

THE LORD'S SUPPER UNTIL HE COMES

DONALD FARNER

Evidence from the gospels, 1 Corinthians 11, Jude 12, 2 Pet 2:13, and other early Christian literature suggests that the supper that formed the context for the first observance of the Eucharist in the upper room was not the Passover. Rather, the supper had special significance and was intended to be perpetuated. This reasoning is substantiated by the dynamic unity between the supper and the Eucharist and by the nature of sacrificial meals.

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INTRODUCTION

IT is the purpose of this study to demonstrate from the Scriptures that the supper meal shared in the upper room by Jesus and his disciples had both a symbolic ceremonial significance for the church and an authorization for perpetuation in the church. Four lines of evidence substantiate this claim:

1. The Gospel Model
2. The Apostolic Record of Perpetuation
3. The Dynamic Unity of the Supper and the Eucharist
4. The Apostolic Authority for its Practice

THE GOSPEL MODEL

The Supper was not the Passover Supper

Many dismiss the meal in the upper room as part of the communion ordinance by declaring that it was the Passover meal and that therefore, while it was significant for Israel, it only provided a setting for the Eucharist. They see no permanent significance in the supper itself. However, it can be demonstrated that the NT teaches that the supper was not the Passover and that it was not the occasion for the eating of the Passover lamb.¹ Constructing a harmony of the passages

¹Those who support this position include Homer A. Kent., Jr. (*Studies in the Gospel of Mark* [Winona Lake: BMH, 1981] 122; and "Matthew" in *The Wycliffe*

that present the time relationship of the upper room supper and the Passover shows that Jesus' observance was not the Passover meal. This is indicated by the following observations:

1. John 13:1: Jesus arose from supper "before the Feast of the Passover."
2. Mark 14:17: the evening referred to at this point is the beginning of the Day of Preparation which began at 6:00 p.m.
3. Luke 22:14-16: the reading of the Greek text preferred by many textual critics² says that Jesus, while expressing his desire to eat this Passover with his disciples, emphatically declares (οὐ μὴ) that he would *not* eat it until it was fulfilled in the kingdom of God.
4. All four gospels note that Jesus was reclining at the table with his disciples. The Passover supper was to be eaten in haste while standing with staff in hand (Exod 12:11). The lamb eaten was to be "roasted with fire" (Exod 12:8-9) rather than boiled or stewed as for a sop.
5. John 13:29: during the supper the disciples supposed that Judas, when told by Jesus, "what thou doest, do quickly," was going to buy things needed for the feast. Where would one find a store open in Jerusalem on the Passover night? Furthermore, why would he buy things for the Passover meal which was already in progress? It would be appropriate and possible to buy such supplies on the Preparation Day of the Passover.³
6. John 18:28: after the supper, in fact, the next morning, the Jews would not enter the Praetorium because they did not want to defile themselves and thus not be able to eat the still future Passover meal.

Bible Commentary [Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, eds.: Chicago: Moody, 1962] 96 and C. F. Yoder (*God's Means of Grace* [Elgin: Brethren Publishing House, 1908] 286-95). Those arguing for the identification of this meal with the Passover include Joachim Jeremias (*The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* [Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955] 1-57) and Bertold Klappert ("Lord's Supper" [*NIDNTT*] 2, 527-29). Those supporting a Passover meal but on a different timetable include I. Howard Marshall (*Last Supper and Lord's Supper* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 57-75) and Harold Hoehner (*Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977] 85-90). Cf. also David R. Plaster, *Ordinances: What Are They?* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1985) 61, 127-28.

²Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971) 173-77. The reading preferred is οὐ μὴ φάγω rather than οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ φάγω.

³Leon Morris (*The Gospel According to John* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971] 2, 628) admits that the words could mean that the Passover lay ahead. William Hendriksen (*Exposition of the Gospel According to John* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953-54] 2, 249) argues from silence against open shops.

7. John 19:14: the Preparation Day spoken of in all the gospels is here identified as "the Preparation Day for the Passover" rather than Friday, the usual preparation day for the weekly Sabbath. Many hours after the supper in the upper room it is still this Preparation Day for the Passover. The sixth hour according to Roman reckoning was about 6:00 a.m.⁴
8. John 19:31, 42: the Sabbath to which the Preparation Day was related in this context is called "A High Day" along with being identified as the Passover in v 14.⁵ Jesus is dead and buried and it is still the Preparation Day of the Passover. In fact, the Jewish leaders wanted him buried before the Preparation Day ended and the Passover began.
9. Mark 15:24-25: Jesus was crucified at the third hour (9:00 a.m.) on the Day of Preparation. Thus it was noon when darkness fell upon the land (Mark 15:33; Luke 23:44).
10. Mark 15:34: at the ninth hour (3:00 p.m.) with only three hours remaining on the Day of Preparation, Jesus cried out. This was the time for the Passover lamb to be slain at the Temple (1 Cor 5:7).⁶
11. Luke 23:54: Jesus' body was laid in the tomb on the Preparation Day nearing 6:00 p.m. when the "High" Sabbath, the Passover itself, would begin. The lamb would be eaten soon. John 19:42 adds that the nearby tomb had to be used "on account of the Jewish day of preparation."
12. Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56 record that the women bought spices on the day after the Passover Sabbath (i.e., Friday) but had to wait until the Sabbath had passed before they could go to the tomb. There had been no time in the fleeting moments at the close of the Preparation Day before the Passover Sabbath closed the market. They had to buy spices on Friday and prepare them and then wait until the Saturday Sabbath passed before leaving home for the tomb that Sunday morning.

Thus, the sequence was as follows. Jesus died on Wednesday, the Preparation Day (Luke 23:54a). The Passover Sabbath was on Thursday (Luke 23:54b). The women bought and prepared the spices on Friday (Luke 23:56a; cf. Mark 16:1). They rested on the Saturday Sabbath (Luke 23:56b) and came to the tomb on Sunday.

⁴Homer A. Kent, Jr., *Light in the Darkness: Studies in the Gospel of John* (Winona Lake: BMH, 1974) 207.

⁵Homer A. Kent, Jr., "The Day of that Sabbath Was a High Day: John 19:31" (unpublished B.D. thesis; Grace Theological Seminary, May 1950).

⁶Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 87.

The Supper was Recorded in All Four Gospels

The supper is one of only two events that are recorded as part of the upper room experience in all four gospels. The betrayal prediction by Jesus is the other common feature. It is interesting that those are the two events that Paul emphasizes in 1 Cor 11:20, 23.

John records the supper and footwashing. Matthew, Mark and Luke record the supper and its memorial. The supper is the common feature of all four. Certainly that would give some indication of its importance, especially since it is assumed at this point that it was not the Passover meal.

The Supper had Special Significance

This supper was the last meal Jesus would eat with his disciples. It was his last few hours with them before his death. From his discourse recorded in John 13:31–16:33 it is evident that Jesus packed into those hours those things which were of greatest significance: love for one another as the mark of discipleship, the way to the Father's house, the coming of the Holy Spirit, peace in tribulation, the key to fruitfulness, Jesus' departure and return, and the privilege of prayer. It was the perfect time to introduce a spiritual ceremony that would depict the real meaning of those harrowing events that were shortly to take place. The most important message to communicate in symbol would be *hope* for the future. This then is highlighted in all four of the gospel accounts. Luke's record of Jesus' statement, "For I say to you that I shall not drink from the fruit of the vine from now until the time when the kingdom of God comes" (22:17–18), is echoed by Matthew (26:29) and Mark (14:25) and paralleled in John 13:1. It even finds its way into 1 Cor 11:26 where Paul writes, "until He comes."

It should also be noted that from ancient times the eating of a meal together implied something about fellowship. Those who eat together form a fellowship.⁷ This is a significance of that supper as well. More will be said of this later.

THE APOSTOLIC PERPETUATION

After those events took place which are recorded in the gospels, it is recorded that the apostles perpetuated this supper from which is drawn the elements for the celebration of the bread and the cup. The early post-apostolic churches continued this pattern.

⁷Klappert, "Lord's Supper," 2. 521.

The New Testament Record

Acts 2:42, 46 and 20:7-11 use the expression "the breaking of bread." A study of this expression demonstrates that this is best understood as referring to a full meal rather than simply the Eucharist.⁸ This phrase became a technical expression for "The Lord's Supper" (I Cor 11:20) and the "Agape" (Jude 12). These terms also embodied the concept of a full fellowship meal with ceremonial significance.⁹ It is thus evident that the church in Acts perpetuated the practice of that meal experienced in the upper room on that fateful night.

It should be noted that what Paul says regarding that supper in I Corinthians should be read as part of the pre-literary history of both Luke and Acts, for Paul's epistle predates both.¹⁰ Luke was the companion and assistant to the apostle and probably used Paul as a source for some of his material.

The subject under discussion in I Cor 10:14-21, meat offered to idols as it relates to the practice of Christians, demands that both the supper and its memorial, the Eucharist, are in view. The dynamic unity between the Eucharist and the supper is illustrated by the fact that a portion of the sacrifice was offered on the altar and the remaining larger portion was shared in a fellowship meal before God.¹¹ The bread, cup and table of the Lord are all woven together in the communion experience.

I Cor 11:17-34 demonstrates at least two things about the Lord's Supper. First, it was an actual meal.¹² Vv 20-22 make any other understanding of it impossible. Second, the supper was practiced, though severely abused, and its continued practice was expected and assumed in v 33 and in the warnings attached to *continued* abuse of it (vv 27-32).

It is not known exactly how the Lord's Supper came to be called the Agape (Jude 12). But before the NT era closed the fellowship meal, originating in the upper room, was called the Agape, the Love

⁸Plaster, *Ordinances*, 81-83, 132-34; Homer A. Kent, Jr., "A Historical Investigation of the Agape" (unpublished Th.M. thesis; Grace Theological Seminary, 1952) 33; J. Behm, "κλάω," *TDNT* 3 (1965) 729-30; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 79, 408; R. Lee Cole, *Love Feasts* (London: Charles H. Kelly, 1916) 50; and J. F. Keating, *The Agape and the Eucharist in the Early Church* (London: Methuen, 1901) 42-44.

⁹Klappert, "Lord's Supper," 2. 530.

¹⁰Donald Guthrie (*New Testament Introduction* [3d ed.; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1970]) prefers A.D. 57 for I Corinthians (p. 441) and A.D. 60-61 for the Gospel of Luke (pp. 110-14).

¹¹See the article by James Custer, "When is Communion Communion?" in this issue of *GTJ*.

¹²J. Behm, "δειπνον," *TDNT* 2 (1964) 34.

Feast. Jude is commonly dated somewhere between A.D. 65–80.¹³ By this time the emphasis of the Lord's Supper was focused on the love relationship between the believers as they shared a complete salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ.

While it is admitted that the textual evidence in 2 Pet 2:13¹⁴ is weighted toward the reading "deceptions" (ἀπάταις), it is significant that the alternate reading, "love feasts" (ἀγάπαις), does have relatively early support. Such support shows that the expression and the practice were thought to exist in NT times. There is also the question of a parallel with Jude 12. 2 Peter probably dates late in Peter's life, sometime before his death in A.D. 68.¹⁵

The Post-NT Record

The Didache (one of the earliest known extra-NT Christian writings) indicates that the phrase "break bread" became semi-technical for the supper (called the Agape) and the Eucharist combined.¹⁶ R. Lee Cole writes, "For nearly three centuries the Agape continued to be a familiar part of Christian Worship in every locality in which Christianity has left us early records."¹⁷ Ignatius in his Epistle to the Smyrneans (ca. A.D. 112) sets apart practices that are ordinances by requiring the presence of a Bishop. He cites two: Baptism and the Agape. Later in the same epistle he makes it clear that he was understanding the Eucharist to be part of the Agape.¹⁸ Likewise, the Didache does not even imply that there were separate ordinances making up the service. The communion service is treated there as a unit with the Agape and the Eucharist practiced together.¹⁹

To summarize, both the apostolic record and the early post-apostolic literature testify to the fact of the perpetuation of the Lord's Supper or Agape as a ceremonial meal of symbolic significance.

THE DYNAMIC UNITY OF THE SUPPER AND THE EUCHARIST

A practical purpose is served by showing the intrinsic unity of the supper and the Eucharist. Few Christians question the practice of the Eucharist. However, the Eucharist is all that is taken from the

¹³Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 909–12.

¹⁴Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 704.

¹⁵Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 850.

¹⁶Cole, *Love Feast*, 47. Cole is one of several European scholars who wrote on the Agape at the beginning of the 20th century.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁸Ignatius, "Epistle to the Smyrneans" (ANF; reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 8. 89–90.

¹⁹"The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" (ANF; reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 7. 379–80.

upper room for ceremonial perpetuation. Why take only the Eucharist from the upper room ceremony? On what grounds is such a selection made? There are at least four lines of scriptural evidence that inseparably link the Agape with the Eucharist.

The Bread and the Cup of Both Supper and Eucharist are One

It is important to notice that the term "Eucharist" is not a scriptural designation for the bread and cup.²⁰ It suggests that the bread and cup, called the "Eucharist," are somehow set apart as more sacred and distinct from the elements of the Lord's Supper (i.e., Agape). Such is not really the case. A careful comparison of the various accounts of the upper room supper in Scripture indicates that the food of the supper and the food of the "Eucharist" were materially and ceremonially one. A harmonization of the Synoptics with Paul's account in I Corinthians 11 is helpful.

First, the bread and cup of the memorial (remembrance) were not a special portion of food kept aside from the meal for the celebration of a "Eucharist" after the meal. Matthew and Mark both place the bread memorial during the course of the meal, that is, "as they were eating."²¹ Luke and Paul do not make such a specific statement but what they do say is easily harmonized with Matthew and Mark. Luke placed the bread memorial between the first and second sharing of the cup (Luke 22:17-20). Thus, the bread of remembrance is from the meal in progress.

Second, both Luke and Paul place the memorial cup after the supper.²² Matthew and Mark present the memorial cup after the bread without comment as to time frame. But again, their account is easily harmonized with that of Luke and Paul.

Third, there is a cup received by Jesus and shared during the supper according to Luke 22:17. The memorial of the cup is presented in v 20. However, the two cups are one. Since the first cup (22:17) is without the article, and the second cup (22:20) has the article, this is an example of the anaphoric article or the article of previous reference.²³ That is to say, after the supper Jesus took the previously mentioned cup and designated the remembrance.

²⁰This became the term used extensively by the early church. Cf. Ignatius, "Epistle to the Smyrneans," 8; and Justin Martyr, "First Apology" (ANF; reprint: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) I. 66.

²¹Ἐσθιοντων δὲ αὐτῶν (Matt 26:26); καὶ ἐσθιοντων αὐτῶν (Mark 14:22).

²²The identical phrase μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι is found in both Luke 22:20 and I Cor 11:25.

²³A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1943) 762.

The point is that Jesus took the food of the supper, bread and wine, and designated the bread of the supper as a remembrance of his body, and the wine of the supper as the remembrance of his blood. The "Eucharist" has no separate existence or meaning apart from the supper from which it was taken. At the time of the original institution it was not a bread and cup celebrated after supper and apart from that supper as a separate ceremony. This is not to say that having a wafer of bread and a sip of juice for the Eucharist is wrong in and of itself. However, such a practice may suggest a separation that is not true. It implies the separation of those elements from the supper from which they were taken.

The Focus on the Second Coming by the Supper and its Food

In all four accounts of the supper the memorial refers to the coming of the Lord Jesus. In Luke 22:18 the eating of the supper (the "supper" cup) is connected with the statement, "For I say to you that I shall in no wise (οὐ μὴ) drink from the fruit of the vine from now until when the kingdom of God comes." I Cor 11:26 notes that "as often as we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes." Matt 26:29 says, "And I say to you that I shall in no wise (οὐ μὴ) drink from the fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it with you new in the kingdom of my Father." Mark 14:25 likewise states, "Verily I say to you that I shall in no wise any longer (οὐκέτι οὐ μὴ) drink from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

When the supper and Eucharist are together, believers are pointed toward the future hope of their supper engagement with the Lord. This future emphasis unites the two aspects. It should be noted that this reunion with the Lord is pictured in parable (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:16-24) and prophecy (Rev 19:7-9) in the setting of the great Supper.

Abuse of the Supper Defiles the Memorial

It is clear that the subject under discussion in I Cor 11:17-34 is the practice or rather the abuse of the Lord's Supper. Vv 20-22 plainly say so. The conclusion in vv 33-34 also indicates that the supper is the matter in Paul's mind. The introduction of the bread and cup memorial in vv 23-26 forms the theological basis for an assertion regarding the danger of abusing the supper. The food of the supper is given ceremonial significance. To abuse the supper, that is, to eat and drink its food in an unworthy manner due to division and selfish strife, is to bring guilt (11:27) and judgment (11:29) upon one's self. In fact, weakness, sickness, and even death are possible consequences. In short, the supper and its food, including the bread and

cup, are united in such a way so that to abuse the supper is to defile the worship of the Lord as celebrated in the supper and its memorial. This points to a union of the two.

*There is a Spiritual, Dynamic Unity
Between the Supper and the Memorial Food*

1 Cor 10:14–22 reveals a common principle involved in a worship ceremony, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian.²⁴ All three are in view in this text. Meat offered to idols forms the context of this passage. Can a believer eat meat offered to idols? A portion of the meat is offered on the altar to a pagan deity. The rest of the edible carcass is then shared in a fellowship meal. This shared meal constitutes the group as a body of worshipers of that deity. Paul notes that nothing happens to the food (10:19), but when one eats with an uneasy conscience regarding the idol he is practicing idolatry. Though idols are nothing, the demons behind them are real.

This same principle is exemplified in Israel's worship. Those who eat the sacrifices are sharers (κοινωνοί) of the altar (10:18). Again, a portion is offered at the altar, declaring the name of the deity worshiped. The rest of the edible carcass (or loaf, etc.) is then eaten by the worshiping group. That group is constituted a body of worshipers by their eating (Deut 12:17–18, 26–27).

Similar to these two worshiping groups is the worship of Christians in the communion experience. The parallel is the basis for the argument of the passage. One should not eat meat offered to idols with an uneasy conscience because one should not be a sharer (κοινωνοί) with demons (10:20). One must not, therefore, drink the Lord's cup and the demon's cup. One cannot partake of the Lord's table and a demon's table. The Lord's Supper and its memorial are linked as the carcass is linked to the portion offered in pagan and Jewish worship. The link is spiritual, ceremonial and dynamic. Meaningful practice of the Eucharist is tied to the celebration of the supper.

THE APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY FOR ITS PRACTICE

An Apostolic "Tradition"

The subject matter of 1 Cor 11:2–34 has to do with apostolic traditions and instructions given by Paul to the church at Corinth. In v 2 Paul praises the Corinthian church for holding fast to the traditions²⁵ (παράδοσεις) he had delivered (παρέδωκα) to them. He then

²⁴Cf. Custer, "Communion," in this issue of *GTJ*.

²⁵See the study by J. Timothy Coyle in this issue of *GTJ*. See also Klaus Wegenast, "Teach" (*NIDNTT*) 2. 773.

proceeds to give instruction concerning a tradition that needs reinforcement among them (11:3–16). In v 17 Paul begins instruction concerning another tradition with regard to which he does *not* praise them. He begins, “now giving instruction with respect to this, I do not praise” (τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶ). This matter is one of the traditions which he delivered which was not being properly perpetuated. In fact, it was being grievously abused. In v 23 Paul specifically refers to that which he received from the Lord and delivered (παρέδωκα) to them regarding the bread and the cup. He does so, not to distinguish the bread and cup from the supper, but to continue his argument against the abuse of the supper. The meaning assigned to the bread and the cup by the Lord is a strong argument against abusive eating of that bread and cup during the supper meal.

Paul concludes in v 34 with the statement, “The remaining things I shall arrange when I come.” He has ordered or arranged things pertaining to the abuse of the supper in his letter. He will do the same for other matters related to it when he comes. The context of this chapter clearly involves matters being commanded by the apostle.

An Apostolic Tradition of “Coming Together”

The verb συνέρχομαι occurs five times in 11:17–34 (17, 18, 20, 33, 34). This verb refers here to the gathering of the church to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.²⁶ Collating the occurrences of the term with its modifiers results in the composite phrase “as you are coming together as a church at the same place to eat the Lord’s Supper.”²⁷ Thus, the supper itself is a formal gathering for worship with a special significance beyond mere eating and drinking.²⁸

An Apostolic Imperative

A final look at this text will focus on 11:33. The answer to the abuse of the Lord’s Supper is not to discontinue the supper but rather to “wait for” one another (ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε) instead of each one “taking first” his own supper in the eating (21). The verb “to wait for” is in the imperative mood—it is a command. The participle “coming together” (συνερχόμενοι) is dependent upon the imperative verb and can be construed as a participle of attendant circumstance. In that

²⁶Johannes Schneider, “ἔρχομαι,” *TDNT* 2 (1964) 684.

²⁷Συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ (18) . . . ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ . . . κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν (20). This composite text describes the practice that is referred to throughout this passage. The fact that the reference is from a corrective vantage point does not alter that.

²⁸Plaster, *Ordinances*, 62–63.

case, the imperative force of the main verb is carried over into the participle.²⁹ Thus, the coming together for this supper is a part of the command. The abuses were to be corrected but the practice of the supper was not to cease.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Lord's Supper is a meal which included the memorial of the bread and cup. It is an apostolic tradition perpetuated by Paul on the basis of the upper room model and the revelation to him from the Lord (1 Cor 11:17-34). It is a ceremonial meal which has a purpose beyond satisfaction of hunger (11:34). It is the source of the bread and cup which is shared in order to declare and memorialize the redemptive work of Christ. It recognizes the fellowship of believers worshipping the Lord Jesus for his sacrificial death. It involves the ceremonial fellowship of Christians looking forward to sharing a supper with the Lord when he returns.³⁰

²⁹Ernest DeWitt Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek* (3d ed.; Edinburgh: F. & T. Clark, 1898) 173-74. Other examples of this grammatical phenomenon are Matt 28:19-20; Eph 5:18-23; and James 5:14.

³⁰It is encouraging that two articles have appeared recently urging reinstitution of the Love Feast in church worship: David Gough, "Recovering the Love Feast," *Eternity* 33 (July-August, 1982) 50-51; and Daniel Doriani, "Wasn't the Lord's Supper Originally a Feast?" *Christianity Today* 27 (March 18, 1983) 44.