

¹⁰Wright. *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 149.

Secondly, the meal was not only built upon the common dining habits of Jesus, but should also be seen in light of Old Testament meal practices that figured prominently in the life of ancient Israel. There is a wide scholarly consensus that this dinner was Jewish in nature, but there is little agreement as to what kind of Old Testament meal it was: Was the Eucharist a covenant meal, a Passover Seder, or maybe a type of peace offering?¹¹ There are good arguments for seeing themes from these meal traditions interwoven into the Last Supper narrative.¹² The meals and feasts of the Old Testament were often pictures of God acting on behalf of Israel, and therefore serve as memorials of those events.¹³ The eucharist is the pinnacle of such meals, signifying the remembrance of Christ's salvific death. The words of the new covenant (καινή διαθήκη) set this meal apart from all others, bathing the eucharist in the language of covenant. This is a significant idea that receives more detailed treatment in the appendix of this thesis.

There has also been a surge in scholarship that views the eucharist as being more influenced by the meal forms of the Intertestamental period.¹⁴ This vast amount of literature hones in on the Jewish meals of the Second Temple Period and the communal meal at Qumran as probable precedents to the Last Supper. However, as Blomberg notes,

¹¹Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhowe (London: The Faith Press, 1966), 45.

¹²For covenant themes, see: Darwell Stone, "Lord's Supper" in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings, John Selbie, and John Lambert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 66; I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 806; For Passover themes, see: J. Jeremias, *The Eucharist Words of Jesus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955); and for an analysis of the peace offering and how it factors in to the eucharist discussion, see: C. John Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 1-23.

¹³I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 77.

¹⁴Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, trans. Dorothea H.G. Reeve (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953); Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945).

there were a variety of meals both in the Old Testament and in the Jewish world of the first century, and an attempt to analyze them all in conjunction with the study of the eucharist is beyond the scope of this thesis.¹⁵

A third important aspect of the Last Supper is the eschatological expectation it symbolized.¹⁶ Drawing significance from Isaiah 25:6-8, which tells of the messianic banquet that is to come at the consummation of the age, Jesus tells his disciples that he will once again drink wine with them in the kingdom (Mk 14:25). Paul will tell the Corinthians that by properly observing the Lord's Supper they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor 11:26). This longing of fulfillment, when God will lavish blessings upon his people in the form of a great feast, is most poignantly depicted in Revelation 19:7-9. Blomberg writes that the wedding feast of the Lamb is "a stunning portrait of the intimacy of table fellowship that all God's people will enjoy with all the company of the redeemed of every age when Christ returns."¹⁷ Therefore, the last meal of Jesus and the continued fellowship meals of the church were saturated with messianic expectation.

As already mentioned, the Last Supper was a culmination. It was the pinnacle of the themes that weave in and out of Old Testament meals and feasts. It was the last in long line of meals that marked Jesus' ministry, a practice that challenged social boundaries and took on revolutionary meaning.¹⁸ It also foreshadowed a future banquet,

¹⁵Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness: Jesus' Meals with Sinners*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 165-66.

¹⁶Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 261.

¹⁷Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 29.

¹⁸Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 431

which places it in the tradition of OT prophetic and cultic meals like the one celebrated at Qumran.¹⁹ While attention should be paid to the long line of meal practices, themes, and influences that culminated in the Last Supper, there is also much scholarship on what happened after the event.²⁰ The eucharist became not only *an* act of worship, but *the* predominant unifying element of worship in the early church.²¹ With so much work dedicated to understanding the variants in early ecclesiastic practice, there seems to be very little done specifically on the contemporary meal-types that influenced the eucharist observance in the early church.

The earliest record concerning the events of the Lord's Supper is Paul's first letter to the Corinthian church. In 11:23-26, Paul gives the "words of institution," using the language of liturgy and tradition to reiterate the significance of the meal. This passage is many times ripped from its context and wrongly applied to contemporary eucharist practices. The pericope must extend to the preceding verses, where Paul tells the Corinthians, in regards to their communal meal, οὐκ ἐπαίνῳ, "I will not praise you" (17, 22).

Why is the meal not praiseworthy? Lietzmann argues that it was because the Corinthians failed to see the bread and wine as the presence of Christ and viewed it merely as a normal meal.²² Paul's criticism, however, is not aimed at the liturgical observance of the sacrament, but is a rebuke against the social inequality being displayed at the table. Gunther Bornkamm argues that the problem is with the conduct of the

¹⁹Kuhn, "The Lord's Supper," 65-93, 259-265.

²⁰Paul Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

²¹One of the best treatments on this idea is I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*.

²²Lietzmann, *Mass*, 207-08.

Corinthians during the communal meal that takes place before the liturgical eucharistic rites. This behavior makes it impossible for the church to worthily participate in the Lord's Supper.²³ Paul writes that "each one goes ahead with his own meal" (11:20-21), instead of waiting for the arrival of others (11:33-34). Joseph Fitzmeyer writes, "Thus the celebration of the Lord's Supper has become an occasion for social discrimination and divisive conduct."²⁴ Therefore, some exegetical work is in order to illuminate the reasons for Paul's criticism of the Corinthian fellowship meal. It will then be argued that the proper context for interpreting 1 Corinthians 11 is the Hellenistic banquet.

This is merely the beginning of a discussion on the importance of the Lord's Supper, both theologically and practically, its many antecedents, the forms it took in the early church, and the manner in which it should be observed today. Not even mentioned are the parallel texts, which offer unique problems of their own (Matt 26:26-29; Mark 14:14:22-25; Luke 22:15-20). What emerges immediately is the immense scope of an undertaking in the study of eucharistic origins. Before looking at the meal practice in the Corinthian church, some limitations will be placed on this study.

Limitations

Since there is such a wide library of work on the Lord's Supper, some self-imposed limitations will be placed on the research of this thesis. First, the only text that will be thoroughly examined is 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. This is only one of the four accounts of the Last Supper narrative. The present author admits that to perform any

²³Gunther Bornkamm, "Lord's Supper and Church in Paul," in *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969).

²⁴Joseph Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, Anchor Bible Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 427.

conclusive study on the origins of the eucharist all the texts must be examined alongside of each other. The goal of this work, however, is not to argue conclusively on any matter other than this: to see if the Corinthian church modeled their meal after the Greco-Roman banquet. Thus, this thesis only hopes to complement current scholarship on eucharistic origins, not revolutionize it.

Secondly, there are numerous proposals for which ancient meal-type was the most-likely forerunner of the eucharist. There is neither time nor space available here to argue against these hypotheses, nor do the conclusions here presented exclude the possible influences from other traditions. This thesis will only seek to show how the banquet model influenced the meal practice of the Corinthian church. In the exegetical work, some analysis will be given of the Passover meal. This is done not to argue for or against a Passover model for the eucharist, but to show its influence on the words and actions of Christ during the Last Supper. Time is further devoted to this topic in a separate appendix. This thesis will not argue for there being one and only one prototypical meal for the eucharist. All that will be shown is that there are traces of banquet form and ideology in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.

II. AN EXEGESIS OF 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

Dividing the Table (11:17-22)

17. τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶ ὅτι οὐκ εἰς τὸ κρεῖσσον ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ ἥσσον συνέρχεσθε

Paul begins with the nominative absolute τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων.²⁵ The τοῦτο could refer to the preceding instructions in 11:3-16.²⁶ It could also be a hinge phrase, referring both to the previous directives and the following commands.²⁷ However, its relationship to the rest of the sentence, with δέ serving as an adversative, shows the close tie of this phrase to the instructions that follow in 11:17-34.²⁸ Also, “Paul’s use of οὐκ ἐπαινῶ in this verse signals a deliberate and conscious retraction of his ἐπαινῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς in 11:2.”²⁹ Paul once again uses the phrase οὐκ ἐπαινῶ in verses 22, creating a verbal bookend to Paul’s criticism concerning the abuse of the Corinthian meal practice.

One would expect Paul to follow up this statement (τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων) with the content of instruction.³⁰ What one finds, however, is Paul’s explanation for why the

²⁵David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 536, n. 1.

²⁶C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Harper’s New Testament Commentaries (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 260.

²⁷A. Lindemann, *Der erste Korintherbrief*, Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 9/1 (Tubingen: Mohr, 2000), 249.

²⁸Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 536.

²⁹Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 856.

³⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 536.

One would expect Paul to follow up this statement (τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων) with the content of instruction.³⁰ What one finds, however, is Paul's explanation for why the Corinthian communal meal is not worthy of his praise (οὐκ ἐπαινῶ). Paul's criticism is aimed at what occurs when the Corinthians "come together" (συνέρχεσθε). This verb is used by Paul five times from verse 17 to verse 34. Fee writes that it is "one of the key words that holds the argument together...and probably had become a semitechnical word for the 'gathering together' of the people of God for worship."³¹ In fact, in the very next verse Paul writes συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ, using the adverbial participle of συνερχομαι, creating a parallel with ἐκκλησίᾳ. This gives some illumination to what is meant by "gathering together" in v. 17-18. The repetition of συνερχομαι in this "specific eucharistic context denotes not simply *assembling together* but the meeting you hold as a church."³²

It is at this practice, in which the Corinthian Christians come together to celebrate their status as the people of God, that Paul writes sharp critique. Paul utilizes strong language, stating that in reality the assembling of the church does more harm than good. Most translations render the phrase οὐκ εἰς τὸ κρεῖσσον ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ ἥσσον in 11:17 with the English idiom "not for the better, but for the worse."³³ The phrase is introduced by ὅτι, which here carries a causal sense, showing the reason for Paul's lack of praise concerning the gathering of the church. The Corinthians' failure was not one in which

³⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 536.

³¹Ibid.

³²Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 856.

³³ESV, NASB, KJV, ASV, NKJV. The NLT gives the reading "For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together;" a reading also favored by the NIV.

they neglected the assembling of themselves together (cf. Heb 10:25), but their failure was “truly to be God’s new people when they gathered; here there was to be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free.”³⁴

18. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν
ὑπάρχειν καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω

Paul now delves into the reasons why the church meetings at Corinth were more harmful than beneficial. He begins by writing πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ, meaning “in the first place,” or “first of all.”³⁵ The phrase is emphatic, since there is no “second of all.”³⁶ The content of Paul’s argument is based upon news he has heard about the gatherings of the Corinthian church. Paul writes συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν. The verb ἀκούω could be a continuous present, giving the idea of “I constantly am hearing,”³⁷ or it may simply carry the idea “I hear,” as most translations render it.³⁸ When the Corinthians come together in ἐκκλησίᾳ (as a church, in assembly),³⁹ word has reached Paul’s ears that there are schisms.

Paul used σχίσματα earlier in the letter, writing: “I appeal to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions

³⁴Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 536.

³⁵Ibid.; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 537.

³⁶R. F. Collins, *First Corinthians* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 421.

³⁷Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1914), 239.

³⁸NASB, ESV, ASV, NRSV, KJV, NIV.

³⁹Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 536.

[σχίσματα] among you” (1:10). There is a difference between the σχίσματα spoken of in 1:10-12 and the ones mentioned here. Thiselton writes:

In 1:10-12 the splits seem to reflect tensions between *different ethos of different house groups*. The splits are external to given groups, although internal to the whole church of Corinth. Here, however, *the very house meeting itself reflects splits between the socially advantaged and the socially disadvantaged*.⁴⁰

Naylor writes that Paul’s critique of “divisions” in 1:10 was directed at “factions coalescing behind certain leaders,” while here “the *schismata* are apparently between the more and the less affluent in the church.”⁴¹ Garland also echoes this thought: “The ‘divisions’ that he is concerned about are not theological schisms (cf. 1:10). They are rooted in the socioeconomic gulf between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots.’”⁴² Murphy-O’Connor shows that the disparity between members of the early Christian communities created an atmosphere conducive to dissension.⁴³ As shown in the previous verse, Paul views gatherings that divide the body of Christ as worse than not assembling at all. Garland writes that these schisms nullify “the very purpose for gathering together for worship in the name of Christ. It contradicts what the Lord’s Supper proclaims as the foundation of the church: Christ’s sacrificial giving of his life for others.”⁴⁴

Paul responds to the news he has heard concerning the divisions in the Corinthian church by saying καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω, translated by the ESV as “and I believe it in part.”

⁴⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 857, italics in original.

⁴¹Peter Naylor, *Study Commentary on 1 Corinthians* (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2004), 290.

⁴²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 537.

⁴³J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 273.

⁴⁴Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 537.

This may reflect Paul's caution in believing these tales.⁴⁵ Perhaps he does not want to believe such rumors, but they come to him from a credible source.⁴⁶ Fee writes, "this is Paul's way of crediting his informants with veracity, but also of bridging the sociological gap between them and the wealthy who are guilty of the misdeeds."⁴⁷ Hays views it as an emphatic "I can't believe it!"⁴⁸ Winter, however, argues that μέρος here should not be translated "partly," but rather "matter" or "report," giving the idea of "I believe a certain report."⁴⁹ The best view, given the tone of sharp critique that runs through this passage, seems to be that of Mitchell and Witherington who see this as a rhetorical device expressing a kind of "mock disbelief."⁵⁰

19. δὲ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι ἵνα καὶ οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῖν

The use of γὰρ shows that this verse is meant to further explain Paul's vexation at the Corinthians abuse of the assembly.⁵¹ The use of γὰρ καὶ is rare in the works of Paul (cf. 2 Cor 2:9; Rom 13:6.) Some translations render the phrase emphatically as "no

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Robertson and Plummer, *1 Corinthians*, 239; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 261.

⁴⁷Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 537.

⁴⁸Richard Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1997), 195.

⁴⁹B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 159-63.

⁵⁰M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Lexington: Westminster/John Knox, 1993), 263-64; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 247.

⁵¹Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 858; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 538.

doubt.”⁵² Fee, however, argues that the word combination is “intended to signal an additional reason to the one stated or presupposed in what has already been said.”⁵³ He gives the translation “There is also this further reason for believing what I heard.”⁵⁴

Paul’s use of αἰρέσεις should be seen as parallel to σχίσματα, giving the idea of “divisions, dissensions, factions.”⁵⁵ What Paul says next is somewhat of a puzzle to contemporary interpreters. He uses the impersonal verb δεῖ, which carries the idea of “it must be” or “it is necessary,” in reference to these factions.⁵⁶ The ESV renders this, along with the prepositional phrase ἐν ὑμῖν, as: “for there must be factions among you.” This seems like a complete reversal from Paul’s condemnations of the Corinthian factions in 1:10-17. What is one to make of this statement?

The ESV renders the ἵνα -clause that follows as showing purpose, giving the idea of “in order that.” The NASB translates ἵνα as “so that,” displaying the idea of result. The grammar allows for either reading, but there does seem to be a theological distinction between the two. The rest of the phrase reads οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γίνονται ἐν ὑμῖν. Garland renders it: “in order that the elite might be evident among you.”⁵⁷ Barrett translates it “in order that the genuine among you may stand out.”⁵⁸ Barclay writes that

⁵²NIV, GNB, JB.

⁵³Fee, 538, n. 33.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 261; Fee, *1 Corinthians* 538, n. 34.

⁵⁶Marion L. Soards, *1 Corinthians*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 233.

⁵⁷Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 535.

⁵⁸Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 259.

the divisions are necessary “so that it may become clear which of you are of tried and true quality.”⁵⁹ What is Paul saying here?

Perhaps Paul is writing about eschatological judgment. This view holds that there appears to be some divine purpose (hence reading the ἵνα -clause as “in order that”) in the divisions necessitating that these factions occur in order to separate true and false believers.⁶⁰ Hays writes, “this idea, foreshadowing the theme of God’s judgment that appears explicitly in verses 27-32, is rooted in Jewish apocalyptic soil.”⁶¹ In this view, οἱ δόκιμοι are seen as the elect approved by God.⁶² However, it is unlikely that Paul would employ such apocalyptic language when addressing the Corinthian church, a primarily Greek audience.

An alternate view is that factions (αἰρέσεις) are permissible and even necessary, while divisions (σχίσματα) are to be avoided.⁶³ Leon Morris takes this view, translating αἰρέσεις as “differences,” implying differing opinions that are arrived at through genial conversation.⁶⁴ This interpretation sees δόκιμοι as “those that are approved.”⁶⁵ Grosheide comments on the existence of *differences* and *divisions*: “A good discussion will show which Christians are the best founded in their faith, but it does not create

⁵⁹William Barclay, *The Letters to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 100.

⁶⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 538; Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 262.

⁶¹Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 195.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³F.W. Grosheide, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 266.

⁶⁴Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 156.

⁶⁵Grosheide, *1 Corinthians*, 266.

divisions.”⁶⁶ This is perhaps the weakest view, as Paul does not seem to insinuate much difference between αἰρέσεις and σχίσματα.

Yet another view sees Paul writing that these factions are inevitable. Orr and Walther write, “With apparent resignation he accepts the inevitability of *factions* as a means of testing.”⁶⁷ The purpose of this inevitable period of testing, as Hodge puts it, is “to show who have stood the test and are worthy of approval. The opposite group is composed of ‘reprobates.’”⁶⁸ Thiselton composes a rather ingenious argument: it is not *Paul* who is saying that the divisions are unavoidable, but his readers.⁶⁹ He renders the verse: “For ‘dissensions are unavoidable,’ it is claimed among you, in order that those who are tried and true among you may be visibly revealed.”⁷⁰ Therefore, to Thiselton, Paul is stating the argument of his readers to show its incoherence. This view has some appeal to it, but Thiselton perhaps stretches the language too much in an attempt to read into Paul’s words.

Perhaps the best way to view this statement by Paul is through the lens of irony.⁷¹ Garland writes, “It is far more likely that he expresses bitter irony about these factions rather than affirming their eschatological necessity.”⁷² If this is the case, δοκιμοί is not

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), 269, italics added.

⁶⁸Charles Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, Crossway Classic Commentaries (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 198.

⁶⁹Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 858-59.

⁷⁰Ibid, 848.

⁷¹R. A. Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, Abingdon New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998), 159.

⁷²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 539.

used in a favorable sense, demarcating “approved Christians.” Rather, it carries the idea of “dignitaries” and is an argument against the wealthy elite of the church.⁷³ Campbell gives the satirical translation: “for there actually has to be discrimination in your meetings, so that, if you please, the elite may stand out from the rest.”⁷⁴ Thiselton notes that this is an acceptable interpretation, but that it “construes Paul’s pastoral response as unusually sharp and sarcastic.”⁷⁵ But as will be shown throughout this passage, Paul will give sharp reproach for the abuse of the fellowship table.

20. συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν

Paul has now set the stage to properly critique the Corinthian assembly. He begins with the emphatic and summative “therefore” (οὖν),⁷⁶ which directs his previous rebukes of divisions at a singular practice: the Lord’s Supper. The repetition of “gather together” (συνερχομένων) once again signifies a church assembly, and this genitive absolute is modified by the phrase ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ giving the idea of “meeting together in the same place.”⁷⁷ What is the purpose of this gathering? It is implied by the negative οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν. The οὐκ ἔστιν, when used with the aorist infinitive φαγεῖν, could denote logical impossibility, giving the idea of “it is not possible for you to

⁷³R. A. Campbell, “Does Paul Acquiesce in Divisions at the Lord’s Supper?” *Novum Testamentum* 33 (1991): 68.

⁷⁴Ibid., 69-70.

⁷⁵Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 860.

⁷⁶Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 539.

⁷⁷Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 862.

eat the Lord's Supper."⁷⁸ Thiselton sees this as an overly complicated reading, preferring the simple "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat."⁷⁹ The church should have been gathering to partake of the Lord's Supper, a communal meal and Eucharistic rite. κυριακὸν is a possessive adjective, giving the idea of "the Lord's own supper."⁸⁰ The word could be more honorific, reading "consecrated to the Lord."⁸¹ So the δεῖπνον, the meal, that was supposed to belong to and glorify Jesus, was not being celebrated when the Corinthians gathered for church.

21. ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν καὶ ὃς μὲν πεινᾷ ὃς δὲ μεθύει

In contrast to what the church should have been doing, celebrating the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, Paul writes that they instead were practicing ἴδιον δεῖπνον. Garland translates the phrase as "his own meal;" meaning that instead of everyone partaking of a common table, individual meals were being observed at church gatherings.⁸² In order to better ascertain what is grammatically being communicated here, a look must be taken into how the Corinthian meal was probably structured.

Hans Lietzmann describes the practice:

Each brings provisions and wine with him according to his means and thus contributes his share to the common supply. When all are present the meal

⁷⁸H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Corinthians* (Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1892), 1:335.

⁷⁹Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 862.

⁸⁰Gerd Theissen, *"The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth"*, ed. and trans. John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 148.

⁸¹Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 540.

⁸²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 541.

begins, and proceeds with seemly sociability. This is the rule. If, on the other hand, anyone keeps his own food for himself, does not wait for late-comers or even allows them to go hungry while he himself drinks too much, he is sharply reprimanded.⁸³

This meal was referred to in the ancient world as an *eranos*, a type of potluck in which each brought according to his means in order to share with all.⁸⁴ The churches of Paul mainly met in houses.⁸⁵ It was the responsibility of the host to perform the culturally expected deeds of hospitality, including presenting the guests with a meal.⁸⁶ It seems safe to assume, then, that much of church practice took place around the meal table. Therefore, it should be seen as an utmost violation of church unity to exclude fellow Christians from the fellowship table.⁸⁷

There is some confusion in the wording of this verse as to which word is carrying the most emphasis. Some scholars point to *προλαμβάνει* being the practice that Paul is here criticizing. The word could carry with it a temporal idea, giving the meaning of “to take beforehand.”⁸⁸ The problem then, as the NIV translates it, is that each one “goes ahead without waiting for anyone else.” Scholars who hold to this reading see the scenario as this: the wealthy members arrive while the working class and the slaves are held up with obligations; and by the time the church is completely assembled, there was

⁸³Lietzmann, *Mass*, 185.

⁸⁴Peter Lampe, “The Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party: Exegesis of a Cultural Context (1 Cor 11:17-34),” *Affirmation* 4:2 (Fall 1991):1-15; cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae* 8.365AB.

⁸⁵Theissen, *Social Setting*, 83-91.

⁸⁶See John Koenig, *New Testament Hospitality: Partnership with Strangers as Promise and Mission*, *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).

⁸⁷As a parallel, see 3 John 9-11 on the consequences of inhospitality within the church.

⁸⁸William Arndt, Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 872.

little food and wine left for the late-comers while some members had already overindulged.⁸⁹

Some scholars place the emphasis on ἑκάστος, which highlights the problem as being one of staunch individualism.⁹⁰ Coupled with τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον, which Thiessen views as “private dinners,” the picture being painted is that the wealthy members of the church were consuming meals that were superior in quality and quantity to the food given to the poorer members of the church.⁹¹ So, which emphasis is more likely? Were the wealthier Corinthians merely getting a head start on the working class members? Or were they partaking of food and wine of higher quality and greater portions *in front* of their less affluent brethren?

While προλαμβάνει can have a temporal meaning, it could also be translated as “consume” or “devour.”⁹² This rendering gives the passage a stronger sense. The members were “expected to share their resources, the rich presumably, to bring more than they needed and to make provision for the poor. In fact, the rich were bringing but eating and drinking the extra supplies themselves.”⁹³ This translation is supported by the syntax in two ways. First, the phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, utilizing the aorist infinitive, indicates what

⁸⁹See Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth*, 160-61; Peter Lampe, “Das korinthische Herrenahl im Schnittpunkt hellenistisch Mahlpraxis und paulinischer Theologia Crucis (1 Kor 11, 17-34),” *Zeitschrift für neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 82:183-312; “The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross,” *Interpretation* 48:36-49.

⁹⁰Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 194.

⁹¹Thiessen, *1 Corinthians*, 147-50.

⁹²Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 197.

⁹³Barrett, *First Epistle*, 262.

is taking place in conjunction with the meal and in the presence of all.⁹⁴ Secondly, the use of ἕκαστος implies that all are present, both the drunk and the hungry.⁹⁵ If this reading is correct, then the rich were *devouring* the portion of the meal that should have been shared with the poor. In satisfying their own desires in greed and gluttony, the Corinthians could not have communal fellowship with each other and with Christ around the Lord's table. There was no κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, only self-serving individual dinners. Soards writes, "Some apparently had more means, time, and goods than others, and distinctions were made."⁹⁶

The verse ends with the phrase καὶ ὃς μὲν πεινᾷ ὃς δὲ μεθύει. The ESV gives the simple reading, "One goes hungry, another gets drunk." In Fee's view, Paul takes "words from both parts of a meal, eating and drinking, and express them in their extremes."⁹⁷ There is not a literal *drunkenness* being spoken against here, but *overindulgence*; and not real *hunger*, but a meal of less quality and quantity. Morris, however, sees Paul as using these words literally to express the "sharp contrast between the hungry poor, lacking even necessary food, and the drunken rich."⁹⁸ Whether the words are merely for argument or truly are indicative of the practice, Paul makes it clear that it is not the Lord's Supper being celebrated. Garland writes that the Corinthian meal "hardly proclaims the meaning of the Lord's death for all. Call it what you will, but do not call it the Lord's Supper."⁹⁹

⁹⁴Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 541; Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 541.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 234.

⁹⁷Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 543.

⁹⁸Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 157.

22. μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν ἢ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ θεοῦ καταφρονεῖτε καὶ καταισχύνετε τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας τί ὑμῖν εἶπω ἐπαινέσω ὑμᾶς ἐν τούτῳ οὐκ ἐπαινῶ

Paul here continues in his trademark style of asking rhetorical questions.¹⁰⁰ Paul is obviously addressing the wealthy church members.¹⁰¹ The questions asked by Paul present his argument in two points. The first is that the Corinthians are failing to see the sacredness of the communal table of the Lord and are treating it like an ordinary meal. The first question (μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν) contains “a double negative in the Greek and amounts to stinging sarcasm.”¹⁰² Fee tries to retain the sarcasm of the μὴ/οὐκ usage with the translation, “For surely it cannot be, can it?”¹⁰³ The question is meant to show worship as a sacred time and the meal table as a sacred place.¹⁰⁴

More to the point, the poor probably did not possess the means and space to cook food in their own houses, which may have been a luxury only enjoyed by the privileged.¹⁰⁵ Osiek comments, “For the poor, a formal meal was had only for special occasions...thus the regular Christian community meal would have had far greater

⁹⁹Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 542.

¹⁰⁰Naylor, *1 Corinthians*, 292; cf. Rom 3:1-9, 27-31.

¹⁰¹S.C. Barton, “Paul’s Sense of Place: An Anthropological Approach to Community Formation in Corinth,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 225-46.

¹⁰²Soards, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

¹⁰³Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 543.

¹⁰⁴Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 865.

¹⁰⁵Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 542.

significance than a meal would among the wealthy.”¹⁰⁶ The point of the meal was not to satisfy one’s hunger, but to come together as the people of God, displaying the Gospel in the unity of fellowship and remembering the work of Christ that made such unity possible.¹⁰⁷

The second question drives to the heart of the matter. Paul sincerely asks the wealthy Corinthians, “Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?” (NASB). καταφρονεῖτε carries the idea of “to show contempt for.”¹⁰⁸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας is not just a reference to the poor in the church, but to the entire community of believers.¹⁰⁹ τοῦ θεοῦ is a genitive of possession, showing the community to belong to God.¹¹⁰ Leon Morris writes, “to behave like the Corinthians is to despise the *church* which is no less than the church *of God*. It is to despise the poor (notice the connection between the poor and the church).”¹¹¹ Barrett argues, “It is by failure here that the Corinthians profane the sacramental aspect of the Supper – not by liturgical error, or by under-valuing it, but by prefixing it to an unbrotherly act.”¹¹² The ones that are humiliated are the τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας, which Winter translates as the “have-nots.”¹¹³ Most

¹⁰⁶C. Osiek, “The Family in Early Christianity: ‘Family Values Revisited,’” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 (1996): 12.

¹⁰⁷Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 199.

¹⁰⁸Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 542.

¹⁰⁹Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 544.

¹¹⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 864.

¹¹¹Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 157, italics in original.

¹¹²Barrett, *First Epistle*, 264.

¹¹³B. W. Winter, “The Lord’s Supper at Corinth: An Alternative Reconstruction,” *Reformed Theological Review* 37 (1978): 73-82.

commentators see this as a general reference to the poor, but Barrett makes the connection with οἰκίας and gives the possible translation, “those who do not have houses.”¹¹⁴

Paul ends this section as he began it. As in verse 17, Paul writes οὐκ ἐπαινῶ, meaning, “I do not praise you.” By using this phrase, Paul is bracketing his condemnation of the Corinthian fellowship by showing its total lack of praise-worthiness. By way of summary, Paul’s argument from 11:17-22 was that the Corinthian observance of the eucharist was marred by greed-induced disunity. This was exhibited around the meal table in the mistreatment of the poorer members of the church by their more affluent brethren. Paul writes that these church meetings were “not for the better, but for the worse” (11:17). The rich devoured their portions and those that were meant to be shared with the poor, overindulging on food and drink while some in their midst went without. This behavior was divisive, creating a distinct visual barrier between the “haves” and the “have nots.” There was nothing in the actions of the Corinthians that emulated the self-giving of Jesus pictured in the eucharist. Morris writes, “There is no place whatever for praise.”¹¹⁵ Naylor comments, “repeating the sad statement of 11:17...[is] in effect a most severe rebuke.”¹¹⁶ And so, it is on this somber note that Paul turns from confrontation to instruction.

¹¹⁴Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 263.

¹¹⁵Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 157.

¹¹⁶Naylor, *1 Corinthians*, 293.

The Words of Institution (11:23-26)

23. ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον

Now that he has molded his argument as to why the Corinthian meal practice was not worthy of his praise, Paul turns his attention to describing the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον as it should be practiced παρέλαβον (“received”) and παρέδωκα (“handed on”) signify the transmission of liturgy and practice.¹¹⁷ This language signifies the passing on of traditions in the worlds of Judaism and Hellenism.¹¹⁸ Blomberg argues that this should not be interpreted as a direct revelation that Christ granted Paul, but rather as the transmission of the words of Christ by the disciples throughout the burgeoning Christian community.¹¹⁹ Although direct revelation is not in view here, Paul views Jesus as being the originator of the meal and appeals to his authoritative example.¹²⁰

The tradition that Paul received and has already passed on to the Corinthians describes what happened ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδετο, which translates as “on the night he was handed over.”¹²¹ παρεδίδετο could be taken a number of ways: it could refer to the arrest of Jesus as a result of Judas’ betrayal; it could carry the passive idea of “handed over by God”; or it could have a middle function, meaning “he handed himself over.”¹²²

¹¹⁷Horsley, *1 Corinthians*, 160.

¹¹⁸Barrett, *First Epistle*, 264.

¹¹⁹Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 229.

¹²⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 545.

¹²¹Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, 436.

¹²²Ibid.

Whatever sense the verb communicates, the emphasis is on why the dinner observed on this night was something special. Garland writes, “this ‘handing over’ and Jesus’ interpretation of what that meant in the words spoken over the bread and the cup mark this meal off from all others as something unique.”¹²³

By setting up the account of the Last Supper in this manner, referring to the night of Jesus’ betrayal and arrest in which he knowingly gave himself up to be crucified, Paul now begins to describe the meal of Jesus in contrast to the selfish way in which the Corinthians were observing the eucharist.¹²⁴ Paul then launches into what has liturgically been labeled “the words of institution.”¹²⁵ Before taking a look at the words themselves, this question, posed by Fee, will be examined: “How does this material function as a response to the Corinthian abuse?”¹²⁶

This passage is unique in the letters of Paul, for “it is the only instance where he cites at some length from the Jesus traditions that would eventually appear in our Gospels.”¹²⁷ Andrew McGowan has surveyed early liturgical institution narratives and offers some insights into this passage.¹²⁸ McGowan writes, “There is no doubt that the institution narrative is here presented as of some liturgical significance, broadly speaking, but it is also clear that the problem at Corinth was one of ethics as much as or more than

¹²³Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 546.

¹²⁴Ibid., 545.

¹²⁵Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 229.

¹²⁶Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 545.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Andrew McGowan, “Is There a Liturgical Text in This Gospel?” *JBL* 118 (1999): 73-87.

of ritual.”¹²⁹ This gives some life and flexibility to the eucharist. In McGowan’s view, Paul is not shackling the church’s observance of the meal to a recitation of words and repetition of ritual. McGowan writes, “the narrative and the call to ‘do this in memory of me’ would seem to lead to ‘thanksgiving’...more easily than the recitation of the words ‘this is my body that is for you.’”¹³⁰ I. Howard Marshall agrees with McGowan’s assessment, arguing that this text is “a description of what Jesus did at a meal” and not a binding command of “what the church ought to do.”¹³¹

Another interpretive element that needs to be dealt with before going forward with the exegesis is the bread-supper-cup sequence that Paul describes.¹³² Peter Lampe writes that the Eucharist, as communicated to the Corinthians, followed this three-step progression: “First, the Eucharistic bread is blessed and broken. Then, a nourishing dinner takes place. Finally, the dinner ends with the blessing of the cup and the drinking from it.”¹³³ Hofius writes, “the Lord’s Supper *paradosis* handed on by Paul in 1 Cor 11:23b-25 presupposes, as the words μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι clearly attest, a meal between the bread rite and the cup rite.”¹³⁴ Paul is then framing the communal meal between the bread-word and cup-word.¹³⁵ Though placing a meal in the middle of a church service

¹²⁹Ibid., 78.

¹³⁰Ibid., 80.

¹³¹Marshall, *Last Supper*, 111.

¹³²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 546.

¹³³Lampe, “The Eucharist: Identifying with Christ on the Cross,” *Interpretation* 48 (1994): 37.

¹³⁴O. Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Supper Tradition: Reflections on 1 Corinthians 11:23b-35,” in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts*, ed. B. F. Meyer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 88.

¹³⁵Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 546.

may seem strange to contemporary churchgoers, Das writes that a worship service without a community meal would have equally been as strange to the Corinthians.¹³⁶ Much work has been done in analyzing the sequence in which the elements are blessed. Two of the most prominent voices of the last century were Hans Lietzmann and Gregory Dix, who place Paul's sequence of blessing next to the Synoptics in order to discern strands of liturgy.¹³⁷ Since analyzing the other accounts of the Last Supper will be to no avail in the current study, it is now time to return to the exegetical study of Corinthians.

Paul writes that Jesus' first action was ἔλαβεν ἄρτον. This is the same formulaic phrase used in Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, and Luke 22:19. The phrase "he took bread" should be seen in its original Passover context.¹³⁸ Though there has been much debate on the topic, Jeremias gives strong evidence that the meal Jesus shared with his disciples was a Passover meal.¹³⁹ The elements, such as the ἄρτον, were signposts used to tell a story, drawing the worshipper back in memory to the time of slavery and redemption.¹⁴⁰ Someone, typically a younger son, was to ask the leading question, "Why is this night different from other nights?" To which the host, usually the paterfamilias, would reply by recounting the story of slavery and exodus and explaining the significance of the elements of the meal. In this way, Jesus acts as a proper host, blessing the bread and

¹³⁶A. A. Das, "1 Corinthians 11:17-34 Revisited," *Concordia Theological Review* 62 (1998): 188.

¹³⁷Particularly, see Lietzmann, *Mass*, 166.

¹³⁸Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 549.

¹³⁹Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 15-88.

¹⁴⁰Ray Carlton Jones, Jr., "The Lord's Supper and the Concept of Anamnesis," *Word and World* 6 (Fall 1986): 443.

wine in Passover language that looks to a new deliverance.¹⁴¹ Wellhausen argues that ἄρτον only referred to “leavened bread,” and therefore could not be used to describe the bread of Passover.¹⁴² That view does not stand up to the evidence, since the LXX uses ἄρτον to describe the showbread.¹⁴³ Paul also uses this word in the first letter to the Corinthians prior to this passage (5:8, 10:16-17). This will be further discussed later on in this thesis, showing the connection that Paul is drawing between bread and body, Christ and church. For now, the words ἔλαβεν ἄρτον show how Jesus is using the Passover context to “reinterpret the meaning of the bread, as he was distributing it, in terms of his own death.”¹⁴⁴

24. καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν

After Jesus takes the loaf, he “gives thanks” for it. Paul, along with Luke, employs the word εὐχαριστήσας, which is the participle that gives rise to the common name of the rite, the Eucharist. Matthew and Mark use εὐλογήσας, which means, “having blessed.”¹⁴⁵ Some have viewed εὐχαριστήσας as arising from Hellenistic Christian communities while εὐλογήσας was a more Jewish word, but Fitzmeyer sees

¹⁴¹Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 871-74.

¹⁴²J. Wellhausen, “*Arton eklasen*, Mc 14,22,” *ZNW* 17 (1906): 182; see also Lietzmann, *Mass*, 173.

¹⁴³Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 62-65.

¹⁴⁴Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 550.

¹⁴⁵Fitzmeyer, *First Corinthians*, 437.

both as being of Palestinian background.¹⁴⁶ Jeremias views this simply as a saying of grace over the meal, which seems likely.¹⁴⁷

Having taken and blessed the bread, Jesus proceeds to break it. ἔκλασεν is a verb that is only used in the NT to express the breaking of bread at a meal.¹⁴⁸ The action itself does not require a metaphorical interpretation, referring subtly to the impending death of Christ, but is a phrase only used to denote a fellowship meal.¹⁴⁹ Jesus now speaks words over the bread, reinterpreting the Passover tradition and drawing the themes of deliverance around himself. He says τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. A literal reading is, “this of mine is the body which is for you.”¹⁵⁰ Engberg-Pedersen sees ἐστὶν as “signifies, stands for, represents.”¹⁵¹ Winter argues that τοῦτό, being neuter, cannot refer to ἄρτον, a masculine noun.¹⁵² Rather, the referent is to the actions of Christ in distributing the bread to his disciples.¹⁵³ Garland sees this as disputable grammatically, but agrees “it is clear that Paul contrasts Jesus’ self-sacrifice at the Last Supper with the Corinthians’ selfishness at their supper.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

¹⁴⁷Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 104, 111.

¹⁴⁸Fitzmeyer, *First Corinthians*, 437; cf. Luke 24:20; Acts 2:46, 27:35; Mark 8:6, 19, 14:22; Matt 14:19, 15:36, 26:26.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 546.

¹⁵¹T. Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the Forms of Paul’s Theological Argument,” in *Pauline Theology*, ed. D.M. Hay (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 2:117.

¹⁵²B. W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 154.

¹⁵³Ibid.

¹⁵⁴Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 547.

The text and context leave little room for the traditional Catholic view of transubstantiation and the Lutheran concept of consubstantiation.¹⁵⁵ Paul is not here arguing for the presence of Christ, real or mystical. There is a sense of identification, however. The τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν echoes the Suffering Servant language of Isaiah 53.¹⁵⁶ Thiselton writes, “the work of the Suffering Servant...oscillates between *identification* and *substitution*, as does σῶμα here.”¹⁵⁷ Fee goes on, “By offering them a share in ‘his body’ in this way, he invited his disciples to participate in the meaning of the benefits of that death.”¹⁵⁸

Another element unique to the Luke/Paul strand of liturgy is the phrase τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.¹⁵⁹ Blomberg gives the translation, “do this as my memorial.”¹⁶⁰ Garland draws further meaning from the Passover context, writing that this phrase:

commands ritual remembrance of this foundational saving event...It is related to Jewish liturgical remembrance that praises and proclaims the mighty acts of God...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...They are to imitate Christ’s example of self-giving. Everything they do in their meal should accord with his self-sacrifice for others.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵Ibid.; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 550.

¹⁵⁶Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 551; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 877.

¹⁵⁷Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 877, italics in original.

¹⁵⁸Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 551.

¹⁵⁹Hodge, *1 Corinthians*, 203.

¹⁶⁰Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 230; cf. Fritz Chenderlin, “*Do This As My Memorial*” (Rome: BIP, 1982).

¹⁶¹Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 548.

Like Passover, the eucharist was meant to become a memorial meal. There has been some scholarly debate as to what exactly is being remembered here. Dix argues that more than a “remembrance,” the eucharist is a “re-presentation” of Christ, focusing on the present presence of Christ in the observance of the meal.¹⁶² Jeremias argues that the subject of ἀνάμνησιν is God, meaning that the meal is not to remind man of Christ’s sacrifice, but rather to remind God of the kingdom promises he made in the eucharist.¹⁶³ He writes that the continued observance of the eucharist is “a presentation before God intended to induce God to act.”¹⁶⁴ Fee reacts to this, arguing that it has “a primarily ‘humanward’ point of reference.”¹⁶⁵ Chenderlin argues that Paul purposefully leaves the subject of ἀνάμνησιν ambiguous, and therefore leaves the door open for either interpretation.¹⁶⁶ Paul Jones sums up the debate by saying, “Although no consensus attends the proper translation of anamnesis, scholarship universally agrees that the cultic meal contains a backward reference.”¹⁶⁷ Sound doctrine can be taken from these multiple views: by participating in the eucharist, Christians should remember the self-sacrifice pictured by the crucified Son of God. There should also be a hint of petition in the practice, by which the church longs for consummation in final resurrection glory.

¹⁶²Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), 161-162; also see Joseph M. Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 119.

¹⁶³Jeremias, *1 Corinthians*, 247-249.

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*, 249.

¹⁶⁵Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 552.

¹⁶⁶Chenderlin, *Memorial*, 25.

¹⁶⁷Paul Jones, “The Meaning of the Eucharist: Its Origins in the New Testament Text,” *Encounter* 54 (Spring 1993): 187.

25. ὥσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι λέγων τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι τοῦτο ποιεῖτε ὅσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν

The introductory phrase ὥσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον literally translates, “and likewise the cup.”¹⁶⁸ Many translations take the verb ἔλαβεν, “he took,” from verse 23.¹⁶⁹ The NJB gives a more literal translation, “with the cup after supper.” μετὰ τὸ δειπνῆσαι, “after supper,” indicates that the wine-blessing was said at the conclusion of the fellowship meal.¹⁷⁰ Thiselton writes, “μετὰ with the aorist active articular infinitive, τὸ δειπνῆσαι, means after taking the main meal.”¹⁷¹ This language also seems to show two courses to the communal meal: a dinner followed by a religious rite, with the blessing over the wine marking the transition between the two.¹⁷² This is one of the strongest arguments for seeing the eucharist in terms of the Greco-Roman banquet.

Many scholars argue for seeing “the cup” as the Cup of Blessing, which is the third cup of the Passover feast.¹⁷³ The Cup of Blessing “points forward in time to the coming of the Messiah.”¹⁷⁴ As Jesus takes this cup, which is already weighted with eschatological significance, he says τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι. Barrett gives the translation “this cup is the new covenant in my blood.”¹⁷⁵ These

¹⁶⁸Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 554.

¹⁶⁹NIV, NRSV, KJV, REB.

¹⁷⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 554.

¹⁷¹Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 882.

¹⁷²Dennis Smith, *Symposium*, 188.

¹⁷³Marshall, *Last Supper*, 119.

¹⁷⁴Ray Carlton Jones, Jr., “The Lord’s Supper,” 444.

¹⁷⁵Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 268.

words also draw attention to Jesus' passion, since covenants are typically established through the shedding of blood.¹⁷⁶ Paul uses the modifier *καινή* to describe the covenant. This description serves as an allusion to the prophets of Israel who foresaw the day when YHWH would make a new covenant with his people (cf. Jer 31:31). It is fitting that this *καινή διαθήκη* be ratified by the *αἷμα* of Jesus, recalling the sprinkling of blood that sealed the covenant at Sinai (Ex 24:8) and that has signified its remembrance and renewal throughout Israel's history (Zech 9:11). The words of Jesus are an explicit allusion to the covenant ratification ceremony at Sinai.¹⁷⁷ More than merely drawing thought back to the foot of Sinai, Jesus is giving weight to Jeremiah's promise of a new covenant. I. Howard Marshall writes that the cup "symbolizes the new covenant, in the sense that the new covenant is brought into being by what it signifies, namely the sacrificial death of Jesus."¹⁷⁸ Just as the covenant at Sinai was ratified by the sprinkling of blood and the sharing of a meal, so to the eucharist births the new covenant in similar language and metaphor. *καινή* here is entirely qualitative. "It signifies not a temporal repetition but a new, eschatological beginning."¹⁷⁹ Bock comments, "Oneness is expressed in the sharing of the cup. A new age of salvation will be found in the new, united community...The covenantal reference makes it clear that a new era is in view."¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 547.

¹⁷⁷Darwell Stone, "Lord's Supper" in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings, John Selbie, and John Lambert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 66.

¹⁷⁸I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 806.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 2:1729.

On the heels of the covenant promises of the cup, Paul writes τοῦτο ποιεῖτε ὡς ἅκις ἐὰν πίνετε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. Fee sees this as a repetition of the previous command “‘do this in remembrance’ precisely because this is where his concern lay – not in repetition of the words per se, but in their eating the Lord’s Supper truly in ‘Christ’s honor.’”¹⁸¹ The Corinthians had lost sight of what Jesus’ words and actions signified. By breaking the bread and passing the cup, Jesus was symbolically giving himself to his disciples. Paul emphasizes observing the meal with a sense of memorial, in which the church emulates Jesus’ self-giving. In this way, the church is to picture in its eucharistic observance the truth of the gospel. Fitzmeyer writes, “the directive to repeat what Christ has done preserves the meaning of the death of Jesus and proclaims its redemptive significance.”¹⁸²

26. ὡς ἅκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνετε τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ

Paul now gives the reason why he has recited the Last Supper tradition: “For as often as you eat this loaf and drink the cup, the Lord’s death you proclaim until he comes.”¹⁸³ γὰρ grammatically links this verse with what has preceded it.¹⁸⁴ ὡς ἅκις, when used with the indefinite ἐὰν, gives the idea of “as many times as.”¹⁸⁵ Whenever the

¹⁸¹Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 556.

¹⁸²Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, 444.

¹⁸³Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 548; Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 556.

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 886.

κυριακὸν δεῖπνον is properly observed, the death of Christ is “proclaimed” (καταγγέλλετε is indicative, not imperative).¹⁸⁶

What does it mean to proclaim the Lord’s death? Some assert that the Lord’s death is proclaimed by the action of the rite.¹⁸⁷ Others believe that there was a verbal component, in which a proclamation was made in a homiletic structure.¹⁸⁸ This type of liturgical presentation of the death of Christ resembles the Passover tradition of retelling the Exodus story.¹⁸⁹ Garland, however, sees the emphasis of this proclamation arising from the actions of “eating” and “drinking.”¹⁹⁰ Paul’s purpose of repeating the Last Supper tradition was a corrective not of the Corinthians abuse of the liturgy of the meal, but of the ethos it should represent. Garland writes, “If they are proclaiming the Lord’s death in what they do at the Lord’s Supper, they will not overindulge themselves, despise others, shame them, or allow them to go hungry.”¹⁹¹ Peter Lampe agrees, saying, “in the Eucharist, Christ’s death is also proclaimed and made present by means of our giving ourselves up to others.”¹⁹² Dennis Smith writes, “the purpose of the death of Christ was to create a saved community...Paul finds the most profound meaning of the meal as “Lord’s Supper” in its ability to bring together a disparate people into one

¹⁸⁶Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 548.

¹⁸⁷Hans Lietzmann, *Die Briefe des Apostels Paulus: An die Korinther I, II*, ed. W. G. Kummel. Handbuch zum neuen Testament (Tubingen: Mohr, 1949), 9:58.

¹⁸⁸Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 270.

¹⁸⁹Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, 444.

¹⁹⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 548.

¹⁹¹*Ibid.*, 549.

¹⁹²Lampe, “The Eucharist,” 45.

community.”¹⁹³ Therefore, it is the table unity of the church, which should overflow with love for another and a mutual meeting of needs, that proclaims the community-making power of Christ’s death to the world.

Paul ends the verse by looking to the future consummation of the kingdom. Jeremias sees ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ not temporally, but as a prospective subjunctive, which would signify purpose, giving the meaning “until the goal is reached that he comes.”¹⁹⁴ He argues that the eucharist “proclaims the beginning of the time of salvation and prays for the breaking in of complete fulfillment.”¹⁹⁵ Fee sees this as Paul “reminding the Corinthians of their essentially eschatological existence. They have not yet arrived; at this meal they are to be reminded that there is yet a future for themselves, as well as for all the people of God.”¹⁹⁶ The eucharist should serve as a signpost pointing beyond itself to a greater, yet-to-come feast. Jesus, in his last meal with his disciples, makes a promise that all of history will culminate in a glorious banquet. Paul here is urging the Corinthians to adopt this futuristic view of the messianic banquet into their current eucharistic practice. Thiselton agrees with the assessment, seeing the fellowship meal as “the first preliminary imperfect foretaste of the ‘Supper of the Lamb’ of the final consummation to which the Lord’s Supper points in promise.”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³Smith, *Symposium*, 199-200.

¹⁹⁴Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 253.

¹⁹⁵Ibid, 118.

¹⁹⁶Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 557.

¹⁹⁷Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 888.

Discern the Body (11:27-34)

27. ὥστε ὃς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνη τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναξίως ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου

ὥστε “denotes a logical consequence.”¹⁹⁸ Thus, a sufficient rendering would be “therefore,” as the NASB and ESV have it, or “consequently.”¹⁹⁹ ὃς ἂν is indefinite, meaning “whoever.”²⁰⁰ In the previous verse, Paul employed the second person. Here, he generalizes his argument in the third person indefinite pronoun.²⁰¹ Although τοῦ κυρίου is only attached to τὸ ποτήριον, it should be seen as modifying τὸν ἄρτον as well, giving the idea: “whoever eats the Lord’s loaf or drinks the Lord’s cup.”²⁰² ἀναξίως “refers to doing something that does not square with the character or nature of something.”²⁰³ The reference is to the actions of the church (“eating” and “drinking”) and not to their character.²⁰⁴ Thiselton writes, “Paul’s primary point is that attitude and conduct should *fit* the message and solemnity of what is being proclaimed.”²⁰⁵ Hays brings it all back to the surrounding context of social abuses amongst the Corinthian

¹⁹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹⁹Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, 444.

²⁰⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 888.

²⁰¹Fitzmeyer, *1 Corinthians*, 444.

²⁰²Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 272.

²⁰³Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 550.

²⁰⁴Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 230-31.

²⁰⁵Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 889.

believers: “to eat the meal unworthily means to eat it in a way that provokes divisions, with contemptuous disregard for the needs of others in the community.”²⁰⁶

Those who so conduct themselves around the fellowship table are “liable” (ἐνοχος) for Christ’s death.²⁰⁷ ἐνοχος is “a judicial term, which means that the Corinthians are answerable to God, the final judge, for this abuse.”²⁰⁸ That makes them “responsible for his body and his blood.”²⁰⁹ This forensic language is not meant to show that the Corinthians are somehow “desecrating” a holy rite. Rather, as Fee argues, they “have missed the point of the meal, which is to proclaim salvation through Christ’s death...[they] place themselves under the same liability as those responsible for that death in the first place.”²¹⁰ The Corinthians become guilty of the death that they should be proclaiming.

28. δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω

δέ operates as an adversative, connecting this thought to the previous verse.²¹¹ δοκιμαζέτω is a third person singular present active imperative with a hortatory function. With the subject of ἄνθρωπος and the reflexive ἑαυτὸν, one could give the translation: “but let a man genuinely examine himself.” Paul used the adjective δόκιμοι in verse 19,

²⁰⁶Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 200.

²⁰⁷Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 550.

²⁰⁸Ibid.

²⁰⁹Engberg-Pedersen, “Proclaiming the Lord’s Death,” 119-20.

²¹⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 561.

²¹¹Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 561.

which Thiselton translated as “those who are tried and true.”²¹² He translates the verbal form as “a person should examine his or her own genuineness.”²¹³ Fee does not see this as “a call for deep personal introspection to determine whether one is worthy of the Table.”²¹⁴ Rather, this should be seen in conjunction with the eschatological promise of verse 26: “since they will be ‘examined’ by God at the End...they should test themselves *now* as to their attitude toward the Table, especially their behavior toward others *at* the Table.”²¹⁵ This self-examination is meant to encourage the church to leave their pride out of the communal meal. Garland writes, “The genuine Christian recognizes there are no class divisions at the Lord’s Table.”²¹⁶

29. ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα

γὰρ is used in an explanatory sense, setting up the reason why the Corinthians should “examine” themselves before coming to the table.²¹⁷ This verse has resulted in much misunderstanding in eucharistic importance and practice. What does Paul mean by “discerning the body” (διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα)? Three strands of interpretation express themselves in modern scholarship.

The first has a strong foundation in ecclesiastical history. This view, espoused by Justin, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Lombard is that the church should

²¹²Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 891.

²¹³Ibid.

²¹⁴Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 561.

²¹⁵Ibid., 562.

²¹⁶Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 551.

²¹⁷Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 562.

distinguish the ordinary bread on the table from the divine presence of Christ in the sacrament.²¹⁸ Some nineteenth century interpreters held to this view, though it has waned significantly in modern scholarship.²¹⁹

The second interpretation has gained momentum since this passage has been increasingly seen as having a socio-economic context. This view sees σῶμα not as the bread, but as the church. Hays writes, “‘discerning the body’ means recognizing the community of believers for what it really is: the one body of Christ.”²²⁰ This interpretation looks back to 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” So, σῶμα is both a reference to Christ’s body as symbolized by the loaf and the church body as symbolized by the breaking and distribution of the bread.²²¹ Garland comments on this interpretation, “the ‘body’ to be discerned, then, is not just the piece of bread *on* the table but the body *at* the table.”²²² Blomberg adheres to this idea, writing that σῶμα “probably refers to the corporate body of Christ, the church, particularly since Paul does not refer to both body and blood.”²²³

²¹⁸Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 552; Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 892; cf. Justin, *Apology*, 1:66; Augustine, *On John*, section 62.

²¹⁹Lietzmann, *Die Briefe des Apostels Paulus*, 59.

²²⁰Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 200.

²²¹Gunther Bornkamm, “Lord’s Supper and Church in Paul,” in *Early Christian Experiences* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 123-60.

²²²Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 552, italics in original.

²²³Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 231.

Garland does not see how this reading fits with the idea of “to judge rightly.”²²⁴ Barrett concurs that such an interpretation “strains the meaning of the verb.”²²⁵

The third view, held by Thiselton, renders the phrase as “recognize what characterizes the body as different.”²²⁶ This is an appeal to see the uniqueness of Christ and his self-giving acts of love. The elements of the eucharist display that action. Therefore, “a proper understanding of what these elements represent should change the Corinthians’ attitude and behavior towards others.”²²⁷ There is a lack of conclusive syntactical evidence to rule in favor of this view or the previous one. It seems that the great lengths that Paul has gone through to show the abuse of the table in a “wealthy/poor” divide gives weight to seeing σῶμα as a referent to the church, the very body of Christ. Therefore, the second view espoused by Hays, Garland, and Blomberg seems to be the best reading of this verse.

30. διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοι καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί

διὰ τοῦτο shows a causal development of what happens when one fails to “discern the body.”²²⁸ Many (πολλοὶ) are ἀσθενεῖς (“sick” or “weak”), ἄρρωστοι (“ill”), and κοιμῶνται (“dying,” literally “falling asleep”).²²⁹ This verse has been a puzzle to interpreters, both past and present. What exactly is Paul communicating here?

²²⁴Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 552.

²²⁵Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 275.

²²⁶Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 893.

²²⁷Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 553.

²²⁸Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 897.

²²⁹Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 553.

Fee argues that “Paul is here stepping into the prophetic role; by the Spirit he has seen a divine cause and effect between two otherwise independent realities.”²³⁰ Barrett sees this both as an explanation for current events at Corinth and a warning against future judgment against those who abuse the Lord’s table.²³¹ Morris also sees this as “the chastening hand of the Lord.”²³² Others argue this is a natural consequence for the drunkenness, gluttony, and sheer overindulgence perpetrated by the Corinthian elite.²³³ Garland tentatively puts forth the idea that not only are the rich sick from overindulgence, but the poor are weak from hunger.²³⁴ Whatever the exact message Paul wished to communicate, such theological insight is not uncommon in Scripture.²³⁵ The simple truth is this: judgment and blessing, death and life, are indeed in the hands of God, but there is also a “cause/effect” relationship in the natural and divine laws of the world. Paul wants the Corinthians to appropriate this belief into their attitudes toward the Lord’s table and the behavior they exhibit one to another.

31-32. εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα κρινόμενοι δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ κυρίου παιδεύομεθα ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν

The ESV gives the simple reading of verse 31, “But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.” Thiselton reiterates his understanding of *διεκρίνομεν* from 29

²³⁰Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 565.

²³¹Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 275.

²³²Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 161

²³³Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 894.

²³⁴Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 553.

²³⁵One of the best examples of the abuse of church fellowship incurring divine judgment is Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5.

as “recognize what characterizes the body as different.”²³⁶ Therefore, he sees Paul’s admonition here as a plea to “*discern our distinctiveness*, not as individuals, but as the *having-died-and-being-raised-one-body-of-Christ*.”²³⁷ If we are discerning in this manner, then “we should escape the judgments described in verse 30.”²³⁸ But a failure to examine one’s self results in judgment “from the Lord” (τοῦ κυρίου). Hays sees Paul here as advocating that the church exercise self-discipline within itself or God would do the chastening.²³⁹ Garland summarizes Paul’s argument from these verses: “Joining the Lord’s Supper in the spirit of the world that put Christ to death means that they will be condemned with the world. Eating the Supper with the spirit of Christ means salvation and requires loving behavior towards others.”²⁴⁰ By so instructing the Corinthians, Paul is showing that their current sufferings are not purposeless evils, but are being used by God to bring them into closer communion with himself and with one another.²⁴¹ Thiselton writes that such discipline “plays a positive role in the process of being conformed to the image of Christ in suffering as well as glory.”²⁴²

²³⁶Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 897, italics in original.

²³⁷Ibid.

²³⁸Barrett, *1 Corinthians*, 276.

²³⁹Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 202.

²⁴⁰Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 554.

²⁴¹Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 162.

²⁴²Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 898.

33-34. ὥστε ἀδελφοί μου συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε
εἴ τις πεινᾷ ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω ἵνα μὴ εἰς κρίμα συνέρχησθε τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ ὡς ἂν
ἔλθω διατάξομαι

Paul now seeks to draw to a close his words on the eucharistic fellowship meal at Corinth, using ὥστε, meaning “so then,” to conclude his argument.²⁴³ συνερχόμενοι (“gather together”) “harks back to the verb used in 11:17-18 to this discussion and serves to bracket this unit.”²⁴⁴ As shown earlier, this describes the act of meeting together as a church. εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν puts the context directly on the eating of the Lord’s Supper. Paul refers warmly to the Corinthians, calling them ἀδελφοί μου, which when used of a group of mixed gender is rendered as “my brothers and sisters” (NIV).

When they gather to eat the eucharist, they are instructed to ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε. Most translations render the phrase “wait for one another.”²⁴⁵ However, many commentators, employing a wider semantic range, see this as an appeal for hospitality. Fee writes that they are to “‘welcome’ or ‘receive’ one another when they come together to eat.”²⁴⁶ If the verb does mean, “to wait for,” it still necessitates that the members share their food with one another, and is not merely a temporal idea.²⁴⁷

Paul’s final instruction is that “if anyone one is hungry” (εἴ τις πεινᾷ), then they should “eat their meal at home” (ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω). Fee reads εἴ τις πεινᾷ not as referring

²⁴³Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 567.

²⁴⁴Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 554.

²⁴⁵NASB, ESV, KJV. ESV.

²⁴⁶Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 568.

²⁴⁷Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 554.

to the famished, but carrying the satirical weight of “if anyone wants to gorge.”²⁴⁸

Garland does not see Paul here “giving banal advice about eating at home before worship.”²⁴⁹ Rather, as Thiselton notes, “if the well-to-do take their meals in their own private houses, the poor and disadvantaged will not be shamed as they are in the case of current practices.”²⁵⁰ The fellowship table of the church is not a place for greed and selfishness. It is where, by the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine, the death of Christ is proclaimed. Jesus came preaching a new covenant and a coming kingdom, and promised a future banquet where he would gather with his people around one table. It is in light of his act of redemption and eschatological promises that the Corinthians were to take of κυριακὸν δεῖπνον. Therefore, it is around a unified, hospitable meal table where the community-creating effect of Christ’s death is most vividly pictured; to distort that picture is to “profane the body and blood of Christ” and may bring about the very judgment of God.

²⁴⁸Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 568.

²⁴⁹Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 555.

²⁵⁰Thiselton, *1 Corinthians*, 899.

III. THE GRECO-ROMAN BANQUET

The Form of the Banquet

The Greco-Roman banquet had a bipartite structure, composed of the *deipnon* followed by the *symposium*.²⁵¹ The *deipnon* was the meal proper. Dennis Smith writes, “But by far the most important meal of the day was the *deipnon*, now translated ‘dinner’ or ‘supper,’ which, when it was extended social event to which guests would be invited, became what we call a ‘banquet.’”²⁵² As a guest arrived, a servant would wash his feet and take him to his place on the couch.²⁵³ According to Smith, “The guests were placed on the couches according to their social rank, since each position at the table had an imputed ranking attached to it.”²⁵⁴ The host was responsible for creating the guest list and assigning them their rank around the table.²⁵⁵ Notice the use of couches around the meal table. The practice of “reclining” at the table was a common custom in Greek, Roman, and Jewish meals of the period.²⁵⁶ Taking food in this position was indicative of free persons; slaves, women, and children were required to sit.²⁵⁷

²⁵¹V.A. Alikin, *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (Ph.D. diss., Leiden University, 2009), 6-7.

²⁵²Smith, *Symposium*, 20.

²⁵³cf. Plato, *Symposium*, 175a.

²⁵⁴Smith, *Symposium*, 33.

²⁵⁵Ibid.

²⁵⁶Ibid., 14; For Greek practice, see: Jean-Marie Dentzer, “Aux origines de l’iconographie du banquet couche,” *Revue Archeologique* (1971): 215-58; For Roman practice, see: Annette Rathje, “The Adoption of the Homeric Banquet in Central Italy in the Orientalizing Period,” in *Symptotica*, ed. Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 285; For Jewish Practice, see: Philo, *De Iosepho*, 203.

²⁵⁷Dentzer, 215-17, 240-46; referenced in Smith, *Symposium*, 42.

After the guests were present and reclining around the table, servants would bring bowls for hand washing and appetizers would be served.²⁵⁸ “Following the appetizer course was the meal proper, which the Romans referred to as the *fercula* or ‘courses.’”²⁵⁹ Martial describes three of these courses composing the meal.²⁶⁰ Upon the conclusion of the dinner, there was a brief transition between the *deipnon* and the *symposium*. Athenaeus records the practice of sweeping the floor, washing the hands of the guests, cleaning the drinking vessels, placing wreaths upon the diners heads, and mixing a new bowl of wine.²⁶¹ Plato also records the transition from dinner to drinking party: “they made libation and sang a chant to the god and so forth, as custom bids, till they betook them to drinking.”²⁶² The libation and singing of the hymn are also noted in the work of Xenophon.²⁶³

So, the end of the meal was marked with the moving away of the tables, the sweeping of the floors, another round of hand washing, the cleaning of the drinking vessels, the offering of a libation to a deity, the singing of a hymn, and the distribution of wreaths.²⁶⁴ Athenaeus describes the libations as being offered in the names of Dionysus and Zeus.²⁶⁵ In connection to the libations, a hymn (*paean*) was sung. Dennis Smith

²⁵⁸ Atheneaus, *Deipnosophistae*, 2.58-60, 14.641.

²⁵⁹ Smith, *Symposium*, 27.

²⁶⁰ Martial, *Epigrams*, 10.31.

²⁶¹ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 11.462.

²⁶² Plato, *Symposium*, 176A.

²⁶³ Xenophon, *Symposium*, 2.1.

²⁶⁴ Smith, *Symposium*, 28.

²⁶⁵ Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 15.675b.

elaborates, “This was probably a solemn song or chant, although in other contexts a paeon would be a victory or triumphal song. The specific content of such a hymn at the close of a meal is not clear, but it does appear to have religious significance.”²⁶⁶ This practice shows the Greek dining table to be closely associated with religious activity.

The second stage of the banquet was the *symposium*, or the drinking party.²⁶⁷

Walter Burkert describes this banquet practice:

The symposium is an organization of all-male groups, aristocratic and egalitarian at the same time, which affirm their identity through ceremonialized drinking. Prolonged drinking is separate from the meal proper; there is wine mixed in a krater for equal distribution; the participants, adorned with wreaths, lie on couches. The symposium has private, political, and cultural dimensions: it is the place of *euphrosyne* [good cheer], of music, poetry, and other forms of entertainment; it is bound up with sexuality, especially homosexuality; it guarantees the social control of the *polis* by the aristocrats. It is a dominating social form in Greek civilization from Homer onwards, and well beyond the Hellenistic period.²⁶⁸

After the dinner (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῃσαι), the evening progressed into this social gathering.

Smith writes that “various activities commonly took place at symposia, such as party games, dramatic entertainment, and philosophical conversation.”²⁶⁹ Though in the above statement Burkert describes the symposia as “egalitarian,” this is only meant in the realm of peers, as Blomberg points out.²⁷⁰ Women could attend, though they rarely did so, for

²⁶⁶Smith, *Symposium*, 30.

²⁶⁷Alikin, “History,” 5.

²⁶⁸W. Burkert, “Oriental Symposia: Contrasts and Parallels,” in *Dining in a Classical Context*, ed. W. J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 7.

²⁶⁹Smith, *Symposium*, 34.

²⁷⁰Craig L. Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 87.

society would brand them as courtesans of the diners.²⁷¹ More culturally appropriate was for women to engage in their own symposia, where they would gather in groups according to age, friendship, and social standing.²⁷²

The *symposia* became infamous for their debauchery, often being depicted as occasions of sexual revelries and drunkenness.²⁷³ Dennis Smith argues that this was not common practice, but an idealized artistic presentation of the dinners.²⁷⁴ There are times when the symposium was placed in a good light. For instance, Plato describes a scene where philosophical discourse, not empty entertainment, is the aim of the evening. A flute girl is the entertainment of the evening, but is sent away by Eryximachus who says, “that we are to drink only so much as each desires, with no constraint on any, I next propose that the flute girl who came in just now be dismissed...let us seek our entertainment today in conversation.”²⁷⁵ Not only were the symposia used as places of philosophical reflection, they were often held by charitable foundations and religious groups, who through the sharing of food, wine, and conversation sought ways to serve their communities.²⁷⁶

The drinking party, then, could have been nothing more than an excuse for excess and pleasure; or, as seen in Plato, the *symposium* could serve as the arena for

²⁷¹Ibid.

²⁷²Ibid.; cf. Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.172.

²⁷³Ross Scaife, “From *Kattabos* to War in Aristophanes *Acharnians*,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 33 (1992): 27-30; Lucian, *Symposium*, 46

²⁷⁴Smith, *Symposium*, 36.

²⁷⁵Plato, *Symposium*, 176E.

²⁷⁶Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 87.

philosophical discourse. Plutarch seems to reflect this view of the *symposium*, defining the dinner party as a “sharing of earnest and jest, of words and deeds.”²⁷⁷ Athenaeus also remarks on the philosophical banquets: “not that they should indulge in intemperance when they came together, but that they might carry out with decency and refinement the practices which accord with the idea of the symposium.”²⁷⁸

The Function of the Banquet

Through the passage of the time, the *deipnon* began to be observed in the evening and not as a midday meal.²⁷⁹ Dennis Smith writes that this change of hour led to the meal taking on more leisurely characteristics and in turn becoming “the social highlight of the day as well.”²⁸⁰ Blomberg showcases the evolution of the *deipnon* from daily communal meal to “the periodic gatherings of charitable foundations, religious cults, civic and business associations, trade guilds, patrons wooing their clients, philosophical collegia and funerary societies.”²⁸¹ So, a banquet could be observed at any time, with no need for a special occasion. However, the banquet did have a function, beyond providing nutrition and entertainment to those partaking of it.

Many things can be learned about a culture by studying its meal practice. Mary Douglas, who has done just that as anthropologist, writes:

²⁷⁷Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, 708D.

²⁷⁸Atheneaus, *Deipnosophistae*, 5.186a.

²⁷⁹The Romans began to mirror this Greek dining practice. See J. P. V. D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1969), 19-54.

²⁸⁰Smith, *Symposium*, 21.

²⁸¹Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 87.

If food is treated as a code, the message it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries. Like sex, the taking of food has a social component, as well as a biological one.²⁸²

The banquet, then, should be treated as a message-bearer, containing within its “code” the social customs of the culture it represents. The Hellenistic meal table functioned on a number of different social levels.

First, the banquet demarcated social boundaries.²⁸³ Philippe Rouillard comments that the social nature of the meal extends past the desire to satiate one’s hunger: “While an animal eats, man has a meal.”²⁸⁴ The meal table, then, serves a very basic sociological function. Smith writes, “whom one dines with defines one’s placement in a larger set of social networks.”²⁸⁵ Much is communicated simply by sharing a meal with some and not with others. The banquet, then, by default was a symbol of exclusivity.

Building upon the concept of the banquet establishing social boundaries, the meal table also creates a social bond.²⁸⁶ Rouillard writes,

The human meal is normally taken in common: it brings together a family, friends, a community. The meal taken in common seals [those] belonging to a same group. It implies an idea of communion and sharing: those who share a same meal constitute a same body, and the fact of inviting someone to eat with one is perceived as an efficacious sign of integration and communion.²⁸⁷

²⁸²Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” *Daedalus* 101 (1972): 61.

²⁸³Smith, *Symposium*, 9.

²⁸⁴Phillpe Rouillard, “From Human Meal to Christian Eucharist,” *Worship* 52 (Summer 1978): 431.

²⁸⁵Smith, *Symposium*, 9.

²⁸⁶*Ibid.*

²⁸⁷Rouillard, 432.

Claude Fisher writes, “*Comer: nada más vital, nada más íntimo*,” there is nothing more vital and intimate than eating.²⁸⁸ This is true of any culture of any age. The meal table was a sign of this intimacy. Smith writes, “In the ancient world this symbolism was carried by various elements of the banquet, such as the sharing of common food or sharing from a common table or dish.”²⁸⁹ Mary Douglas takes the approach of studying the family meal as representation of the value set of the culture at large.²⁹⁰ The common meal codified the diners into a social unit. The Hellenistic banquet, then, pictorially presented this social bond in terms of couches and tables, bread and wine. Cicero writes of this communion: “Nor, indeed, did I measure my delight in these social gatherings more by the physical pleasure than by the pleasure of meeting and conversing with my friends. For our fathers did well in calling the reclining of friends at feasts a *convivium*, because it implies a communion of life.”²⁹¹

Related to the idea of social bonding and boundaries is the idea of social stratification.²⁹² The very act of “reclining” was a social marker, since only free persons were allowed to sit in such a position during meals.²⁹³ This posture indicated superiority, requiring the guest to be served.²⁹⁴ But the stratification does not stop there: “Those

²⁸⁸Quoted from Montoya A Mendez, *Food matters: Prolegomena to a Eucharistic discourse* (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2000), 1.

²⁸⁹Smith, *Symposium*, 10.

²⁹⁰Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966)

²⁹¹Cicero, *De senectute*, 13.45-14.46.

²⁹²Smith, *Symposium*, 10.

²⁹³Dentzer, 215-17, 240-46; referenced in Smith, *Symposium*, 42.

²⁹⁴See Plato, *Symposium*, 175A, 213B.

who reclined were further ranked by the places assigned to them at the table.”²⁹⁵ This dining practice is indicative of the wider Hellenistic culture, which placed great value on the separation of slave and free, male and female, wealthy and poor.²⁹⁶

Not only did the banquet function as a daily reminder of social boundaries, bonds, and stratification, but it also celebrated a number of different occasions. Dennis Smith writes, “Much like what we do today, ancients tended to mark special events and rites of passage with banquets.”²⁹⁷ Such special events included birthdays,²⁹⁸ weddings,²⁹⁹ and funerals.³⁰⁰ It has already been noted that there existed a certain substratum of banquet tradition intended for philosophical discourse.³⁰¹ Most meals were imbued with some religious significance, but there were sacrificial/cult banquets that celebrated certain deities and holy days, sometimes involved sacrifice, and could have been observed within the dining room of a temple.³⁰² Nicholas Fisher writes, “In few societies have

²⁹⁵Smith, *Symposium*, 11.

²⁹⁶See John H. Elliott, “Patronage and Clientism in Early Christian Society: A Short Reading Guide,” *Forum* 3:4 (December 1987): 39-48; also, for a treatment of a woman’s place in banquets, see: Kathleen E. Corley, *Private Women, Public Meals: Social Conflict in the Synoptic Tradition* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 24-66.

²⁹⁷Smith, *Symposium*, 38.

²⁹⁸Kathryn Argetsinger, “Birthday Rituals: Friends and Patrons in Roman Poetry and Cult,” *Classical Antiquity* 11 (1992): 175-93.

²⁹⁹John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, Wisconsin Studies in Classics (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993)

³⁰⁰Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985), 21-37.

³⁰¹Smith, *Symposium*, 47-65.

³⁰²See Michael Jameson, “Sacrifice and Ritual: Greece,” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean*, ed. Michael Grant and Rachel Kitzinger (New York: Scribner’s, 1988); Stanley K. Stowers, “Greeks Who Sacrifice and Those Who Don’t: Toward an Anthropology of Greek Religion,” in *The Social World of the First Christians: Essays in Honor of Wayne A. Meeks*, ed. L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 293-333.

celebrations of shared eating and drinking been so highly valued, so idealized and stylized, so widely practiced at many levels.”³⁰³ He goes on to say that the *symposia* were “significantly used as occasions for philosophical, political, and moral discussions and their reflections in poetic and prose literature.”³⁰⁴

The *deipnon/symposium* celebration necessitated proper etiquette and equality among members. Smith writes, “As a corollary of social bonding, sharing a meal also created a sense of ethical obligation of the diners toward one another.”³⁰⁵ The meal was meant to break down barriers among fellow guest and establish unity. Smith goes on, “The idea was that a meal that was shared in common and that created a sense of community among the participants should be one in which all could share equally and with full participation.”³⁰⁶ Though this was the ideal, this was often not the practice.

Marital gives this parody of the banquet:

Since I am asked to dinner, no longer, as before, a purchased guest, why is not the same dinner served to me as to you? You take oysters fattened in the Lucrine lake, I suck a mussel through a hole in the shell; you get mushrooms, I take hog funguses; you tackle turbot, but I brill. Golden with fat, a turtle-dove gorges you with its bloated rump; there is set before me a magpie that has died in its cage. Why do I dine without you although, Ponticus, I am dining with you? The dole has gone: let us have the benefit of that; let us eat the same fare.³⁰⁷

³⁰³N. R. E. Fisher, “Greek Associations, Symposia, and Clubs,” in *Civilization of the Ancient Mediterranean: Greece and Rome*, ed. M. R. Grant and M. R. Kitzinger (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1988), 2:1167.

³⁰⁴*Ibid.*

³⁰⁵Smith, *Symposium*, 10.

³⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 11.

³⁰⁷Marital, *Epigrams*, 3.60.

Pliny also reacts against unequal portions consumed at the banquet, believing that in sharing the same food the guests are bound to a greater camaraderie.³⁰⁸ Plutarch writes, “When each guest has his own private portion, fellowship perishes.”³⁰⁹ Therefore, the banquet can be seen as idealized representation of Aristotle’s *polis*, which is pictured as a unified body composed of diverse members: “For it is possible that the many, though not individually good men, yet when they *come together* may be better, not individually, but collectively.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁸ Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae*, 2.6.3-6.

³⁰⁹ Plutarch, *Quest. Conv.*, 644C.

³¹⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 3.6.4., italics added.

IV. THE CORINTHIAN EUCHARIST AS A BANQUET

Parallels in Form

Now that we have examined the communal meal at Corinth as described by Paul and have subsequently gleaned from ancient sources information regarding the *deipnon/symposium* structure of the Hellenistic banquet, it is time to find parallels between the two sets of data in order to see if the theory of Dennis Smith applies to the Corinthian eucharist.

The first question, then, is does the *form* of this banquet practice correspond with what is found concerning the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians 11? As has been shown throughout this thesis, a full meal was involved in the events of the upper room and in the meal of the Corinthians. Paul places the “cup blessing” after the phrase μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι to indicate that these words were taking place after the meal (1 Cor 11:25). Peter Lampe writes that the Eucharist, as celebrated at Corinth, followed this three-step progression: “First, the Eucharistic bread is blessed and broken. Then, a nourishing dinner takes place. Finally, the dinner ends with the blessing of the cup and the drinking from it.”³¹¹ Lampe contends that this follows Greek dinner custom, in which both the meal table of the *deipnon* and the second table of the *symposium* began with an invocation to the gods.³¹² Also, it was shown that the transition between the meal and the drinking party was marked by the sweeping of the floor and the mixing of a jug of wine, part of which would be poured out as a libation (either to a deity or to the emperor). Lampe writes, “The eucharistic cup after dinner could have been construed as parallel to

³¹¹Lampe, “The Eucharist,” 37.

³¹²Ibid.

drinking party was marked by the sweeping of the floor and the mixing of a jug of wine, part of which would be poured out as a libation (either to a deity or to the emperor).

Lampe writes, “The eucharistic cup after dinner could have been construed as parallel to the mixing of the first jug of wine.”³¹³ This is Smith’s contention as well. He comments on the Corinthian eucharist:

The meal pictured here has the following features of a normal Greco-Roman banquet: (a) benediction over the food, represented by the bread; (b) the division of the meal into *deipnon* (mentioned in the text) followed by the symposium (implied by the wine blessing); (c) a benediction over the wine marking the transition from *deipnon* to symposium.³¹⁴

According to this theory, the early Christians’ meal practices followed very closely in form to the dining practices of the surrounding Hellenistic world. The invocation of the food (pictured in the Eucharist by the bread) signified the beginning of the *deipnon*; the blessing of the cup announced the *symposium*. Smith writes, “It is clear, therefore, that the Greco-Roman banquet form provides the backdrop for this tradition.”³¹⁵ The meal table in the Greco-Roman world was a blend of fellowship, philosophical conversation, and religious sentiment. According to V. A. Alikin, “The main manifestation of virtually all religious voluntary associations was a periodical gathering that had a bipartite structure: a supper and a drinking party afterwards.”³¹⁶ He goes on to argue that this is the backdrop against which the meal practice of the early church must also be seen.³¹⁷

³¹³Ibid.

³¹⁴Smith, *Symposium*, 188.

³¹⁵Ibid.

³¹⁶Alikin, “History,” 5.

This could also explain how “the celebration of the Lord’s Supper achieved ritual independence from its original context in a community meal.”³¹⁸ Paul Jones, from the work of Nathan Mitchell, identifies four stages in Eucharistic development:³¹⁹

1. The celebration of full meals, framed by the bread-blessing and wine-blessing, as a continuation of the table fellowship of Christ.
2. The movement of the Eucharist to the end of the meal.
3. The Eucharist as becoming an independent liturgical rite, indicated by Matthew and Mark omitting the phrase “after supper.”
4. The final stage marks the evolution of thought, where the liturgical rite of the Eucharist becomes sacramental and the elements themselves communicate the presence of Christ.

The Hellenistic courses of “supper” and “symposium” are conducive to this shift.

Gradually, the eucharistic elements were moved entirely from the *deipnon* and reserved for the *symposium*. With that move, the meal itself lost sacramental importance, while the liturgical rite gained significance. At that point, the eucharist was detached from its meal-table origins.

Eventually the meal became entirely separated from the eucharist and became known as *Agape*, or “Love-Feast.”³²⁰ It is debated, however, as to whether the Agape can be distinguished from the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον. The *Didache* refers specifically to the partaking of the cup and the breaking of the bread as *eucharistia* (9.1, 5). Pliny the Younger writes that Christian worship began to be observed in two removed parts: “[they

³¹⁷Ibid.

³¹⁸Nathan Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: The Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass* (New York: Pueblo Publishing, 1982), 196.

³¹⁹These movements are found in Jones, *Christ’s Eucharistic Presence*, 15-16.

³²⁰Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8.2; cf. Jude 12.

are] accustomed to assemble before dawn on a fixed day and chant alternatively a hymn to Christ as to a god when that is finished, they have the habit of departing and gathering together again to partake of ordinary, harmless food.”³²¹

Coyle writes that there is an intrinsic relationship between the eucharist and the agape and that it is evident in the text of 1 Corinthians: “It is clear that the agape was meant to symbolize the kind of love which the Lord had for his followers and which his followers were to have for each other.”³²² Coyle believes that in 1 Cor 11, Paul is oscillating between instructions for the agape and the eucharist, seeing the two as an organic whole.³²³ Coyle writes:

The close relationship between the meal and the eucharist can be seen in institution of the communion service. The eucharist was instituted in the context of a meal, the Last Supper. The eucharist followed the meal (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25), and the elements of the eucharist came directly from the meal itself... The eucharist came from the agape. There is an organic bond between the agape and the eucharist since the elements of the eucharist came from the agape itself. Had there been no agape, there would have been no eucharist.³²⁴

The separation of the agape from the eucharist, the *deipnon* from the symposium, was due to an increase in mysticism, asceticism, and ritualism in the fourth and fifth centuries. Coyle argues, “There is no example of partaking of the eucharist apart from the agape or any biblical authority for doing so.”³²⁵ This is a thought that cannot be fully developed in this thesis, for it moves the discussion from the meal at Corinth to contemporary practice, but it is worth mentioning the progression of the eucharist from a full meal to a lone rite.

³²¹Pliny, *Epistulae*, 10.96.7.

³²²J. Timothy Coyle, “The Agape/Eucharistic Relationship in 1 Corinthians 11,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6:2 (1985): 414.

³²³*Ibid.*, 415.

³²⁴*Ibid.*

³²⁵*Ibid.*, 418.

The banquet, with its two-part structure, could in fact explain how this evolution occurred.

Archaeology may also shed light on the relationship between eucharist and banquet. Murphy-O'Connor shows that excavations reveal that houses in Corinth were composed of a *triclinium* (a dining room consisting of three couches which form a u-shape around the meal table), and an *atrium*, which was a larger room without couches.³²⁶ Based on the measurements given by Murphy-O'Connor, Hays writes that probably no more than nine persons could comfortably dine in the *triclinium* of an average Roman villa.³²⁷ He uses this information to argue that what occurred in the Corinthian churches was an elitism. The host would gather with his closest friends and guests of the highest rank in the *triclinium* while the rest of the church ate in the *atrium* or even in the courtyard. This disparity between the wealthy and the poor guests was not only one of seating. Hays writes, "Furthermore, under such conditions it was not at all unusual for the higher-status guests in the dining room to be served better food and wine than the other guests."³²⁸ Pliny the Younger writes of his experience of supposed hospitality at a banquet of a friend:

The best dishes were set in front of himself and a select few, and cheap scraps of food before the rest of the company. He had even put the wine into tiny little flasks, divided into three categories, not with the idea of giving his guests the opportunity of choosing, but to make it impossible for them to refuse what they were given. One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friends are graded), and the third for his and our freedmen.³²⁹

³²⁶J. Murphy-O'Connor, *St Paul's Corinth: Text and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 178.

³²⁷Hays, *1 Corinthians*, 196.

³²⁸*Ibid.*

³²⁹Pliny, *Epistulae*, 2.6.

That these archaeological finds mirror what was occurring in Corinth is educated conjecture. Excavations have only been performed in certain areas of the city, and there is a lack of evidence to conclude how the average house in Corinth was structured. Horrell writes that it is impossible to propose the layout of the average Corinthian residence “since excavations have been largely concentrated around the forum area, on the sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore and of Asclepius, on a small number of selected villas, and on other significant structures in and outside the city.”³³⁰

Although this archaeological evidence may not conclusively reveal the abuses of the Corinthian meal practice, it does offer illumination into what could have been occurring. This type of structure is indicative of banquet practices, however. The *triclinium* (or “three-couch” room) was a Roman development of the Greek *andron* (“men’s room”), where men would dine and enjoyed entertainment with the *paterfamilias*.³³¹

Insofar as form is concerned, the banquet seems to be an appropriate model for the Corinthian eucharist observance. Paul relays the sequence of the meal in a “bread-supper-cup” sequence that could be indicative of the supper/symposium format of the banquet. This could also explain the shift away from the meal table in early church history. Now, a look will be taken at the significance of the Corinthian meal in comparison with the banquet.

³³⁰D. G. Horrell, “Domestic Space and Christian Meetings at Corinth: Imaging New Contexts and the Buildings East of the Theatre,” *NTS* 50 (2004): 360

³³¹Smith, *Symposium*, 25.

Parallels in Function

As shown in the previous chapter, one of the main functions of the banquet was to define societal boundaries. The idea of social boundaries and social bonding figures prominently in the works of Paul. An interesting text speaking to this issue is found in Galatians 2:11-14:

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

It seems that this issue is similar to the one addressed to the Corinthian church as well (1 Cor 11:7-33). The circumstances differ: in Galatia, the segregation was on ethno-religious bias; in Corinth, it was one of economic status. An idea that will not receive the treatment here that it deserves is that of covenant. It must be noted that there is much interplay between the Jewish notion of covenant and the meal table functions of social boundaries and bonding. However, the results of table inequality at Corinth and Antioch were the same: "the truth of the gospel" was not being practiced. Paul addresses this truth as the unity of the church, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28-29).

This is the sentiment that should be proclaimed from the Christian meal table. However, in Corinth and in Antioch, the meal table was being divided. According to Smith, "The meal controversies at both Antioch and Corinth (and Rome as well) derive

from the nature of the meal to create social boundaries.”³³² A refusal to have equal meal participation with someone indicated staunch exclusivity. This led to the practice of individualized meals (τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον) when there should have been communal meals, referred to by Paul as the Lord’s Supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον), shared by the entire church body.³³³

A function of the Corinthian meal was to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Paul launches from this statement into the admonition of 27-34 for a person to “examine himself” so as not to take the meal “without discerning the body” and as result “eat and drink judgment upon himself.” Paul seems here to be hooking the proclamation into the meal table. His exhortation to discern the body (σῶμα) is both a reference to Christ’s body as symbolized by the bread and the church body as symbolized by the breaking and distribution of the bread.³³⁴ So, the thread of Paul’s argument flows from the σῶμα of verse 24 (“This is my body”), to verse 28 (“without discerning the body”) and climaxes in 12:12 (“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.”). Paul begins this σῶμα -focus in 10:17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” The church proclaims the death of Jesus through love and unity. Peter Lampe writes, “in the Eucharist, Christ’s

³³²Smith, *Symposium*, 175.

³³³cf. 1 Cor 11:20, 21, 33.

³³⁴Gunther Bornkamm, “Lord’s Supper and Church in Paul,” in *Early Christian Experiences* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 123-60.

death is also proclaimed and made present by means of our giving ourselves up to others.”³³⁵

The eucharist is the tool by which Christ’s death is proclaimed. Proper meal table etiquette was a sign of the unity of the dining group in the Hellenistic world.³³⁶ The reverse is also true – the abuse of the banquet table was indicative of disunity. Dennis Smith writes, “the purpose of the death of Christ was to create a saved community...Paul finds the most profound meaning of the meal as “Lord’s Supper” in its ability to bring together a disparate people into one community.”³³⁷ Therefore, it is around a unified, hospitable meal table where the community-creating effect of Christ’s death is most vividly pictured; to distort that picture is to “profane the body and blood of Christ” (1 Cor 11:27) and is not “in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14).

As seen above, the *symposium* could have had a philosophical function, in which thought-provoking conversation would be shared by all.³³⁸ After Paul gives instruction on the *deipnon* in 1 Corinthians 11, he goes on to give instruction on orderly church worship in chapters 12-14. It has already been shown that the early churches met in houses around meal tables. It is plausible, then, to see these worship services as taking place after dinner (μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι, cf. 1 Cor 11:25) around the table as well. Dennis

³³⁵Lampe, “The Eucharist,” 47

³³⁶Plutarch, *Quaest. Conv.*, 660B.

³³⁷Smith, *Symposium*, 199-200.

³³⁸Plato, *Symposium*, 176E; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistae*, 5.186a; Plutarch, *Quaestiones convivales*, 629C-D.

Smith argues that this worship service occurred “during the symposium, at a time which meal customs designate an extended period of entertainment or conversation.”³³⁹

Paul’s admonition for orderly conduct during the *symposium* could have been a reaction against the often-disorderly Hellenistic banquets. Lucian records:

Most of the company were drunk by then, and the room was full of uproar. Dionysodorus the rhetorician was making speeches, pleading first on one side and then on the other, and was getting applauded by the servants who stood by him. Histiaeus the grammarian, who had the place next to him, was reciting verse...But Zenothemis was reading aloud from a closely written book that he had taken from his attendant.³⁴⁰

As seen in this parody, the men of the banquet were drunkenly infatuated with the expression of their own gifts and talents. That is not to be the way of the church. The church was not to be a place of drunkenness (11:21-22), nor was it to be a chaotic mesh of individual expressions (14:26-40). Rather, the activities of the *symposium* were to be conducted that the “church may be built up [ἡ ἐκκλησία οἰκοδομὴν λαβῇ]” (14:5). The unity of the *deipnon* was to carry over into the unity of the *symposium*. When the meal table is divided, so is the church; and when that happens our meetings are “not for the better, but for the worse” (11:17).

It seems to be an argument with substantial evidential support that “the periodical suppers of the early Christian communities in shape, function, and symbolic significance, fitted in with, and were part of, the common banquet culture in the Greco-Roman world.”³⁴¹ Paul Bradshaw, however, argues that “one may challenge the assumption that

³³⁹Smith, *Symposium*, 201.

³⁴⁰Lucian, *Symposium*, 17.

³⁴¹Alikin, “History,” 12-13.

the precise format of the *symposium* must have been the sole model on which both Jewish and Christian formal meal practice would have been based.”³⁴² This thesis has argued against precisely that notion. Scholars who have argued for there being *one* prototypical model from which the eucharist derived have been unable to produce enough evidence that would support their claim while rejecting all others. All that needs to be shown here is that the influences of the Greco-Roman banquet, in both form and function, figured prominently in shaping the meal practice of the early church. This may not have been the sole background of the development of the Lord’s Supper, but it does appear to have influenced the Corinthian meal and has given rise to some liturgical tradition.³⁴³ See the attached Appendix for arguments in favor of Jewish influences of the supper tradition. In the light of the evidence, Dennis Smith’s hypothesis that in 1 Corinthians 11, “Paul utilized traditional arguments from Greco-Roman meal ethics to define the basis for community identity and social ethics” holds true.³⁴⁴

³⁴²Paul Bradshaw, *Eucharistic Origins* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 43.

³⁴³Gerard A.M. Rouwhorst, “The Reading of Scripture in Early Christian Liturgy,” in *What Athens Has to Do with Jerusalem: Essays on Classical, Jewish, and Early Christian Art and Archaeology in Honor of Gideon Foerster*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers (Lueven: Peeters, 2002), 308.

³⁴⁴Smith, *Symposium*, 217.

V. IMPLICATIONS

From the beginning the church has been influenced and shaped by its surrounding culture. The aim of this thesis was to show how the Corinthian community of believers adapted the common meal form of the day, the banquet, into their fellowship gatherings and worship services. This understanding of eucharistic origins impacts contemporary ecclesiastical practices in many ways.

First, the question must be asked, “How free is the church today to adapt the celebration of the eucharist to contemporary culture?” The implication of this study is that the church is not heavily bound by liturgy and tradition. Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians was not a prescriptive command to emulate Jesus’ actions and words during the Last Supper. Rather, the thrust of Paul’s message was for the church to imitate the humble *self-giving* of Jesus and so proclaim the death of Christ by their unity and love. In re-thinking current eucharist practices, believers today should creatively discuss ways to better do this. Do oyster crackers and grape-juice filled shot glasses vividly portray this fellowship? Paul also stresses to the Corinthians that they should be mindful of the needy among them. How can the body of Christ, by sharing the Lord’s Supper with one another, find ways to meet each other’s needs? Blomberg concludes his study on the meals of Jesus by seeing “the need for God’s people to share from their surplus, especially of foodstuffs, with the poor and needy at home and abroad.”³⁴⁵

Though there is freedom in celebrating the eucharist, there is also a plea to exercise caution. Jesus’ last supper with his disciples was a picture of many things. In

³⁴⁵Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 170.

meals of Jesus by seeing “the need for God’s people to share from their surplus, especially of foodstuffs, with the poor and needy at home and abroad.”³⁴⁵

Though there is freedom in celebrating the eucharist, there is also a plea to exercise caution. Jesus’ last supper with his disciples was a picture of many things. In order to properly celebrate it, great efforts should be taken to “do this in remembrance” of Christ and his self-giving actions on the cross. The elements of the bread and the wine are signposts of the great salvation story. In keeping with the original Passover context of the meal, it is important to interpret the bread and wine in light of Christ, the Passover lamb. So, the church is only free to adapt the eucharist inasmuch as the observance does not fail to point back to Christ, as well as point toward his coming glory.

It has also been shown that nowhere in Scripture is the eucharist mentioned apart from a fellowship meal.³⁴⁶ It will not be argued here that the eucharist *has to* be observed in a meal context, but it is strongly suggested. I. Howard Marshall writes, “The Lord’s Supper in the New Testament is a meal. The appropriate setting for the sacrament is a table.”³⁴⁷ It is the opinion of this author that there are few things as conducive to community as sharing a meal together. The church should recapture the δεῖπνον in the κυριακὸν δεῖπνον. More than a meal, the banquet table was a display of hospitality, acceptance, and unity. The bread and wine, removed from this setting, diminish in significance.

³⁴⁵Blomberg, *Contagious Holiness*, 170.

³⁴⁶Coyle, “Agape,” 418.

³⁴⁷Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 156.

Just as the *deipnon* should be re-evaluated in current practice, so should the *symposium*. That is not to say the eucharist should be a “drinking party,” but rather the liturgy and worship should be seen as part two of a two-part service. The *deipnon* binds the celebrants into fellowship. This is the foundation for the outflow of the “service of the word”³⁴⁸ and worship.³⁴⁹ Therefore, perhaps it is necessary not only for the church to rediscover the origins of the eucharist in the meal table, but also in the worship table.

These are merely thoughts that grew from this study. They are not here presented conclusively or authoritatively. But, if one is to sincerely study the origins of the eucharist, he should be willing to ask how these findings impact current practices. For now, may the words of Paul be a reminder to those who claim Jesus: “for as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” May the church continue to find meaningful and relevant ways to proclaim that death, in worship, in fellowship, and around the meal table. Even so, come Lord Jesus.

³⁴⁸ See Rouwhorst, “The Reading of Scripture in Early Christian Liturgy,” 305-331.

³⁴⁹ cf. 1 Cor 12-14.

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APPENDIX: OLD TESTAMENT ORIGINS

The Hellenistic influence on the observance of the eucharist in Corinth has been thoroughly analyzed. To be true to a study of eucharistic origins, the supper that Jesus shared with his disciples and the subsequent remembrance of it in the early church will now be viewed in light of its Jewish content. There are two aspects of Old Testament influence that need attention: the covenant meal and the Passover.

Eucharist as a Covenant Meal

Matthew, Mark, Luke and Paul all speak of covenant (διαθήκη) in their eucharistic narratives, and all four authors link the word to Jesus' statement of the cup (ποτήριον) being his blood (αἷμα).³⁵⁰ Luke and Paul add an interesting modifier to διαθήκη, writing that this is a *new* (καινή) covenant. This description serves as an allusion to the prophets of Israel who foresaw the day when YHWH would make a new covenant with his people (cf. Jer 31:31). It is fitting that this καινή διαθήκη be ratified by the αἷμα of Jesus, recalling the sprinkling of blood that sealed the covenant at Sinai (Ex 24:8) and that has signified its remembrance and renewal throughout Israel's history (Zech 9:11).

The language of all four of these accounts makes it explicitly clear that Jesus' final meal in the upper room served as a covenant event. But in what ways did this

³⁵⁰Mt 26:28 “τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης”; Mk 14:24 “τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης”; Lk 22:20 “τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματι μου”; 1 Cor 11:25 “τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι.”

The covenant ceremony at Sinai is seen modeled upon treaty patterns of the Ancient Near East.³⁵¹ D.J. McCarthy's work in this area has gained wide scholarly consensus.³⁵² McCarthy puts forth the outline of a Hittite treaty as posited by Mendenhall:

1. Preamble introducing the sovereign;
2. The historical prologue describing previous relations between the contracting parties;
3. The stipulations which outline the nature of the community formed by the covenant;
4. The document clause providing for preservation and regular re-reading of the treaty;
5. The list of gods who witnessed the treaty;
6. The curse and blessing formula.³⁵³

The connection between Old Testament covenant rites and ancient treaty forms has led to a much greater understanding of the composition of documents such as Deuteronomy, but has only further clouded the Sinai event as described in Exodus.³⁵⁴ Many scholars have supposed that the failure to synchronize Exodus with the Hittite treaty form is evidence of a fragmented composition of the narrative.³⁵⁵

³⁵¹The pioneer in this area was George Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

³⁵²D.J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenants* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978).

³⁵³*Ibid.*, 12.

³⁵⁴Frank. Polak. "The Covenant at Mount Sinai in Light of Texts from Mari," in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfield Jubilee Volume*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 120.

³⁵⁵McCarthy, *Covenants*, 73; E. C. Kingsbury, "The Theophany *Topos* and the Mountain of God," *JBL* 86 (1967): 205-10; M. Newman, *The People of the Covenant: A Study of Israel from Moses to Monarchy* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962).

In opposition to the argument for the disunity of the Sinai text, Frank Polak has offered a study of the Babylonian documents uncovered at Mari.³⁵⁶ Polak writes, “These new texts contain a wealth of information concerning the negotiations leading to a treaty alliance, the role of the royal envoy as go between, and the ceremonies related to the ratification of a treaty.”³⁵⁷ Instead of seeing Sinai in terms of the Hittite Suzerain-Vassal treaty, Polak’s article shows how the covenant rather reflects the treaty ratification of other Mesopotamian kingdoms. Scott Hahn paraphrases the argument in this manner:

Polak argues that the text follows a coherent pattern typical of ancient Near Eastern covenant ratifications: (1) terms given by the superior covenant partner are announced, often by a mediator; (2) the consent of the other party is expressed; and (3) a *bilocal* ratification process ensues: covenant-making rituals are performed first in one party's territory, then in the other's. This would correspond to the twofold covenant ratification at Sinai, first in the human sphere (Exod. 24.4-8) and then in the divine (24.9-11).³⁵⁸

This bilocal ratification process has long puzzled biblical scholars, but Polak’s work with the documents from Mari show the event to be a cohesive narrative that was not uncommon in covenant agreements. The first locus of ceremony takes place in the territory of one party, in this case at the base of the mountain. In the Sinai event, blood rites and sacrifice depict this action. Burnt offering and peace offerings are presented, the Book of the Covenant is read aloud, and then blood is sprinkled on the altar and the people as a sign of ratification (24:4-8). The covenanting party then must move into the divine sphere to complete the process. The Exodus passage (24:9-11) shows this in terms

³⁵⁶The documents can be found in J. M. Durand, *Archives épistolaires de Mari* (Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations, 1988).

³⁵⁷Polak, “Mari,” 122.

³⁵⁸Scott Hahn. “Covenants in the Old and New Testaments: Some Current Research (1994-2004),” *Currents in Biblical Research* 3 (April 2005): 276.

of a fellowship table. On top of the mountain, in the presence of God, Moses and the elders of Israel share a meal and thereby seal the covenant.

McCarthy writes, “the covenant between Yahweh and Israel described in the Sinai narrative was a covenant based upon some sort of blood and sacrificial rite [and]...a covenant meal uniting Yahweh and the people.”³⁵⁹ Making a covenant through the sharing of food has biblical precedent (Gen 26:26-30, 31:43-50). Was the meal a process in the formation of these covenants? McCarthy suggests rather that the meal was symbolic, a sort of enacted sign of the newly formed agreement.³⁶⁰ Polak, however, disagrees with McCarthy. He sees the meal as “stage two” in the ratification process:

The decisive point is that the festive meal at Mount Sinai is held at the very home of the God of Israel, on the divine mountain. This meal, then, embodies a theophany, although in a way that is quite different from the divine descent on the mountain. By viewing the divine presence and by partaking in a meal at the divine abode, the members of the delegation participate in a ritual that involves both the deity and the Israelite elders. Implicitly, then, the scene on Mount Sinai confirms the obligation that the Israelite community at first took upon itself at the foot of the mountain.³⁶¹

Before Moses and the elders dined with God on the mountain, the ceremony was only half completed. As such, the covenant could not have been fully sealed without the meal in God’s presence.

Whether the meal is viewed as mere symbol or as an integral part in the covenant ceremony, it stands as a momentous occasion in the history of God’s dealing with man.

Robert Stallman writes:

³⁵⁹McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenants*, 30.

³⁶⁰D.J. McCarthy, “Three Covenants in Genesis,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 26 (1964): 179-189; See also Jeffrey Jay Niehaus, *God at Sinai* ([S.L.]: Zondervan Pub, 1995), 198; and W.J. Dumbrell, *Covenant & Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1984), 94.

³⁶¹Polak, “Mari,” 132.

It [the meal] cast Yahweh and Israel (as represented by Moses and the other leaders) in the roles of generous host and grateful guest. Audience with Yahweh would never come at the expense of commitment to obey, but it would definitely come and always take place within the context of a covenantal relationship initiated by God who chose to reveal himself not only in deafening thunder and lightening (Exod 19:16) but also in the din of table fellowship (Exod 24:9-11).³⁶²

There is little doubt that meals in the Ancient Near East functioned on the covenantal level. Some scholars, however, stretch the connection too far. Ludwig Kohler, for example, has argued that the etymology of *berith* lends itself to the idea of “to eat,” meaning that the phrase “to cut a covenant” actually is a referent to the “cutting of food for a meal.”³⁶³ This subject has received detailed treatment by many scholars, with James Barr giving a convincing argument against Kohler’s hypothesis.³⁶⁴ The jump from *berith* to “meal” is without strong scholarly support and to deal with the topic in any more detail would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

What has been argued thus far is that there exists a strong tie in the Old Testament between covenant and meal table. This motif breaks through the surface in the Last Supper narratives. When Jesus claims that τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι (1 Cor 11:25), he is making an explicit allusion to the covenant ratification ceremony at Sinai.³⁶⁵ More than merely drawing thought back to the foot of Sinai, Jesus is giving weight to Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant. I. Howard Marshall writes

³⁶²Stallman, Robert Carlton. *Divine Hospitality in the Pentateuch: A Metaphorical Perspective on God as Host* (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2009), 237.

³⁶³Ludwig Kohler, “Problems in the Study of the Language in the Old Testament,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 1 (1956): 4-7.

³⁶⁴James Barr. “Some Semantic Notes on the Covenant,” in *Beiträge zur alttestamentlichen Theologie: Festschrift für Walther Zimmerli zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Herbert Donner, Robert Hanhart, and Rudolph Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977) :23-38.

³⁶⁵Darwell Stone, “Lord’s Supper” in *Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels*, ed. James Hastings, John Selbie, and John Lambert (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 66.

that the cup “symbolizes the new covenant, in the sense that the new covenant is brought into being by what it signifies, namely the sacrificial death of Jesus.”³⁶⁶ Just as the covenant at Sinai was ratified by the sprinkling of blood and the sharing of a meal, so to the Eucharist births the new covenant in similar language and metaphor. *καὶνὴ* here is entirely qualitative. “It signifies not a temporal repetition but a new, eschatological beginning.”³⁶⁷ Bock comments, “Oneness is express in the sharing of the cup. A new age of salvation will be found in the new, united community...The covenantal reference makes it clear that a new era is in view.”³⁶⁸

The events of the Eucharist, then, must be informed by the idea of a covenant meal as exemplified at Sinai in Exodus 24. Hilbur writes, “the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai served as a pattern for the inauguration of the new covenant recorded in the gospels and 1 Cor 11:25. Divine presence is indicated by the bread. Covenant and sacrifice are indicated by the cup.”³⁶⁹ YHWH is once again revealing himself to man in a manner of table hospitality. This meal serves as part of a ceremony that, in conjunction with the impending death of Christ, brings into existence a new era in salvation history.

Eucharist as Passover

An interesting variant within the Lucan/Pauline tradition are Jesus words of ἀνάμνησιν. As he distributes the elements, he says “Do this in remembrance of me” (Lk

³⁶⁶I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 806.

³⁶⁷*Ibid.*

³⁶⁸Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 2:1729.

³⁶⁹John W. Hilbur, “The Theology of Worship in Exodus 24,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (June 1996): 188.

22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). This idea of memorial is also seen in the Israelite Passover tradition: “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD” (Ex 12:14). What then is the significance of Jesus’ words of remembrance spoken to his followers on this Passover Eve?

One of the most complicated debates surround New Testament studies is the relationship the Last Supper had to the celebration of Passover.³⁷⁰ There is little question that the meal must be viewed through the lens of the Passover feast.³⁷¹ Does that make the eucharist a Passover observance?

There were six elements involved in the traditional Passover meal:

1. The Passover lamb
2. Unleavened bread
3. Bowl of salt water
4. Bitter herbs
5. Charosheth
6. Four cups of wine³⁷²

The New Testament’s silence on the presence or absence of these elements is curious. Only the bread and wine receive mention, and their descriptions only cloud the current debate. The Greek word employed for “bread” (ἄρτον) usually referred to leavened bread, whereas there was a specific word (ἄζυμος) signifying unleavened bread.³⁷³ Likewise, the New Testament mentions the presence of wine, but none of the accounts

³⁷⁰A. J. B. Higgins, *The Lord's Supper in the New Testament* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1952); J. Jeremías, *The Eucharist Words of Jesus* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955).

³⁷¹Marshall, *Last Supper*, 789; Bock, *Luke*, 1713.

³⁷²Joel B. Green, “Last Supper,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 447.

³⁷³Hans Lietzmann, *Mass and Lord's Supper*, trans. Dorothea H.G. Reeve (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1953), 173.

speaking to there being four cups introduced to the meal. Luke mentions two cups, but the second reference is debated as to its authenticity.³⁷⁴

None of these arguments comprise a strong case against an association between the eucharist and a Passover Meal. It has been shown ἄρτος can in fact be used in connection with unleavened bread, for it is used in the LXX to describe the showbread.³⁷⁵ The fact that Paul, Matthew, and Mark only mention one cup is merely an argument from silence. Luke mentions two cups, and there is strong reason to support 22:19b-20 as being in the original text.³⁷⁶ Bock sees Luke 22:17-18 as a reference to the first cup of the Seder, while 19b-20 describes the third cup, “the cup of blessing,” which is the cup used to institute the new covenant.³⁷⁷

The absence of the other items, especially the Passover lamb, can also be easily explained. Jesus sends Peter and John on a mission, telling them to “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it” (Lk 22:8). Marshall writes, “the task of preparation for the Passover...included making ready the room, providing the lamb, the unleavened bread and other food, and cooking the meal.”³⁷⁸ This in conjunction with the temporal language utilized by Paul μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνῆσαι shows the “words of institution” to be proclaimed over the bread and wine during or after a meal consisting of other elements.

³⁷⁴Bradley Billings, “The Disputed Words in the Lukan Institution Narrative (Luke 22:19b-1): A Sociological Answer to a Textual Problem,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125 (Autumn 2006): 507-526.

³⁷⁵Green, *Dictionary*, 446.

³⁷⁶Billings, “Disputed Words,” 525.

³⁷⁷Bock, *Luke*, 1717

³⁷⁸Marshall, *Last Supper*, 791; another argument is that in Lk 22:15 (‘I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you’), ‘this’ is a reference to a literal lamb placed before Jesus, see: C.K. Barrett, “Luke XXII.15: To Eat The Passover,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 9 (1958): 305-7.

What this text may be testifying to is the shift that has taken place in the early church, wherein the eucharist becomes a ritual celebrated at the end of a meal and not a meal in and of itself.³⁷⁹ The point of interest here is that the eucharist was a meal, and according to the words of Jesus it was a Paschal meal. The bread and wine were separated from the rest of the meal and imbued with prophetic significance.³⁸⁰

The major problem in associating the Last Supper and the Passover meal is one of chronology. The Synoptics place the meal on the “first day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed.” This without question places the date of the meal on Nisan 14, which would have begun at sundown on Thursday night and lasted until sunset on Friday.³⁸¹ John, however, writes that the meal occurred “before the Feast of Passover” (13:1). Also, during the trial of Jesus, the Jews refrained from entering the Praetorium so “they would not be defiled, but might eat the Passover” (18:28). And lastly, Jesus is said to have been crucified on “the day of preparation of the Passover” (19:14). This places the crucifixion as going on simultaneously with the slaughter of the Passover lambs, which would place the eucharist one day earlier than the Synoptics. So, the Synoptics record the Passover as starting on Friday, the day in which Jesus was crucified. The Johannine chronology puts the first day of Passover a day later, on the Sabbath.

Scholars have attempted to resolve this conflicting chronology in a number of ways. There are those who argue that the Synoptics are the most accurate in dating the

³⁷⁹Paul Jones, “The Meaning of the Eucharist: Its Origins in the New Testament Text,” *Encounter* 54 (Spring 1993): 179

³⁸⁰Robin Routledge, “Passover and Lord’s Supper,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53:2 (2002): 204.

³⁸¹Jeremias. *The Eucharistic Words*, 18.

meal, while John is interpreting the event theologically in order to present the crucifixion of Christ as taking place in conjunction with the Passover sacrifices.³⁸² There are also those who argue that John's dating is correct, thus resolving conflicting crucifixion chronologies. This theory states that the meal was not observed in accordance with traditional dating but rather Jesus, who knew he would be unable to partake of the meal at the appropriate time, anticipated the Passover by celebrating it a day early.³⁸³ One theory that has gained popularity is that Jesus was following a sectarian calendar and purposefully held the Passover meal a day early to protest the temple authority.³⁸⁴ Fitzmyer writes, "According to this solution, Jesus would have eaten the Last Supper according to the solar (Essene) calendar...and been crucified according to the luni-solar calendar."³⁸⁵

None of these theories completely satisfy the chronological discrepancies. This debate has received much attention from many notable scholars and is still without popular resolve. The assumption that will be made here, based upon the work and arguments of Joachim Jeremias, is that the Last Supper was a Passover meal in character.³⁸⁶ It is tangential to the current purpose, which is to uncover the motifs underlying the events of the Last Supper, to argue whether or not the meal was a

³⁸²Ibid., 205.

³⁸³Marshall, *Last Supper*, 790.; H.E.D. Blakiston, "The Lucan Account of the Institution of the Lord's Supper," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4 (1902-3): 548-55.

³⁸⁴Annie Jaubert, *The Date of the Last Supper* (New York: Alba House, 1965).

³⁸⁵Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (X-XXIV)*, The Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 1381.

³⁸⁶Jeremias. *The Eucharistic Words*, 4-25.

verbatim liturgical replica of the Seder. What is important is to draw out the thematic elements from the Passover celebration that come to bear in Jesus' last meal.

The Passover was a meal of memorial and expectation. It was held annually on the 14th/15th of Nisan to remember the drama of Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Ex 12; Lev 9:1-5; Deut 16:1-8). The meal was followed by a seven-day celebration known as the Feast of Unleavened bread. The Seder evolved over time, starting with the elements of the Lamb, the bitter herbs, and the unleavened bread, but slowly growing into a more complex ritual.³⁸⁷ The food played an important role in the rite. The elements were signposts used to tell a story, drawing the worshipper back in memory to the time of slavery and redemption.³⁸⁸ Someone, typically a younger son, was to ask the leading question, "Why is this night different from other nights?" To which the host, usually the *paterfamilias*, would reply by recounting the story of slavery and exodus and explaining the significance of the elements of the meal.³⁸⁹ The story was told in the first person: "We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt, and the Lord our God brought us forth from there with a mighty and an outstretched arm."³⁹⁰ This moved the meal from the realm of mere remembrance to a celebration of corporate solidarity. Witherington writes, "the rehearsal of the story makes clear that it is not just a matter of Jews' remembering who they were, but indeed who they are and continue to be."³⁹¹

³⁸⁷Routledge, "Passover," 207.

³⁸⁸Ray Carlton Jones, Jr., "The Lord's Supper and the Concept of Anamnesis," *Word and World* 6 (Fall 1986): 443.

³⁸⁹Green, *Dictionary*, 447.

³⁹⁰Ben Witherington III, *Making a Meal of It: Rethinking the Theology of the Lord's Supper* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 4.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*

Paul and Luke record Jesus' words of ἀνάμνησιν: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24). Like Passover, the eucharist was meant to become a memorial meal. There has been some scholarly debate as to what exactly is being remembered here. Dix argues that more than a "remembrance," the Eucharist is a "re-presentation" of Christ, focusing on the present presence of Christ is the observance of the meal.³⁹² Jeremias argues that the subject of ἀνάμνησιν is God, meaning that the meal is not to remind man of Christ's sacrifice, but rather to remind God of the kingdom promises he made in the Eucharist.³⁹³ He writes that the continued observance of the Eucharist is "a presentation before God intended to induce God to act."³⁹⁴ Paul Jones sums up the debate by saying, "Although no consensus attends the proper translation of anamnesis, scholarship universally agrees that the cultic meal contains a backward reference."³⁹⁵

In the tradition of Passover, the celebration of the Lord's Supper points back in time to a crucial event in salvation history. Fitzmyer writes, "Jesus gives himself, his 'body' and his 'blood,' as a new mode of celebrating Israel's feast of deliverance. His own body and blood will replace the Passover lamb as the sign of the way God's kingdom will be realized from now on."³⁹⁶ Paul uses this theological framework, writing to the Corinthians that γὰρ τὸ πάσχα ἡμῶν ἐτύθη Χριστός (1 Cor 5:7). Christ has taken

³⁹²Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945) 161-162; also see Joseph M. Powers, *Eucharistic Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1967), 119.

³⁹³Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 247-249.

³⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 249.

³⁹⁵Paul Jones, "Meaning of Eucharist," 187.

³⁹⁶Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1392.

the place of the sacrificial lamb, and in this way he has effectively remolded the meal of remembrance around himself.

The feast is not only one of memorial, but also one of messianic expectation.³⁹⁷ Fitzmyer writes, “Associated with this reliving of their historic liberation was an anticipation of an eschatological, even messianic deliverance.”³⁹⁸ The Matthew/Mark tradition records the meal concluding with the singing of hymns (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). Traditionally, the Psalms of the Hallel (Ps. 114-118) were sung during Passover.³⁹⁹ Psalm 118 flows with messianic anticipation, climaxing in verses 25-26, “Save us we pray, O LORD! O LORD, we pray, give us success! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the LORD.” The Midrash interprets this passage eschatologically as the final day of redemption.⁴⁰⁰ Jeremias writes that more than a meal of remembrance, the Last Supper was a sign that the hour of redemption was here:

The end of Ps. 118 forms the last prayer that he prayed before he began his journey to Gethsemane. The establishment of this point, that he ended the last meal with his disciples by anticipating the jubilation of the antiphonal choir which would greet him at his return, opens the way to understanding the deepest meaning of the this hour and with it of the Lord’s supper altogether: *it is an anticipatory gift of the consummation.*⁴⁰¹

Ending the meal with the singing of the Hallel definitely imbues the event with messianic anticipation, but also present in the meal itself were expectations of the coming kingdom. The four cups of the Passover anticipate with joy the heavenly banquet that is

³⁹⁷Ray Jones, “Lord’s Supper, 444.

³⁹⁸Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1390.

³⁹⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰See William G. Braude, *The Midrash on Psalms*, Yale Judaica Series, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 277.

⁴⁰¹Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 261, italics added.

to come.⁴⁰² The third cup, or Cup of Blessing, “points forward in time to the coming of the Messiah.”⁴⁰³ As Jesus took the third cup, he said “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” (Mk 14:25). Jesus is giving eschatological weight to the cup. Ray Jones writes, “The words of Jesus can hardly be interpreted differently when we remember what wine—the cup—meant for Israel and how the cup was understood in the context of the Passover meal.”⁴⁰⁴ The third cup of the Passover meal signified a national, covenantal longing for consummation. Forsyth draw the covenantal and eschatological connections of the cup together: “The cup is the sign and pledge of a share in the new covenant, and so in the kingdom.”⁴⁰⁵ This places the Last Supper in the tradition of Jewish anticipatory meals (Isa 25:6; Zech 8; 14:16-21). Stendenahl writes, “The Eucharist is primarily the *Banquet*. It is the banquet on the way toward the consummation and toward fulfillment. It is a real meal and a joyous meal.”⁴⁰⁶

So, as Jesus gathers with his followers for one final meal, he tells them “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). With this sentiment, Jesus shared a meal with his friends. Acting as the *paterfamilias*, whose role it was to interpret the elements in the redemption-language of Passover, Jesus speaks words over the bread and the wine and distributes them to his disciples. By doing so, he

⁴⁰²Ray Jones, “Lord’s Supper,” 444.

⁴⁰³Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵P. T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 2nd edition (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1947), 246.

⁴⁰⁶Krister Stendahl, “New Testament Background for the Doctrine of the Sacraments,” in *Oecumenica*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 56, italics added.

effectively takes this feast of nationalistic memorial and expectation and applies it to his own life, death, and resurrection.⁴⁰⁷

Conclusion

The church at Corinth adapted the observance of the eucharist around a meal practice that was familiar to them. As evident as that may be, it does not strip the meal of its Old Testament origins. The meal has roots in the story of Israel. Jesus gathered with his disciples to celebrate Passover and to signify the birthing of a new covenant. In studying eucharistic origins, one must be careful not to embrace the Greco-Roman aspects witnessed in the churches of Paul while forgetting the paschal and covenantal nature of the meal.

This is but a glimpse at the voluminous scholarship on the matter. It has been presented here merely to give balance to the thesis as a whole. Scholars who argue for Jewish origins of the eucharist have solid grounds for doing so. The aim of this thesis is to spark imaginative conversation on the eucharist: its origins, how it was observed by the early church, and the role it plays in contemporary Christian practice. The Old Testament influences and the Greco-Roman banquet structure are only starting points. May others continue to prayerfully examine the eucharist, further the current scholarship in this area, and keep the conversation going.

⁴⁰⁷ Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1390-1

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