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The Eucharist in the Early Church

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to outline something of how and why the Eucharist was celebrated in the early church. It seems that the dominating passage for contemporary understanding of the Eucharist is 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, as it is by far the most detailed. However, as with many well-known passages, this has left it open to abuse and misuse and hence clouded by liturgical familiarity. Interpretation has affected Christians' approach to the Eucharist drastically, often making the focus individual self-examination under the threat of judgment. Outside of this and chapter 10 of the same letter, there are surprisingly few references to celebration of the Eucharist in the New Testament. The book of Acts has 5 references to 'breaking of bread' in three sections and Jude (and possibly 2 Peter 2:13) has a reference to the 'love feast'. Outside of these, people have postulated a number of allusions or possible liturgical formulations, namely in 1 Peter 2:3; 1 John 5:8; Rev 3:20, 22:17-20; 1 Cor 16:22; 1 Cor 5:11. The first letter to the Corinthians, then, gives us the earliest recorded and clearest window into the celebration of the Eucharist in the New Testament church.

Breaking of Bread in Acts

It is clear from Acts that the post-Pentecost church regularly gathered for the "Breaking of Bread". Acts 2:42 famously records it as one of four core aspects of their life together. Again in verse 46 breaking bread is included in a summary of the life of the church. There are various interpretations of what this actually meant in the life of the early believers. Marshall, agreeing with Jeremias¹, prefers to interpret the *koinonia* as a common meal hence requiring that the Breaking of Bread is specifically 'the bread and the cup'. Others take this view without that particular interpretation of *koinonia*, with its meaning coming from Jesus' words at the Last Supper. It is almost universally accepted, however, that the Acts 2 church gathered around a common meal. The Breaking of Bread is said to occur from house to house, as a complimentary aspect to the daily gathering in the temple courts, and that they "ate together with gladness"².

A little more background can be found in Luke's previous volume, his Gospel, where Jesus is said to break bread at the start of the feeding of the 5000, the Last Supper and with the disciples on the Emmaus road³. This reflects common Jewish practice, where bread was broken when God was blessed at the start of a meal⁴. Although there is no evidence of it

¹ Marshall, I H, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, Paternoster, 1997, 128

² v46. Some also postulate that the eating and the breaking are different activities, in a similar way to Acts 2:42

³ All of these initiate a shared meal

⁴ Martin & Davids ed., *Dictionary of Later New Testament & Its Developments*, IVP, 1997, 686

standing for a full meal before its use in the New Testament, there is also no evidence of its use *outside* of the context of a full meal. Given in Luke's Gospel Breaking Bread is always linked to a shared meal, it is not surprising that a similar pattern can be found in Acts.

The second reference to breaking bread in Acts is during Paul's stay in Troas. Paul is said to have talked with them "on the first day of the week having gathered to break bread" [20:7]. The likelihood is that this was the weekly gathering of the church community in Troas, and that their gathering, as normal, centred around this activity of the breaking of bread. They gathered, and Paul kept going until midnight, until a young man fell from a window and died. Eutychus's tiredness was presumably brought on by hunger as well as the lateness of the hour, since Paul then revived him, broke bread and ate. The breaking bread formed a formal introduction to the meal, presided over by Paul, after the gathering had started by an extended conversation⁵.

The third and final reference to breaking bread in Acts is again Paul, this time on a boat with other prisoners, Roman guards and the sailors. They were in the midst of a storm, clearly about to be shipwrecked⁶ and no-one had eaten for 14 days. Paul tells them it is time to eat, breaks bread and they all eat together. Clearly this breaking of bread is not "the bread and the cup", but a meal together which commenced with a prayer of thanks to God, in a typical Jewish and Christian way, all the more poignant given their dire circumstances.

In summary, then, it is clear that in Acts, Breaking of Bread was important in the life of the church, regularly breaking bread from home to home, celebrating their new found life in Christ. Continuity through Luke-Acts sees Breaking of Bread as the typical Jewish blessing to introduce a meal. Hence a common meal was the central activity of the church and, as in Troas, was *the reason* the church met. For the early church, however, this would have carried with it even greater meaning given the background of Jesus life and ministry. That the disciples on the Emmaus Road should recognise Jesus *in the Breaking of Bread* is a clear practical and theological message that offers an indication for its continued basis for the corporate church life in Acts that finds its fullest meaning in Jesus' Last Supper. In all likelihood, then, it has become a semi-technical term in Luke to refer to the shared meal eaten together in remembrance of Jesus that may well have included the Eucharistic elements in a very Jewish way.

The Meal in Corinth

Although Eucharistic practice may not have been uniform across the early church, some correlation would be expected for a reconstruction to make best use of the evidence. Certainly it seems reasonable to expect some kind of common practice between our two main sources for NT Eucharistic understanding, Luke and Paul, given Luke's clear association with Paul on his missionary journeys. This is further indicated by Paul's clear use of a common church tradition in his recounting of the Words of Institution to the Corinthians. It is therefore not surprising that Paul's two main references in his first letter to the Corinthians both indicate that a common meal is in view.

Firstly, Paul indicates that he compares the meal that they share together with the meal that would be shared in idol temples⁷. These meals may have been part of the monthly banquets that would be celebrated by those belonging to various private associations. These private associations were important in many aspects of first century life in the Roman

⁵ and in fact finished with an even more extended conversation as Paul carried until morning!!

⁶ Acts 27:33-38

⁷ 1 Cor 10:1-22

empire, even providing burial services. These banquets could be dedicated to, and even 'hosted by' a god, and held within an idol temple⁸. Other celebratory meals, such as birthdays may have also been celebrated in a similar manner. Association members would pay a monthly fee but the meal would be supported by 'a patron', who would supply the meal. Social etiquette at the meals, it seems, included the standard practice of providing different meals for different 'standards' of guest, depending on class and friendship, even over the same table⁹. These meals seemed to be times of celebration and revelry of the most extreme kinds.

In contrast, Paul indicates that whilst idols are nothing, participation in their feast was to participate in the table of demons, and that they cannot participate in the Lord's table as well. He is keen to remind them that although the Israelites in the desert also had 'spiritual food and drink' it was not enough to protect them from falling into "pagan revelry"¹⁰. Paul indicates that the drinking from the cup and the eating of the bread constitutes a 'participating' in the blood and body Christ. Marshall takes from Philo to support the view that by participation "Paul means sharers in the benefits arising from the sacrifices offered on the altar"¹¹. Hence the reference to sacrifices and altars here means that "the Supper is likened not to a sacrifice at an altar but to the meal which follows the sacrifice and which is celebrated with a table and a cup"¹². For the Corinthian believers, the risen Christ is the host of the supper. Those who share in it share in fellowship with him and those who partake of the bread and the cup share in the benefits of the sacrifice. It seems clear from this passage, and Paul's reference to the Words of Institution in chapter 11, that he considers the elements of the bread and the cup as important aspects of the Lord's Supper, in a way that is less clear in Luke.

Paul, then, appeals to them in 1 Corinthians 11 to celebrate a Feast hosted by the Lord. This second key passage falls in the midst of a section from chapter 11 to chapter 14 concerning different aspects of what happens when they gather, covering prayer/prophesying 'posture', the Lord's Supper and the abuse of glossolalia in the gathering. It is clear that all of these take place within the same gathering, and hence once again the common meal was central "when you come together as church"¹³. Since this was to be "the Lord's Supper"¹⁴ it is to be celebrated the way in which the Lord wants. If it is not celebrated in the Lord's way, "it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (v20), it is "your own supper"¹⁵. Although there could be an indication that gluttony and drunkenness (v21) was an issue, this is not actually Paul's primary concern here: his concern is that every person

⁸ For example an invite might read: "Chaeremon invites you to dinner at the table of our lord Serapis [the cult god] in the Serapeum tomorrow the 15th at nine o'clock." (Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, Eerdmans, 1974, 124)

⁹ For example a complaint in Martial: "... Golden with fat, a turtledove gorges you with its bloated rump; there is set before me a magpie that has died in its cage. Why do I dine without you although, Ponticus, I am dining with you?" Martial, *Epigram* 3.60, and also Pliny, referring to three lots of wine given at a meal: "One lot was intended for himself and for us, another for his lesser friends (all his friend are graded) and his and our freedmen" Loeb, I, 95-97. Quoted in Fee, *1 Cor*, Eerdmans, 1987, 542

¹⁰ 1 Cor 10:1-10

¹¹ Marshall, I H, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, Paternoster, 1997, 122

¹² *ibid.* 123

¹³ v18. The language of gathering occurs only three times in Paul, all of them in 1 Corinthians: 5:3-5 – about excommunication; 11:17-34 – the subject passage where the word occurs five times; 14:23-26 – on the use of tongues in the assembly. The word *συνέρχεσθε* ('gather together') could therefore be a semi-technical term for gathering for worship "as the ἐκκλησία". Since it occurs so often here, it ties the passage together.

¹⁴ My opinion is that this is a Pauline phrase, rather than a pre-Pauline technical term.

¹⁵ v21. The NIV says: "each of you goes ahead without waiting for anyone else" which in from an interpretation of v33, which misses the word play in the Greek and is unnecessary.

should be treated as an equal member of the Lord's body. The poorer members, such as slaves, may have had to work later than the rich 'patrons' of the community, or even eaten less or lower quality food than them, as would have occurred at those similar feasts in the city. It may even be that the patrons considered themselves more highly regarded by God than others, as Paul implies with a hint of sarcasm in verse 19. Paul's attentions here then are on the difference between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'. It is the 'haves' who have homes (v22), and who would be have the preferred seating arrangements and who would have the opportunity to eat (maybe their 'fancy food') before they come (v34). To reflect the segregations of the wider culture and the practices of the other feasts around into the Lord's feast means that their gatherings do more harm than good, and show that they despise the church of God, humiliating the less privileged¹⁶. It becomes a feast nothing to do with the Lord (v20), and they become as those guilty against the Him¹⁷. It is clear that for Paul "the Eucharist could be profaned by faction as certainly as by idolatry"¹⁸.

This disregard for the body (v29), means that they should examine themselves in their attitudes to each other so the Lord doesn't have to (v31). In fact there are indications that the Lord's judgement is already active, with the 'sick body' resulting in sick bodies¹⁹. Rather, in considering the Lord as the host and the body, they should consider each other in their eating by welcoming or receiving²⁰ each other and eating the same as each other (v33-34). He appeals to them on the basis of freedom, as with the food sacrificed to idols²¹, be free not eat what you want when you gather, for the sake of the body. Everybody should eat the same food at the same time; you can eat when and what you like at home!

Tragically this passage has a firm foothold in Christian culture that implies that taking the bread and the cup is a solemn affair that requires deep individual introspection. The result is that those who are leading unworthy lives and longed for forgiveness feel unworthy to partake, whereas those who feel 'most spiritual', or even self-righteous and hence have most disregard for others in the body, feel most comfortable. This is the direct opposite of Paul's point in 1 Corinthians 11. For Paul to happily compare the Supper to idol feasts, means that the supper surely must have been a joyful, celebratory feast, much as is indicated in Acts 2:46, where every member should be openly welcomed and included.

The Other Early Church Evidence

There is evidence outside of Luke and Paul right through to the beginning of the third century that a common church meal, known as the "Agape Meal", was common practice. This is explicitly mentioned in Jude 12, but also later at the turn of the second century by Ignatius who says in his letter to the Smyrneans: "It is not permissible either to baptize or to hold a love feast without a Bishop." Here then it is clear that the 'Love Feast' is considered to be sacramental, and hence, for Ignatius, requires a bishop. The Didache, dated sometime around 70AD, has clear reference to prayers with respect to both the bread and cup, although interestingly no reference to the words of institution, and an additional prayer "after you have had enough" [10:1], which includes the line: "you have given food and drink to men to enjoy" [10:3], allowing for the possibility that a meal context is in view. Of course the Last supper was based around a Jewish feast of Passover, and the Jews also had their

¹⁶ where "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female for all are one in Christ Jesus", Gal 3:28

¹⁷ of 1 Corinthians 8:12 "When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ"

¹⁸ Bruce FF, 1 & 2 Cor, Eerdmans, 1980, 110

¹⁹ v30. Fee suggests this is "not so much judgement on the individuals as a reflection of a sick congregation"

²⁰ or the NIV's "waiting for"

²¹ 1 Cor 8-9

own religious meals based around Sabbaths and Festivals. They had four key elements: washing of hands, lighting of lamps, blessing and breaking bread and blessing a cup of wine. This excerpt from Tertullian, from around 200AD, indicates that all of these made their way into Christian meals at points:

“Our feast shows its motive by its name. It is called by the Greek word for love. Whatever is reckoned the cost, money spent in the name of piety is gain, since with that refreshment we benefit from the needy ... We do not recline at the table before prayer to God is first tasted. We eat the amount that satisfies the hunger; we drink as much as is beneficial to the modest. We satisfy ourselves as those who remember that even during the night we must worship God; we converse as those who know that the Lord listens. After the washing of hands and the lighting of lamps, each one who is able is called into the centre to chant praise to God either from the Holy Scriptures or from his own talents. This is proof of how much is drunk. Prayer in like manner concludes the meal”²²

It is not known exactly when the Bread and the Cup separated from what became known as the ‘Love Feast’, but unpicking the differing terminology in different writings doesn’t bring much clarity! The best evidence suggests that the NT terminology “Breaking of Bread”, “Lord’s Supper” and “Love Feast”²³ all refer to the same thing. As Marshall suggests: “right through the New Testament period and beyond Christians met together to hold common meals that were more than a token reception of bread and wine”²⁴. Within the early church the shared meal carried with it deep theological and social significance that reflected both Jewish and contemporary cultural understanding.

The Context of the Last Supper

It is to keep the tradition firmly rooted beyond himself, to the life of many churches and to Jesus himself, the host of the Supper, that Paul quotes the Words of Institution in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. It seems reasonable that the Lord’s Supper remained rooted in the context of the Passover and this is certainly supported by 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, where Jesus is directly called “our Passover lamb”, and the Corinthians are told to ‘keep the Festival’²⁵. The Passover festival celebrated the Israelite exodus from Egyptian slavery by ‘reliving’ the experience of their forefathers. As the rabbis laid down: “in every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt”²⁶. Hence food was eaten that reminded them of the experience and a ‘Passover’ lamb was sacrificed at the temple and eaten. The exodus was foundational for the covenant and paradigmatic for the future new exodus and covenant. Therefore the festival also had a direct reference to the future redemption: “in this night they were redeemed and in this night they shall be redeemed”²⁷. The significance of the Last Supper was the radical nature of Jesus explanations of the symbols. He took the Passover story and wove in his own story, redefining the meal around himself, fulfilling the Jewish hope of Messianic redemption and covenant renewal through his own one-time sacrificial death. For the Jews it was the death of the Passover lamb that led them to being the “unleavened” loaf, hence it was through Jesus’ death, represented in the bread, Paul can say that the Corinthian church was formed into the new ‘loaf’ of God, the body of Christ²⁸.

²² *Apol.* 36.16-18, quoted in Freedman ed., *Anchor, ‘Agape Meal’*, DoubleDay, 1992, p90.1

²³ Hippolytus, *Ap. Trad.* 26 uses “Lord’s Supper” for the love feast.

²⁴ Marshall, I H, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, Paternoster, 1997, 111

²⁵ Most naturally these would mean the Lord’s Supper

²⁶ Quoted in Marshall, I H, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, Paternoster, 1997, 22. The rabbis based this on Exodus 13:8 “I do this because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt” (cf Deut 6:20-23).

²⁷ Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (A.D. 90), quoted in Bruce F F, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, Eerdmans, 1980, 114

²⁸ Compare 5:6-8 with 10:16-17

Passover, then, could be called “remembrance through re-enactment”. The Jewish understanding of ‘remembrance’ is strongly linked to their covenantal relationship with God. Deuteronomy, for example, frequently repeats the refrain: “remember that you were slaves in Egypt”²⁹. This is not to share in sympathy with their ancestors’ slavery or merely to “preserve a perception”³⁰ of the past, the intent is to provide a link with the past and allow it to affect life ‘today’. For the Hebrew “memory is ... constitutive of identity and determinative of conduct”³¹. Hence to remember was to provide community identity and continuity with the past; to forget was to damage both of those³². The requirement to assemble to re-read the covenant was not just to enjoy it, but to make a decision as to whether you will take part in it and keep it. The institution of cultic objects, worship and festivals “serve to renew the structure of the world by re-enacting the sacred drama of the myth”³³. To forsake these and forget was not merely absentmindedness; it was being unfaithful to the covenant. This is significant since in Corinthians Paul uniquely quotes Jesus as attributing the phrase “do this in remembrance of me” to both the bread *and* the wine³⁴.

The linking of blood with “new covenant” in the Words of Institution, draws together theological strands from both Jeremiah 31:31, the promise of a new covenant, and Exodus 24:8. In the latter passage, it is the blood which marks out the people of the covenant in contrast to the other peoples of the world. This is one element of the covenant-making process, when compared to the standard forms in the ANE. These can be drawn out of Israel’s experience and linked to new covenant ideas in the New Testament. For example:

Historical Prologue:	“I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the land of slavery”	“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed took bread...”
Stipulations:	Written on two stone tablets deposited within the ark of the covenant	Law written on hearts of flesh within the people
Re-reading, Witnessing & Ratification:	Covenant is to be re-read and witnessed (Ex 23:17) followed by a ratification ceremony: “all you have said we will do” (Ex 19:8), sprinkling of blood to ‘set apart the people’, followed by eating in the presence of God	Institution of the Lord’s Supper as the ratification of a New Covenant, and an identification of who is the new people of God with the sacrificial blood

²⁹ Deut 5:15, cf 7:18; 8:2,18; 9:7; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:18, 20, 22; 32:7

³⁰ Plato, see Freedman ed., *Anchor, ‘Remember’*, DoubleDay, 1992, 667.V

³¹ Freedman ed., *Anchor, ‘Remember’*, DoubleDay, 1992, 667.V

³² The link between covenant and remembrance is also reflected in Israel’s appeals to God. It is said that “He remembers his covenant forever” (Ps 105:8), his actions are said to be a response to his remembering of it (Ex 2:24), in lament he is called upon to forget sins and remember steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps 25:6, cf Jer 31:31. Note: steadfast love and faithfulness is *chesed* – covenantal faithfulness).

³³ Brown ed., *NIDNTT, ‘Remember’* vol. 3, DoubleDay, 1986, 237

³⁴ Fee suggests that this reflects a Pauline emphasis on the ecclesiastical nature of the Lord’s Supper, especially considering his interpretation of the bread/body in 10:16. He seems less concerned with the atoning aspects, since he uniquely does not link the cup to being “poured out for many/you”, but is more concerned that both the bread *and* the cup should be taken “in remembrance of” Jesus³⁴. Therefore, as v26 indicates, he is focussing on the death of Christ through which the church experiences the reconciling/forming work of the new covenant.

It is argued on the basis of the above that the Eucharist served as a covenant renewal/ratification ceremony in the early church. Jesus' reference to his blood being 'of the covenant' indicates that Jesus saw himself as instituting the new covenant and the fulfilment of the Jewish hope. Hence he was forming a new people of God around himself on new terms. Jesus' action at the Last Supper was repeated regularly "in remembrance" of Jesus saving work. Again this was not just a recalling to mind but hearing again the terms of the new covenant and deciding whether or not to respond to it, and as a result allowing it to define their identity, community and behaviour.

This is supported by the use of the Latin term *sacramentum* to designate the Eucharist by Christians perhaps as early as the first century. In addition to church history evidence, a letter from Pliny the Younger to the Roman emperor Trajan reported that Christians "gathered *se sacramento obstringere*"³⁵. The term *sacramentum* in the first century "referred to a soldiers oath of loyalty to the Roman emperor"³⁶. It is therefore possible that early Christians saw themselves as binding themselves by oath to another emperor, the Lord Jesus, actually *in* their participating in the Lord's supper. The Roman officials did not respond too well to a group swearing loyalty to another lord, and therefore the Eucharist was the cause of much persecution. Hence participation was not seen as merely fulfilling a traditional or liturgical ceremony, but the ratification of a change of allegiance that affected how their lives were lived with each other and in the world.

"Thus, as in early Israel, the "new covenant" was a socially enacted historical reality that brought into existence a pluralistic community of people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who were united by their commitment to ... Christ"³⁷

This may add to our understanding of Paul's concerns for the Corinthians. Johnson suggests a theme of the first letter to the Corinthians is the issue of "the difficulty of defining an identity within a pluralistic context"³⁸. Paul's language in Corinthians makes it clear that he views the church in Corinth as the new people of God, in continuity with the OT people of God but reconstituted around Jesus and the New Covenant. He refers to them as "the ἑκκλησία of God ... sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1:2). The Greek word ἑκκλησία stands in continuity with the assembly of Israelites gathered to receive the covenant³⁹, as well as the Greek 'body politic', over against the 'polis' around giving allegiance to Caesar. Hence it was highly appropriate that "it also came to serve as the primary designation for [the local community] as the newly constituted, eschatological people of God"⁴⁰. The community was 'sanctified', set apart as God's elect, as were the people at Sinai, but this time through the work of Jesus⁴¹. Further, throughout the letter, Paul's appeal to them seems to be based around a true understanding of who they are *as a people*, to become "as you (*plural*) really are" (5:7). He disputes, for example, their need to go to pagan law courts asking: "Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (6:2) as the eschatological people of God. He sees them in continuity and in radical discontinuity with Israel, as he distinguishes them as a 'third race': "whether Jews, Greeks or the ἑκκλησία of God" (10:32). Finally, Paul makes clear that "the people who shared the [Lord's] meal are the people of the renewed

³⁵ Freedman ed., *Anchor, 'Covenant'*, DoubleDay, 1992, 1198.1

³⁶ *ibid.*, 1198.1

³⁷ *ibid.*, 1199.1

³⁸ Johnson L T, *Writings of the New Testament*, Fortress, 1999, 295

³⁹ For example, in Deut 4:10

⁴⁰ Fee G, *1 Cor*, Eerdmans, 1987, 32

⁴¹ See also 6:11

covenant⁴² by tying the people of God into the body of Christ⁴³, as represented by the bread in the Eucharist (10:16-17).

Conclusion

The common meal was a central part of the gatherings in the early church. Luke's references to the breaking of bread, even without explicit references to the bread and the cup, seem to correlate with Paul's references to 'the Lord's Supper' in Corinthians and the evidence of the celebration of 'love feasts' in Jude and later church fathers. The common meal, celebrated from house to house and 'on the first day of the week, served as a time of joyful thanksgiving to God for their new life in Christ.

The meal stood in a direct contrast to other banquets that were held in the surrounding culture, and provided additional framework for the theological significance of the meal. The church was to see the Lord as the host of the meal, as opposed to an idol, or any of individuals amongst them, hence the way that the meal was practiced should reflect what it means to be God's people. The meal had a didactic and enacting function – the way it was administrated reflected the reality that it was celebrating. Hence abuses of people, mainly through self interest, at the meal were abuses against the Lord, as the host, and now also the body represented by the people there. Further, the Lord is the sacrifice that the participants are sharing in and sharing the benefits of, and forms the basis for the fellowship together and with Christ. The breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup were significant aspects of the meal, that caused this to be a reality.

In relating the meal to the meals of Jesus both pre and post his resurrection, the meal is rooted in their understanding of Jesus. In the words of institution the meal retained a sense of the Jewish Passover, and functioned in a similar manner, as "remembrance through reenactment". The meal had more meaning than a fellowship tea. In the participation of the meal in the presence of Jesus, they were formed as the new people of God, under a new covenant in their Lord, Jesus. This corporate identity is the primary focus, with individual interests perverting the very act that should reinforce their corporate identity, as it forms community identity and behaviour through remembering and response to the new covenant.

The joyful sharing of a full meal was not 'remembrance' in the sense of a thanksgiving service after a funeral. It was the celebration of sharing a meal with the risen Lord, as his body, benefiting from the action of his sacrificial death and anticipating the great end-time Banquet that will take place when He returns.

Questions

- In what ways could we or do we allow the distinctions of wider culture influence our gatherings?
- How does the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper reflect our understanding of church and the Gospel?
- How can we celebrate in a way that reflects our corporate identity as the people of God, showing primary allegiance to the Lord, Jesus?
- What message is communicated by the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper?
- How do we allow the celebration of the Lord's Supper be a means of grace to all, rather than fear? What, then, should qualify people to participate in the Lord's Supper?

⁴² Wright N T, *J&VG*, 1996, 563

⁴³ Body imagery is in fact found throughout the first letter to the Corinthians, and is foundational for the understanding of the Lord's Supper passage 1:13; 6:15-20; 10:16-17; 11:29; 12:4-27

- How is it that the celebration of a meal in a particular way be said to “do more harm than good” for the church?
- Is the individualism reflected in many of our celebrations of the Lord’s Supper doing more harm than good?
- How can the Lord’s Supper be a time of joyful celebration, looking forward to the end-time banquet, not a funeral service?