

The Lord's Supper

"It's Elemental"

First Corinthians 11:23-25

Mick tried to keep Rocky from fighting Clubber Lang. Rocky had lost his hunger; rather, he'd lost the eye of the tiger.

He forced the fight and lost. Apollo Creed stepped in and offered to train Rocky - but only on the condition he train in Apollo's old gym in L.A., where he could get back to basics.

In the midst of his rebuke for their selfish behavior during the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper, Paul gets back to the basic elements, and order, of communion.

1Co 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;

Sometime after he was saved on the road to Damascus, Paul spent time alone with Jesus. He did not go to Jerusalem to receive instruction from the apostles. Rather, he retired into Arabia for a time, and not until three years later did he go to Jerusalem.

The only apostle he met was Peter, and the only other leader he met was James.

Paul clearly implied that he spent three years being taught by Jesus Himself (Galatians 1:12). Like the other apostles, Paul studied with Christ for three years before beginning his ministry.

He may have received instruction about the Lord's Supper during that time. On the other hand, the church was already sharing communion, from the very first days after Pentecost. Thus the phrase, "I received from the Lord," can also mean that Paul received the instruction that had come from the Lord to the apostles, and was being followed in the churches.

Paul was the one who "delivered" the tradition to the Corinthians. He had founded the church, and stayed there for some eighteen months before moving on. We don't know exactly how Paul administered communion. The pot-luck they were having prior to communion was probably added after Paul left. What Paul describes here is the bare bones.

I'll mention something, just because it is interesting, I discovered that scholarly estimates of the size of the church, at the time of this letter, range from 40 to 150 persons.

Of all the things Paul could emphasize about Jesus and the Lord's Supper, he said it was the same night Jesus was "betrayed." It reads, "while He was being betrayed," reminding us that Judas was not a participant in communion.

Following the timing of these events can be difficult, but it seems that the Passover meal was fully over before any part of communion was instituted.

Let me say something very briefly about Passover and the Christian. It's popular for believers to attend Passover Seders around Easter, to commemorate the last Passover of Jesus.

"Seder" simply means, *order of service*. If you've been to one, they are full of incredible symbolism and ritual.

Problem is, much of that was added years later. Allow me to read this rather long quote from a Hebrew website:

Jesus could not have known what a "seder" was, let alone have modeled His last Passover after one. The elements of even the primitive seder originated *decades after he died*.

[In Jesus' day] Jewish families brought Passover lambs for sacrifice on the Temple altar as biblically prescribed: "Thou shalt sacrifice the Passover offering...in the place which the Lord shall...cause His name to dwell [Jerusalem's Temple]" (Deuteronomy 16:2, 5–6); and the practice of King Josiah: "In the eighteenth year of King Josiah [621 B.C.E.] was this Passover kept...in Jerusalem" (Second Kings 23:21–23).

For the ceremony, the priests conducted the sacrificial rite. Then families retrieved and consumed their meat as the main part of their Passover meal, which also included unleavened bread and bitter herbs (recalling the Hebrews' enslavement in Egypt).

Passover meals Jesus experienced in his lifetime would have had to be along these Temple-centered lines.

Where does the modern Passover Seder come from? A book called the *Haggadah* (from the Hebrew root "to tell") that serves as the liturgy and guidebook for the seder developed over time.

The first documented evidence of parts of the Haggadah is found in 200AD.

Commentaries were added and most of the version we now have was completed by the end of the Talmudic period (500-600AD).

In Exodus, God said,

Exo 12:8 Then they shall eat the flesh [of the lamb] on that night; roasted in fire, with unleavened bread *and* with bitter *herbs* they shall eat it.

Pretty simple! Very basic. As time passed, different traditions were added.

Wine was not mentioned at all in Exodus; it came later, along with the diners reclining and singing hymns.

In fact, on the very first Passover, we read

Exo 12:11 And thus you shall eat it: *with* a belt on your waist, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. So you shall eat it in haste. It *is* the LORD's Passover.

Interesting. Did the disciples, and Jesus, have "sandals on [their] feet?" Not if Jesus washed their feet!

This tells me that as long as the basic elements are present, we have freedom in liturgy.

Jesus' last Passover would have been a very simple affair, followed by His instituting the Lord's Supper.

BTW - There are slight differences in the Gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper. There are no contradictions, and everything can be reconciled. But I think it's important to understand that we don't always know the exact order of these traditions.

I am thankful for that, because it keeps things from becoming dead rituals, where you go through the motions without thinking about what you're doing, and why you're doing it.

1Co 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

There's absolutely no way that Jesus, a Jew, would have meant this in any sense other than as symbolic. If He meant that somehow the elements of bread and wine turned into His physical body, that would have been a much longer conversation.

The Lord's Supper can be meaningful without being mystical.

He meant that His physical body was about to become the final sacrifice for sin. Since Eden, God had required a sacrificial lamb to temporarily atone for sin. All those lambs anticipated the final Lamb of God Who would once-for-all take away the sin of the world.

1Co 11:25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

The old covenant required the constant blood of animals offered by men. The new covenant has been ratified once and for all by the death of Christ. It is written on our hearts when we believe Him.

By "blood" Jesus meant His life. Again, there was nothing mystical about His blood, and the fruit of the vine we drink does not become His blood.

William MacDonald points out, "In all this instruction concerning the Lord's Supper it is notable that there is not a word about a minister or priest officiating. It is a simple memorial service left for all the people of God."

We've discussed the words, "as often as you drink it," before. I believe that they give us freedom. We can share the bread and cup everyday... Or weekly... Or monthly... As we are led by the Spirit.

We can share the bread and cup at a gathering of saints... Or in our homes.

The Lord's Supper is a "remembrance." Gordon Fee says of this,

The Passover meal itself was a "remembrance" to be kept forever in Israel; so Jesus is now reconstituting the "memorial" for the true Israel that will gather around the table in His name to "remember" its own deliverance through Him. That is why He describes it as "My remembrance." It is not simply "in memory of Him," but it is eaten as a "memorial" of the salvation that He has effected through his death and resurrection.

Paul got back to basics. These are the elements; this is why you partake of them. Other than mentioning the bread and the cup, he kept it simple.

Rather than add all kind of elaborate rituals, we ought to keep communion basic, to allow us to remember what the Lord did for us.