

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26
FEBRUARY 10, 2021

1 Corinthians 11:23 For I received from the lord

23a. *For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered to you*

With these few words, Paul establishes two things:

First, he received his understanding of the Lord's Supper from the Lord.

- There is no record of this transaction in the New Testament
- Some scholars think that Paul means that the Lord established this tradition which the church passed on to Paul.

Second, while serving as the founding pastor of the Corinthian church, Paul passed this tradition on to these people.

- They have no excuse for failing to understand the sacred nature of the Lord's Supper
- They have no excuse for the inconsiderate way they have been treating each other in the context of worship.

1 Corinthians 11:23b-25. On the night in which he was betrayed

23b. *that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread. 24. When he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "Take, eat. This is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in memory of me." 25. In the same way he also took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink, in memory of me."*

23b. "that the Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread"

Note that the Greek word for betrayed appears both in 23a, where Paul handed on to the Corinthians what he had received from the Lord and in 23b, where the Lord Jesus was betrayed.

The word has the sense of "delivered up" or "given over." It took on the idea of betrayal in the New Testament, because Judas' handing over Jesus to the Roman soldiers constituted a betrayal.

24a. "When he had given thanks, he broke it"

It would be usual for the host at a Passover meal to bless the bread and break it before distributing it.

What do you know about the word Eucharist?

- The word Eucharist is derived from a Greek word which means “to give thanks.”
- Eucharist is often used today to refer to the Lord’s Supper, it is not used in the New Testament as a name for this rite. Nor is the word Communion in the New Testament.
- Paul refers to this rite as “the Lord’s supper” in his introduction to this passage (11:20).

24b. “Take, eat. This is my body”

This phrase has caused significant divisions within the church which I find ironic, since Paul was concerned about divisions in the Corinthian church.

- Roman Catholics believe in *Transubstantiation*, which means that the substance of the bread and wine of the Eucharist are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus, even though we continue to perceive them as bread and wine.
- Some (but not all) Lutherans and Orthodox Christians believe in *Consubstantiation*, which means that the body and blood of Jesus are present alongside the bread and wine.
- Most Protestants, including we Methodists, believe that “This is my body” is an expression meaning, “This symbolizes my body.”

Some clergy go so far as to use the words, “This symbolizes my body” as the words of institution.

Note: I believe in the symbolic nature of these words, but I would never use “symbolizes” in the words of institution, because that goes beyond the Biblical text. I have not heard Pastor Lara use it when serving the table.

A side note: Resolving the issues raised by these words goes beyond this exegesis, so I recommend (because we all have diverse backgrounds) that you look to your own tradition to understand Jesus’ words.

Will you share your early methods of receiving the Eucharist?

24c. “which is broken for you”

The event to which the Lord’s Supper points is the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The phrase, “which is broken for you,” reminds us of the atonement for our sins that Christ made possible through his death on the cross.

24d. “Do this in memory of me”

Matthew and Mark do not include these words in their accounts of the institution of the Lord’s Supper (Matthew 26:26-30; Mark 14:22-25). Luke does include them (Luke 22:19). This and similar differences (Luke and Paul add “which is broken for you” to the bread saying—and

include “This cup is the new covenant”) cause scholars to link Matthew and Mark together as derived from one source—and Luke and Paul as derived from another.

Jesus clearly intended for the Lord’s Supper to serve as a rite that would bring to mind his death on behalf of the world. However, we, who tend to understand remembrance primarily as a mental activity, need to understand the significance of remembrance in Biblical times.

- God remembered his covenant with Israel, which led him save Noah and the other inhabitants of the ark (Genesis 8:1)
- God also called Israel to remember all that God had done for them, and promised to bless them if they did and to punish them if they didn’t (Deuteronomy 8:18-19).

So when Jesus invites us to remember him through the bread and wine that we share at the Lord’s Table, he is calling us to something more than bringing his death to mind. He is calling us to true discipleship

YOUR THOUGHTS?

25a. “In the same way he also took the cup, after supper

This suggests that Jesus distributed the bread before the meal and the wine after the meal.

One commentary believes that this was probably the pattern that the Corinthian Christians were following when some ate their fill while others went hungry.

25b. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood”

As noted above, Luke’s version also has Jesus saying, “new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20).

Mark’s account says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24).

Matthew’s account says, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

When I offer communion, I use words from Matthew: “This is the blood of the covenant which is pour out for you, me, and the many.”

The phrase, “new covenant,” reminds us that God promised to “make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jeremiah 31:31).

The words, “covenant in my blood,” remind us of Moses’ words as he dashed the blood of a sacrifice on the people, saying, “Look, this is the blood of the covenant, which Yahweh has made with you concerning all these words” (Exodus 24:8).

“Do this, as often as you drink, in memory of me” (v. 25c). These words remind us to keep the remembrance of Jesus in the forefront of our consciousness each time we observe the Lord’s

Supper. As noted above (see the comments on v. 24d), Biblical remembrance involves action—obedience—faithfulness.

When Jesus says, “as often as you drink,” he leaves the frequency of observance indefinite. However, Luke reports, “On the first day of the week, when the disciples were gathered together to break bread...” (Acts 20:7)—suggesting that the central purpose of the church’s meeting together on the Lord’s Day was to observe the Lord’s Supper—which suggests that early Christians observed the Lord’s Supper every week.

Do you know why the Lord’s Supper is on the first Sunday of each month in UMC?

1 Corinthians 11:26. You proclaim the lord’s death until he comes

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

26a. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death”

The little word, “for,” connects this verse with verse 25. Paul tells these Corinthian Christians that they are to observe the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Jesus, “for” when they do so they “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”—in other words, the observance of the Lord’s Supper becomes a proclamation—a preaching event.

The words of institution bring to mind the Lord’s death, but the bread and wine also have compelling power to bring to mind the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross.

26b. “until he comes”

With these words, Paul reminds us that we are an eschatological people who are waiting for the great day when Christ will come again—when he will be “Judge of the living and the dead” (Acts 10:42; 2 Timothy 4:1)—and when he will set our crooked world straight on its axis once again.

The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord make his face to shine on you
and be gracious to you
and give you peace.

Numbers 6:24-26