

December 4, 2005 PM

**COMMUNION: FEEDING ON CHRIST
THE COMMEMORATION VIEW
1 CORINTHIANS 11.23-26**

The early church fathers spent more time speaking in sacramental language concerning the Supper (which they predominantly called the Eucharist, following the “thanksgiving” offered by Christ at the institution) than they did trying to figure out the mysteries of how God works in and through the Eucharist to communicate to the Church the blessings of Christ’s work. That is, they did not seek to explain (as much) *how* we feed on Christ in the Supper as they simply observed the fact *that* we feed on Christ in the Supper.

Controversy in the Church: in the “Middle Ages,” mostly in the Western branch of the Church. In the 9th century (800's) two men (Radbertus and Ratramnus) were at the forefront of the debate over the issue of whether or not the elements in the Eucharist (the bread and the wine) literally/physically turned into the physical body and blood of Christ. (Radbertus was, to my knowledge, the first to clearly teach this doctrine.) No Church action was taken at this point. The issue arose again in the 11th century (Berengar and Lanfranc). The Western Church (commonly known as the Catholic Church) declared in 1215 that the bread and wine literally/physically become the body and blood of Christ. This is the view that is called *transubstantiation*.

Reformation: Luther’s view: *consubstantiation*; i.e., the bread and wine remain bread and wine, but Christ is present in, with, and under the elements. The elements were like a sponge which contained the physical presence of Christ but were distinct from it. Swiss Reformer Ulrich Zwingli: (attributed to him) *commemoration*; i.e., Christ is not present. The bread and wine are there as “reminders” of the work of Christ. They serve the purpose of stirring up our memories of Christ’s work. Calvin: most biblical view; Christ is truly present by His Spirit and we feed on Him, though not physically.

The Supper is more than the elements. But a particular view of the elements influences views of what is going on in the Supper, and views concerning what is going on in the Supper influences views of the elements.

But there is a danger of focusing on the elements. There is a larger context which make the elements “sacramental.” (E.g., showers vs. baptism; daily supper vs. the Lord’s Supper; correspondence by not exactly the same because of the context.)

In the sacraments the elements are important because certain elements are prescribed by God and symbolize what God is doing in the Supper. But the context in which those elements are used is also prescribed by God and inseparable from the sacrament itself. (E.g., Passover; must be certain elements within a particular context.)

The larger context of the Supper is the Church’s celebration of our redemption in Christ. The sacrament is about the Church, how each individual relates to the whole, and how we all relate to Christ as His body.

One of the goals of this short “series within a series” is to promote that which the Supper signifies and creates: the unity of the body of Christ.

Note: We must represent views honestly, not creating straw men.

1. THE SUPPER AS A COMMEMORATION MEAL

Mischaracterization: “You think that the Supper means nothing at all!”

Those who believe the Lord’s Supper to be a commemoration generally believe that the Supper as observed by the Church is solely for the purpose of stirring up our minds, remembering the work of Christ at the cross, and through this practice we are to be spurred on to greater obedience.

These elements are, as some in Church history have put it, “naked symbols.” God does not communicate to us the benefits of Christ’s work, they only point nakedly to Christ’s death. Communicants, then, do not feed on Christ in any way in this view. They have a cognitive recollection of factual data.

1. The commemoration view does not account adequately for the use of covenantal participation language.

Luther: *Hoc est corpus meum* (as it was in the Vulgate, the Latin Bible, the official Bible translation of the Church), “This is my body.” He was right to make a point of this.

What does Christ mean when He says, “This is my body,” meaning, “When you eat this bread you are feeding on my body”?

The commemoration view would say, “Christ meant this symbolically (“naked symbol”), but in no way do we ‘feed on Christ’ in the bread or ‘drink His blood’ from the cup.”

Fails to deal sufficiently with the participationist language in the Scripture concerning “communion with Christ’s body and blood” (i.e., feeding on Christ) in the Supper.

Cf. 1 Cor 10. Context: eating meat sacrificed to idols is okay when bought from the market place (ch. 8). Worship feasts in ch. 10; how they function and what occurs during them. Paul deals with the Jewish meals and their spiritual feedings in the wilderness in the first thirteen verses of ch. 10. Then Paul moves to the Lord’s Supper in 10.14-17. From there through the beginning of chapter 11 he draws application to the Corinthian situation.

Paul says here that the Jews in the wilderness most certainly participated or communed with Christ in the wilderness. Their eating and drinking meant something more than just a cognitive recollection.

When we drink of the cup of blessing, this is participation, fellowship, or communion with the blood of Christ. When we eat the one loaf, this is participation, fellowship, or communion with the body of Christ (10.16).

In the context he is telling them that they cannot “drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons.” Why? Because those who eat at the altar of demons have communion–fellowship, participation–with demons! That is, they partake of the “life” (or death) of demons because what they are doing in that context is worship. And in worship the one worship communicates his life to the worshiper.

Those who hold to a commemoration view of the Lord’s Supper have a difficult time accounting for (at least) the penalties/curses involved with unworthy participation. This does not mean that they do not recognize that the Bible says something about it. They do. But they cannot *account for it* in their understanding of the Supper.

2. The commemoration view does not understand memorial language properly.

When Jesus said (as it is translated), “Do this in remembrance of me,” He was not saying, “I am afraid that you will forget me and what I have done, so I am instituting this meal so that you will never let me slip your mind.”

While the memorial meal in the Bible does have the effect of the communicant remembering and responding appropriately, this is not the primary remembering that is going on.

This meal was instituted so that God would look upon His people celebrating this meal and remember His covenant and all of His obligations. The sacrament is primarily about God remembering His covenant, and only secondarily about us remembering.

3. The commemoration view tends to be highly dualistic.

Dualism is the belief that there is a sharp distinction between the physical and spiritual realm. When it comes to the Supper, dualism will say that it is not possible (or at least highly improbable) that God will work through physical/material matter in order to communicate spiritual/invisible realities.

God is not dualistic. He is the Maker of heaven and earth. Though He is distinct from His creation, He does work in, with, and through His creation to accomplish His purposes. He ordains means. (Remember the trees in the Garden.)

The dualistic view generally leads to neglect of the sacrament because it does not mean anything more than any other thing that we do to remember the death of Christ.

4. The commemoration view tends to be highly individualistic.

In this view the point of the Lord’s Supper is to stir up *my* memory. The Supper becomes a matter almost solely of personal piety. This view does damage to the corporate context of the Supper.

Paul’s argument in 1 Cor 10 involved the fact that in the loaf we commune with the body of Christ, the Church. It is because you are associated with this body that you cannot be associated with that body. The commemoration view of the Lord’s Supper undermines the entire context of the Supper when the focus is almost exclusively on what goes on between my two ears.