

# The Means of Grace

## The Lord's Supper: Our Weekly Sacrament

... and all ate the same spiritual food,

<sup>4</sup> and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ ...

<sup>14</sup> Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

<sup>15</sup> I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.

<sup>16</sup> The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?

<sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

<sup>18</sup> Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?

<sup>19</sup> What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything?

<sup>20</sup> No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.

<sup>21</sup> You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

<sup>22</sup> Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

**1 Corinthians 10:3-4, 14-22**

## They all Ate The Same Spiritual Food

The **word of God is a great power**. This has been the key concept we've been uncovering in our short series on the means of grace. **The means of grace** depend upon the idea of the word of God as a great power. If it is not a great power, then the means of grace are pointless, for the means

of grace *are* the word of God, be it in the form of preaching, reading, singing, or praying the word or the sacraments. Last time we dealt with **what a sacrament is** and then went to the initiation sacrament of the new creation: baptism. Today, we want to look at **the weekly sacrament**, the one that feeds us with food to teach us our need for our “**daily bread**” from God. This is the Lord’s Supper.

I thought it would be interesting, before doing a little **systematic** theology on the Lord’s Supper and then looking at it through a **biblical** theology lens, to begin with a passage we looked at last time. **1 Corinthians 10:1-2** says, “**For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea...**” We used this as a launching point for the idea that **baptism** is in fact an OT idea. Paul directly calls the baptism crossing a baptism into Moses. But he continues in the very next words by saying this. “**... and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For the drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ**” (3-4). How interesting that right after he talks about baptism, he goes to eating and **feasting upon Christ!**

This is in some ways similar to how we began last time with **Isaiah 55:10-11**, where the prophet spoke of both **water and bread** in the same sentence as being the analogies of how powerful his word is. It is like water that turns seed to sprout, eventually giving way to the bread which feeds the people. On the other hand, the prophet Amos spoke about the word of God when he likened the lack of hearing it to **a famine** that God was sending, not of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD” (**Amos 8:11**). There was no greater famine the people could endure than this famine, for in failing to give his word to them, the people would starve and **die in their inner man**, the spiritual man, the man who lives long after the body wastes away in the grave. **“They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it”** (**12**). I’m going to come back to this idea at the end and how we often give ourselves a self-induced famine when it comes to the Supper, but first, let’s explore more what it means that the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace.

## **Communion—What Is It? A Bit of Theology**

In our circles, we perhaps most commonly call our sacramental meal together **“communion.”** The word comes

from just a little later in the same chapter in Corinthians. The ESV reads, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a *participation* in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a *participation* in the body of Christ?” (1Cor 10:16). However, the older KJV and Geneva Bibles say, “a *communion* in the blood ... a *communion* in the body.” The Greek word here is the famous *koinōnia*. What is koinonia?

The word refers to **communion, association, or partnership** (LSJ). It can refer to “**fellowship**” or **joint-ownership**. Our English word comes from the Latin *communio*, which is how the Latin translates it and it means fellowship, *mutual* participation, or sharing. It is a compound word composed of the prefix *com-* “**with, together**” and *unus* “**oneness, union.**” The word “common” is its root. Something in common is something belonging to all, owned or used jointly, general, of a public nature or character. So this usage, we can see that communion is not only a participation in or a fellowship with, but something that belongs to all Christians; it is **our common meal**.

How ironic then that up until 1970, **Rome refused to give half of the meal to its members**. You were free to take the bread, so long as the priest feeds it to you, but the cup

was forbidden to all but the priests. This is because of a gross superstition that crept into the Roman Mass around 1215 AD at the Fourth Lateran Council. At that time, Rome officially adopted what most Protestants consider a great blasphemy—**Transubstantiation**.

As the word conveys, the idea is that when the eucharistic prayer is offered by the priest, the efficacy of the word of Christ and the action of the Holy Spirit “**trans**” form the “**substance**” of bread and wine into the actual literal body and blood of Jesus. That’s why you were not allowed to drink the blood, especially if you spilt it on the ground! By the way, the **Eucharist** is what they and several other denominations have chosen to call the Supper. Eucharist refers to what the Lord did at the Last Supper with the disciples. He broke the bread and “**gave thanks**” (*eucharīsteō*; Mark 14:23). So Eucharist simply means to give thanks. It is **the Christians’ corporate Thanksgiving meal!**

Now, I believe there’s a whole bunch of philosophical monkey business afoot in their view of Transubstantiation, and I’m not going to spend the hours upon hours it would take to break it all down for us, except to say this. The idea is deeply rooted in the philosophical assumption of the

atemporality of God. This is the idea that **God exists outside of time** and is therefore *present* in *every* time. There is only “now” with God, not past or future.

With this underpinning, the priest blesses the elements and they are transformed into the actual literal body and blood of Christ, although this is **completely invisible to any form of scientific inquiry**. You just “believe it.” When this happens, it’s as if the two “presents” (Jesus on the cross; us right now) somehow merge in our space-time continuum. Now, importantly, because we want to be fair to their actual position, the idea is not that Christ is actually *put back* on the cross and re-sacrificed. It actually doesn’t have to be, because to God, Jesus is always dying on the cross, just like Jesus is always in the womb of Mary and Jesus is always here at the Second Coming. That’s the nature of an atemporal God. Nevertheless, they believe it *is* Christ’s body and blood and God is remembering Christ’s sacrifice in a way that he can’t do for the benefit of the people unless it actually transforms into that.

Rome, of course, believes Christ is now in space and time **eternally alive**, not dead. And so they will call the Mass a “**living sacrifice**,” even though it is simultaneously a

participating in the actual death of Christ on the cross. So as one person has put it, “The Mass is not a repeating the murder of Jesus, but is taking part in what never ends; the offering of Christ to the Father for our sake.”<sup>1</sup> But why is it never-ending? Because God is outside of time and to him, it is as if Christ is always on the cross dying. In my opinion this is really philosophical sleight of hand and I disagree with how Rome has used this philosophy to reinterpret the words of the Bible.

One of the things Rome does is to take Christ’s language that “this is my body ... this is my blood” literally, which I think is about as smart as taking his statements that he is the door or the gate or the road literally. It’s called a metaphor. This isn’t difficult.

In a kind of overreaction, many Protestants have said that there’s nothing whatsoever to the Supper save our own personal remembrance of it. It’s totally one-sided. It is not a means of grace. Instead, in taking it, I think about Jesus (or more likely I think about myself, but that’s for the end of the sermon) in a kind of intense psychological experience I try to make myself have. This is called the memorial view of the Supper and it is really first

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<sup>1</sup> A good summary of this can be found at Jason Evert, “Is the Mass a Sacrifice?” *Catholic Answers* (9-1-2001).

championed by the great Swiss Reformer and friend of Calvin, [Ulrich Zwingli](#) (1484-1531). I grew up with this view and I believe it profoundly misses Jesus' statement nearly as badly as Rome does. For while I do not take "this is my body" literally, I do take it *seriously*. There is something profound going on in the Supper that makes it a means of grace.

Remember, the means of grace always have [at their heart](#) the word of God. The word of God is powerful, especially the Gospel, which is powerful to save and the sanctify because it is God's word. Now, we always make sure that the proclamation of the word is attached to the sacrament, but we should never lose site of the fact that [the sacrament itself contains the word](#) of the gospel. After all, what is this we take? The Body of Christ in some sense. His body when? Broken for you [on the cross](#). This is the death of Jesus in mind here, his sacrifice that takes away our sins. It is the new covenant in his blood, his blood poured out on the cross as that same [life-giving sacrifice](#) that came through his own death. That's the gospel and therefore it is the power of God. As such, it is a means of grace. It is God's grace to you, through the gospel, to feed you with Christ.

Because the Supper is somehow a communion with the living Christ, as Paul himself told us, then when he says this is my body, we must take it seriously, though not literally. This is where I've found Calvin's view of the Supper better stated than perhaps anyone in church history.<sup>2</sup> Essentially, he believes that when the Supper is taken by faith, that the participants, already mystically united to Christ by faith, are lifted together into heavenly places as a sign and a seal of the new covenant relationship we have been brought into. After all, Christ has "raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:6). We are lifted up to where Christ now stands, into heaven itself through our vital union with him. There, we commune in real, actual, genuine fellowship with him and one another as his body on earth through his Holy Spirit. This is called the spiritual presence view of the Supper and it says, "Yes, we are able to have real fellowship with Christ through the meal, because we are communing *with him* as we do it. He is somehow feeding us with himself through the sign of the Supper." But to understand more of this, we need to go now to a

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Calvin, *Institutes* 4.17.

biblical theology of the Supper by looking at OT foreshadowings and types that teach us more.

## The Supper in OT Type

### *Communion in the Garden of Eden*

Let's begin in [the Garden of Eden](#). Is there food here? Of course there is. God gave to Adam “[the tree of life](#).” “[And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil](#)” ([Gen 2:9](#)). Of course, both trees gave forth fruit. Eve saw that the tree of knowledge had fruit that was “[good for food and a delight to the eyes](#)” ([3:6](#)). And the Tree of life had fruit that one could eat a “[live forever](#)” ([22](#)). Eating and living is very much the spiritual idea behind the sacrament of communion, so this is a type of our Supper.

Our own Reformed divines such as [Francis Turretin](#) even called the tree of life “[a sacrament and symbol of the immortality which would have been bestowed upon Adam if he had persevered in his first state ... With respect to \[the\] future life, it was a declarative and sealing sign of the](#)

happy life to be passed in paradise and to be changed afterward into a heavenly life, if he ... continued upright.”<sup>3</sup> As with all sacraments, it involves a promise of God attached to it. This was the food sacrament of **the covenant of works**, and was a foreshadowing of the life that Christ gives us through himself as Revelation says, “To the one who conquers I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God” (**Rev 2:7**).

### *Communion and Noah*

We can move forward to **Noah**. When Noah was given the instructions for the ark, which was the holy sanctuary he would spend his life during and as the flood waters receded, he was told, “Take with you ever sort of food that is eaten, and store it up. It shall serve as food for you and for them” (**Gen 6:21**). This included, “Every moving thing that lives” which “shall be food for you” (**9:3**). God was now giving mankind permission to eat the animals. How is this significant?

I can't spill all the beans just yet, we will need to wait for the Levitical covenant for that. But here, it is enough to

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<sup>3</sup> Turretin, *Institutes* 8.5.3. Cited in **Lane G. Tipton**, *TH221 Doctrine of Man*, Logos Mobile Education (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). Calvin says the same thing in *Institutes* 4.14.18.

know that Noah's covenant was what we call **a covenant of common grace**. *Common* grace is simply grace given by God that is *common* to all mankind, it is not specially given only to some, and it is not speaking about eternal life or the gospel. God promised our entire race that he could never again flood the whole world like he did with Noah (9:11). As a companion to this common grace, God gave our race **permission to eat the animals**, and as such they become a gracious precursor to the Supper, but in the common realm. Think about how you give thanks for any food you eat around the table, especially when you eat steak or bacon—such glorious gifts from God. My mind often goes to the stories of the Indians of North America who were renowned for giving thanks to the Great Spirit for providing the buffalo which sustained nearly their entire existence. In this way, every time you eat, you are partaking of a common grace sacrament, if we could call it that, which is supposed to remind you of all God's wonderful daily blessings.

### *Abraham and Melchizedek*

But **common grace is not special grace**, because it offers no eternal life through the gospel. It is merely a type and a

shadow of the greater blessings that come from being in a covenantal relationship with God in grace. The first time this is clearly pictured for us is still a very long time ago. It takes place in the days of [Abraham and Melchizedek](#).

Genesis 14 is a fascinating chapter of the Bible. It begins with what I call [the giant wars](#), four kings against five, all related in one way or another to the Nephilim and Rephaim giants found throughout the OT. Among the five kings were the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah ([Gen 14:2](#)), and we all know what a place that became through the story of Lot, who pitched his tent there.

But in fact Lot is the central point of this story, and he *has already* pitched his tent in Sodom ([13:12](#)). We learn that it did not go well for the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah ([14:10](#)), and the enemy took all their possessions and provisions and went their way. “[They also took Lot, the son of Abraham’s brother, who was dwelling in Sodom](#)” ([12](#)). One of the captives had escaped and told Abram, who took with him some Amorite allies ([13](#)), and led a warband of 318 trained soldiers all the way to the foot of Mt. Hermon and then north of Damascus to go and rescue him ([14-15](#)). They were eventually victorious and returned back to his home by the Oaks of Mamre in Hebron.

Upon his return, he went through the hill country of what is today modern Jerusalem in [the King's \(Kidron\) Valley](#), just east of the city of David. This is the same valley Jesus would cross on his last night between the Mt. of Olives and the city of Jerusalem. Here, Abram was met by the king of Sodom and the very mysterious “[Melchizedek king of Salem](#)” [later Jerusalem] who brought out “[bread and wine](#)” (18), the same elements in our Supper.

There, Melchizedek blessed Abram by “[God Most High](#)” and he blessed “[God Most High](#)” (El Elyon) who had delivered the enemy into his hands. “[And Abram gave him a tenth of everything](#)” (20). What's going on here?

It seems that we have [a covenant being made](#) and confirmed after [a great military victory](#). You have a greater king (Melchizedek) entering into covenant with the lesser vassal, blessing him with a covenant blessing and sealing it with the covenant victory meal. It is important to stress [the military connection](#) here, because we saw the same thing with the word “sacrament,” and how it was originally used to describe the oath of allegiance and obedience of a soldier to a commander. Baptism was also a sacred oath, when viewed from the perspective of the baptizee. Here then we have yet another military connection to the other

sacrament of the NT, which is intimately linked to making a covenant through bread and wine. Surely, the many Fathers and Reformers who have seen this as a type of the Lord's Supper, especially when you consider who Melchizedek may very well be. And who is that?

Long story short, Hebrews tells us some very bizarre things about him. It implies he is a **priest forever** (**Heb 5:6, 10**) of God Most High. He is a **King**, like Jesus. His name means **Righteousness** and his city is **Peace**, like Jesus. He is **without father, mother, genealogy**. He has **neither beginning of days or end of life** (**6:3**). He is like the Son of God come in the flesh (**3**). He is the mighty **Abram's superior** (**7**). **Vs. 8** implies that he is immortal and **vs. 11** that his priesthood is perfect.

Hebrews is simply agreeing with many ideas found earlier, in the **Dead Sea literature and the LXX**. **Psalm 110:1** identifies preincarnate Son of God (Adonai) with his priesthood, while **vs. 3** is very much like **Psalm 2:7**, "I have begotten thee from the womb before the morning." 2 Enoch could call him "**The Word and Power of God**" (**2En 71:34**). The Scrolls will replace Elohim in **Psalm 82:1** with Melchizedek, while Yahweh in **Isaiah 61:2**, which Jesus reads when he first lets people know he is the Messiah, is

turned into “[the year of Melchizedek’s favor](#).” For these reasons and more, I think Melchizedek, the king of Jerusalem, is simply the Angel of the LORD being given a proper name. In other words, it is the preincarnate Christ covenanting with Abram with bread and water.<sup>4</sup>

### *Passover and Manna with Moses*

There are two very important food events with [Moses](#) that are attached to his covenant. The first is [the Passover](#). Of course, the Lord’s Supper takes place at the Passover. In fact, the disciples are taking the Passover as Jesus reinterprets for them its meaning in light of what he is about to do for them at the cross. Therefore, the Passover is perhaps [the most direct OT type](#) of communion that we have.

It teaches us some amazing truths (see [Ex 12](#)). The last and greatest of the plagues of Egypt was about to occur—the slaughter of the firstborn. Upon its heels, the people would be led in all haste out of Egypt, out of slavery, redeemed by the only Powerful God. It was necessary that a pure [lamb be sacrificed](#) for the salvation of the people.

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<sup>4</sup> I recently did a Blurry Creatures episode on this. See [Doug Van Dorn](#), “[Ep: 272 Michael, Melchizedek, and Metatron with Doug Van Dorn](#),” *Blurry Creatures* and *Apple Podcasts* (Oct 10, 2024).

They then had to put **the blood** on the lintel of their doors as an act of faith and a sign to God that “pass over” this house when the angel of death came through. The people were to eat that night a meal with unleavened bread, which symbolizes **haste and purity** needed for their redemption. One could spend an entire sermon on this single OT type and not exhaust all of the implications. But the clearest point is that it is **the gospel of Christ foreshadowed for us**, with the sacrifice, the redemption, the looking past our sins, the covering of them with the blood.

The second food event is **the manna from heaven** (see Ex 16). The people were now out of Egypt, delivered through the Sea, but weary and worried about where they were going. They began to grumble. They were hungry. So God told them to prepare, because he would send them manna from heaven! Manna was a white, flake-like substance that looked like coriander seed or frost on the ground. It was said to taste like wafers made with honey. It came in at night, a miracle food, and would only last the day. But God would end up feeding the people for forty years—their daily bread.

The Psalm amazingly calls manna “**the grain of heaven**” and the “**bread of angels**” (**Ps 78:24**). It was both a **physical**

and metaphysical food, just like a sacrament. Jesus goes so far as to say that he is the manna, the bread come down from heaven (John 6:51). When we feast upon the Supper, we are feasting in some spiritual way upon the living Christ himself. “If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” This is exactly what we do in the Supper and therefore the manna of the OT is a wonderful type of our NT communion.

### *Communion in the Levitical Priesthood*

We next want to look at that priestly covenant that came through Aaron. Here we want to think about the main “sacrament” of this covenant: sacrifices. Here is how Calvin put it, “The sacraments themselves were also diverse [in the Old Testament], in keeping with the times, according to the dispensation by which the Lord was pleased to reveal himself in various ways to men. For circumcision was enjoined upon Abraham and his descendants. To it were afterward added purifications, sacrifices, and other rites from the law of Moses. These were the sacraments of the Jews until the coming of Christ” (Calvin, *Institutes* 4.14.20).

The idea of a sacrifice being a sacrament is very interesting to consider the word Jesus used when he said, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19; 1Cor 11:24-25). In the Greek world, the word *anamnēsis* can mean a “calling to mind, reminiscence, or a memory.” So, we usually think that when we take the Supper, that we are remembering what Jesus did.

On the other hand, it can mean “reminders to the gods of sacrifices offered [by us]” (LSJ). The Greek speech writer Lysias (445-380 BC) wrote, “Certainly the fear that was upon them must have made them believe that they saw many things which they saw not, and heard many that they did not hear. What supplications, what reminders of sacrifices, were not sent up to Heaven!” (Epitaphius 39). You can hear how the sacrifice was actually given to remind the gods of their promises, the exact opposite of what we often think.

The thing is, this seems to be the way it is used in the LXX of Numbers 10:10. “And in the days of your gladness, and in your feasts, and in your new moons, ye shall sound with the trumpets at your whole-burnt-offerings, and at the sacrifices of your peace-offerings; and it shall be for you a reminder before your God.” The ESV of the Hebrew reads, “They shall be a reminder of you before

your God: I am the LORD your God.” Its parallel is in the previous verse where the trumpet blast alerts God to remember his people.

One of the two sacrifices mentioned here is the “**peace offering**.” This was a sacrifice that the Israelites actually participated in by offering part to God and **eating part of it themselves**. This is the special aspect of eating food that was foreshadowed in Noah and his covenant. For now, the meat can be eaten. It was in a very real sense a **sacrificial meal**, not for atonement (i.e. the burnt offering), but to **celebrate peace with God** and to express **thanksgiving and fellowship** with him. This is the idea with the Lord’s Supper where we feast upon the life of the resurrected lamb of God who died to take away our sins.

### *You Prepare a Table Before Me: David and Communion*

David’s is the last great covenant of the OT, so let’s think for a moment about **him and his greatest psalm**.<sup>5</sup> Psalm 23 tells us, “**The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul ... You prepare**

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<sup>5</sup> As regards this covenant, we could also look at the mighty sacrifices and festival Solomon had on the day of the dedication of the Temple, but we do not have time for everything.

a table before me in the presence of my enemies” (Ps 23:1-2, 5). In John’s version of the feeding of the 5,000 where he also tells us he is the Manna, he tells us very specifically that the crowds were gathered together on the green grass (John 6:39), which hints at the meaning of the meal. Given that the meal was also done on Passover (6:4), just like the Lord’s Supper just a year or two later, it seems that this miracle feeding was both foreshadowing Communion and looking back to Psalm 23.<sup>6</sup>

The Psalm 23 connection is even stronger when you realize that that likely setting for the feeding was right near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), the home of several of the disciples on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. Just a few hundred yards to the northwest, just above the Jordan River as it gets ready to flow into the sea, there is large green field upon which sits an ancient pagan monument called Khirbet Bteha, a stone circle about 1/3 the size of the larger monument called Gilgal Rephaim about 10 miles to the east. When archeologists were digging around here, they found two petroglyphs, one of a serpent and one of a fish. Jesus fed the 5,000 with fish, while the serpent reference

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<sup>6</sup> See for example Timothy J. Geddert, *Mark*, Believers Church Bible Commentary (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2001), 149.

has a strange connection to Psalm 23 in the interpretation of the Rabbis.

They taught that this table is “the flesh of Leviathan.”<sup>7</sup> Curiously, it is in John 6 that we find the feeding of the 5,000 where Jesus also gives the sermon that he is the manna from heaven. **2 Baruch 29:3-8** says that Leviathan “shall be food for all ... and it shall come to pass at the self-same time that the treasury of manna shall again descend from on high, and they will eat of it.”<sup>8</sup> Leviathan is likened in the Bible to Satan (**Rev 12:9; 20:2; cf. Isa 27:1**). He is the great enemy of our faith (**1Pet 5:8**). Jesus was about to conquer him on the cross when he gave his disciples the Supper and thus Psalm 23 is a tremendous foreshadowing of our communion meal. Perhaps this is why Zwingli, citing Origen said, “This is my body, etc.’ Here he immediately adds: ‘This bread, which God the Word acknowledges to be His body, is the word that nourishes the soul, the word proceeding from God the Word and the bread from the bread of heaven which was placed upon the table, of which

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<sup>7</sup> Midr. Pss. 23/7 on Ps 23:5a. Cited in 154-55. **Roger David Aus**, *Feeding the Five Thousand: Studies in the Judaic Background of Mark 6:30-40 par. And John 6:1-15*, Studies in Judaism (New York: University Press of America, 2010), 151-55. On the Christian Church possibly interpreting this in the iconography of St. Catherine’s Monastery at Mount Sinai see **Lois Drew**, “Leviathan, Behemoth and Ziz: A Christian Adaptation,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 152.

<sup>8</sup> On this and the previous note see my longer sermon, **Douglas Van Dorn**, “[The Messianic Banquet: Feasting on Leviathan, Feasting on Christ](#),” *RBCNC* (5-28-2023).

it is written, ‘Thou has prepared a table before me in the presence of those who afflict me.’ [Ps 23:5].”<sup>9</sup>

### *Once-For-All Sacrifice: It is Finished!*

It is into this that I want us to consider a couple of things that the Bible says about **Jesus, his sacrifice, and our communion meal**. Hebrews teaches that Christ, “Has appeared *once for all* at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself” (**Heb 9:26**). “He entered *once for all* into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (**9:12**). “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this *once for all* when he offered up himself” (**7:27**). This is a **main reason** why we do not believe that communion is a re-sacrificing of Christ.

Let’s remember that Rome calls the Eucharist a “sacrifice.” There are some misunderstandings of what Rome actually teaches. They say it is bloodless, yet it is really and truly a (non-atoning) **sacrifice of Christ** where

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<sup>9</sup> **Huldreich Zwingli**, *The Latin Works of Huldreich Zwingli*, ed. Clarence Nevin Heller, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Heidelberg Press, 1929), 242–243.

the elements are transformed into his actual body and blood in his atoning sacrifice on the cross. If that sounds bizarre, it's because it is. I've already dealt with how there is much philosophical underpinning going on here to justify this view. Because of that, I think many Protestants have actually misunderstood what's going on because they don't have the philosophical training. And Rome has some pretty interesting answers for what they teach, not that I agree with them,<sup>10</sup> but I want to point something else out here.

Our main objection to Transubstantiation was not only that it wasn't biblical (you simply can't find any proof of it; it is all built on complex philosophy, as interesting as it actually is to think through), it wasn't found in the early church,<sup>11</sup> but that it is also repugnant “**even to common-sense and reason**” overthrowing the nature of the

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<sup>10</sup> For example, whereas Calvin taught that Rome's view says the bread and wine are annihilated at the consecration (Institutes 4.17.14), Aquinas said that this is not so. “**The substance of the bread or wine, after the consecration, remains neither under the sacramental species, nor elsewhere; yet it does not follow that it is annihilated; for it is changed into the body of Christ; just as if the air, from which fire is generated, be not there or elsewhere, it does not follow that it is annihilated**” (*Summa* III Q. 74 a.3 ad 1). An interesting blog from a Catholic is **Taylor Marshall**, “[John Calvin as Confused over Substance and the Eucharist](#),” *Called to Communion* (June 30, 2009). You can decide if you think Thomas was successful or Calvin was right.

<sup>11</sup> One could read something like a Lutheran or Calvinist view of the Supper as the meaning intended in most of the Fathers. It is clear that they held to something much more than a pure memorial though. See the Church Father's quotes on the Wikipedia of “[Transubstantiation](#).”

sacrament and being the cause of manifold superstitions and even gross idolatries (WCF 29.8; LBC 1689 30.6), where people actually worship the elements, deny the cup to the people, and carry them around for adoration (LBC 30.4), among other things.

Edward Leigh, a Westminster Divine, gave us ten reasons why this view is irrational. Among them Christ must hold himself in his own hands and eat and drink his own flesh and blood when he gave it to his disciples, Christ's one physical body would have to be in a thousand places at once when it is offered in the Mass, and it is a form of cannibalism.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, it is important to look to that once-for-all sacrifice of Christ rather than to superstitions in the meal, and that when we take the Supper we are in a figurative sense asking God to remember his covenant promises that were already promised and made certain in Christ's Death.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity Consisting of Ten Books: Wherein the Fundamentals and Main Grounds of Religion Are Opened, the Contrary Errours Refuted, Most of the Controversies between Us, the Papists, Arminians, and Socinians Discussed and Handled, Several Scriptures Explained and Vindicated from Corrupt Glosses: A Work Seasonable for These Times, Wherein so Many Articles of Our Faith Are Questioned, and so Many Gross Errours Daily Published / by Edward Leigh*, Early English Books Online (London: A.M. for William Lee, 1654), 698. You can find them online here: Shane Lems (and Edward Leigh), "[The Reformation Rejection of Transubstantiation](#)," *Reformed Reader Blog* (Jan 14, 2015).

## *Don't Have Fellowship with Demons: Paul, the NT, and Practical Application*

A second thing I want us to think about is Paul's discussion of the Supper and how it is actually a form of spiritual warfare. **1 Corinthians 8-11** all discuss the Supper, with some diversions into other topics mixed in between. We've already looked a bit at chapter 10 in terms of how it is here called "communion" and how it had an OT type in the "spiritual food" and drink that was Christ.

In the middle of this, Paul says that their taking of the Supper (and Baptism) were examples for us. They grumbled and were destroyed by the Destroyer (**1Cor 10:10-11**). Paul then tells to "flee from idolatry" when we take the supper, since it is a communion or participation in the body of Christ (**14-17**). Somehow, he is connecting what Israel did in the wilderness with idolatry and is telling us to watch out for the same thing. But how so?

To answer, we must go back to the beginning of his argument in 8:4ff. In the ESV, "Therefore, as to the *eating of food offered to idols*, we know that 'an idol has no real existence,' and that 'there is no God but one.' For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'—yet for us

there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1Cor 8:4-6). The punctuation here is abysmal and belies a profoundly anti-supernatural bias on the part of the translator, which actually destroys Paul’s entire point.

First of all, there are not quotation marks in the Greek (or punctuation at all for that matter). When it puts “*an idol has no real existence*” in quotations, it appears to us as if Paul is quoting one of them. But why? Paul agrees that idols have no real existence later in chapter 10 when he says, “What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No...” (10:19-20a). This is because Paul, unlike modern people, realizes that idols are not “fake gods” but rather houses of gods. As houses, they are nothing. They are simply the place in which a deity dwells or doesn’t dwell, comes or goes. So who cares about idols in this sense, he points out.

Next, Scripture teaches us that there is “*no God but one.*” Here, he is actually quoting the Shema, so these marks are OK. “Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut 6:4 LXX). It is stunning the pushback that is starting to crop up in Reformed circles about the following

point. Having just said this, Paul actually acknowledges **in the very next breath** that there are in fact **many gods and many lords**. He couldn't be any more explicit about it. And yet, at the same time, he says, **“Yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”** In other words, the other gods and lords that exist are not the Creator, but rather were created by our God and his Only Begotten Son who created all things. In other words, they are lesser in every possible sense.

Yet, one more translation point is needed here, and it is a truly grievous one. First, the ESV calls them **“so-called”** gods. This is unjustifiable. The word is simply *lego*, the word that we always translate as “called.” At most, it should say they are **“called gods,”** not **“so-called gods.”** “So-called” makes it sound like they aren't really gods. Furthermore, it then puts “gods” and “lords” in quotes, or what some have called **scare-quotes**, to scare you off from coming to the conclusion that these entities are actually real. No, beloved. These entities *are* real. That's Paul's entire point!

This freaks people out and causes some to lash out at what they do not understand because they have confused the distinction between **the idol** (the house) and **the entity** that indwells it (the god). They think idols *are* the gods and since idols are nothing, the gods must be too. Ironically, **this may be the very problem that Paul is trying to counteract**, because apparently this is what some of the Corinthians were thinking! The ESV has ironically changed Paul's entire argument to agree with the Corinthians and their problem!

We can **see this much better** by going to the parallel in chapter 10. In this place, Paul now refers to these same entities as "**demons**" (*daimonion*), and I think you realize that **demons do have real existence**. "**No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?**" (**1Cor 10:20-22**).

Again, the ESV's use of English markers is horrendous. This time, they have no quotes. But **this is misleading** in an opposite way, because Paul actually is quoting something,

this time from **Deuteronomy 32:17**. “They sacrificed to demons (LXX: *daimonion*), and not to God; to gods whom they knew not.”<sup>13</sup> Why wouldn’t you put a quotation here to alert the reader? **That’s bad form.**

Because there are difficulties in how to translate this verse, someone might say, maybe Paul is just making this up, that’s why they didn’t put it in quotes. But if so, why does he say that taking the supper the wrong way can “**provoke God to jealousy,**” which is exactly what the previous verse in Deuteronomy says? “**They stirred him to jealousy with strange gods; with abominations they provoked him to anger**” (**Deut 32:16**). Notice how in both verses then, “demons” are identical to the “gods.” Same thing.<sup>14</sup>

**What is Paul’s point?** He is telling us that because **the Supper is in fact a communion with the living God,** a

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<sup>13</sup> This is the LXX version. The Vulgate follows suit. As does the KJV. The ESV blows it again here translating it, “They sacrificed to demons that were not gods, to gods they had never known, to new gods that had come recently...” The question becomes, how can they both not be gods and yet be gods in literally four words? Even though it is grammatically possible, it is nonsensical. The KJV or NET or even NAS are all better, with the NET and KJV being the best, “They sacrificed to demons, not God

<sup>14</sup> **Going Deeper.** It’s important to say here that these “demons” are not the same entities as the “unclean spirits” of the Gospels. The latter refer to the spirits of dead nephilim, while the former are the Hebrew word *shedu*. A shedu was a territorial guardian entity, not unlike the “sons of God” *elohim* in other parts of Deuteronomy, indeed Deuteronomy 32 (see vs. 8). The Greeks used “demon” in this broader sense to refer to the gods, and in the narrower sense to refer to the heroes of old (i.e. the nephilim), so Paul’s use is reflecting that to this Greek church at Corinth.

sacramental mystery that somehow not just represents Christ, but actually unites us to him by faith in a communal sense as he strengthens our faith, that we must not align ourselves with other real entities, for this is a form of adultery or prostitution and it provokes him to jealousy. If they aren't real, then his entire point is nonsensical. The Corinthians seemed to have been of the opinion that they could, like Israel, [participate in pagan worship practices](#), making God in their own image ([1Cor 10:7](#)), engaging in [sexual immorality](#) (8), putting Christ to the test (9), [grumbling](#) and being destroyed (10), participating and [having communion](#) with demons (20) and have no bearing at all upon their relationship to God. Paul is simply adding to the point that [their lives](#) as shown in the rest of the letter were [not in line with their profession of faith](#). Taking the Supper is the climax of all their sinful problems. This is why he warns them in the next chapter that their behavior even at the supper, where they were [showing partiality](#) to some, eating and [getting drunk](#) on the Supper while others went hungry ([11:18-22](#)), had already brought God's displeasure and some of them had even died (30). This was therefore not the Supper they were truly eating. Rather, it was a participation with demons! How frightening!

It is precisely for this reason that **in our worship service**, right at the beginning, we have a **time of reflection on our own sins**, acknowledging and confessing and repenting of them. We are to realize that our sins are not in line with our profession of faith. And by faith we know that **if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1Jn 1:9)**. We are taking 1 Corinthians 8-11 seriously, for we always take the Supper together as his people, for it is the covenant renewal ceremony of the new covenant!

But beloved, **some of you have spent many Lord's Suppers doing this**. This is how I grew up under the view that my job was to repent of as many things as I could during the Supper so that I could be worthy to take the meal as I remembered with all my might what Jesus did in hopes of having some great psychological experience. But this is exactly backwards. In doing this, I was actually depriving myself of the word of God as a means of grace. It is as if I was **bringing Amos's famine of the word to myself**. For in doing this, all the focus was on me and not on Christ's work for me in order to encourage and strengthen and help me understand that he loves me so much that he sent his Son to die for me—once for all. I was shutting out

the gospel through my own religious zeal to be worthy to take the meal.

The supper is a means of grace, not of terror. It is the gospel, not the law. It is the good news of Jesus' death for his enemies, those who are inherently unworthy to sit at his table or even eat the crumbs from under it like dogs. God has given us a place at his table with his Son—the Lord's supper, such that we actually have *koinonia* with him, hence Communion. It is to make us thankful. That's why it can be called the Eucharist. In the Supper, all of the OT types find their fulfillment: It shows us the way to eternal life, it shows us not to take for granted any of the common blessings we have, it shows us Christ's great victory where he has redeemed us and taken us out of captivity, it feeds us bread from heaven, it reminds us the once-for-all sacrifice for our sins, it teaches us that Christ has overcome the dragon.

It even gives us a glimpse of the future. For one day not too distant from now, if you look with eyes of faith, you can see that Christ will allow you, his child, to come to the wedding supper of the lamb, where you will see all of these blessings and more together with all God's people eating this joyous meal, as he takes his betrothed and

marries her for eternity. We are the bride of Christ and he has given us this meal to show us how intimate our communion truly is with himself.

Therefore, think much on the Supper as a sacrament. For in it you receive more blessings than you can imagine, if you receive it by faith.

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