

# **THE LORD'S SUPPER IN PAUL: AN IDENTITY-FORMING PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL**

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**I**n a strange twist of God's providence, we find ourselves grateful for the ways that the Corinthian church struggled. We are not grateful that they sinned but grateful that their problems provoked Paul to apply the gospel to their lives in ways that continue to instruct. Paul's letters are occasional, and scholars often observe that if the Corinthians had not provoked Paul to address their abuse of the Lord's Table, the Lord's Supper might not have been directly addressed in his letters.<sup>1</sup>

Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:17–34 explain that the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the gospel made by those who embrace the gospel, those whose identity is shaped by the gospel.<sup>2</sup> In order to establish this thesis we must understand the abuses of the Lord's Supper in the church in Corinth, and these abuses are tangled up with the other problems in the church that Paul addresses. Throughout 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses Corinthian error with Christian gospel. The fact that the Lord's Supper is a proclamation of the gospel made by those who embrace the gospel makes what Paul says about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10–11 relevant to the issues Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 1–9.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. T. R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 39; I. H. Marshall, "Lord's Supper," in *DPL*, 570; I. H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997 [1980]), 16. R. B. Hays writes, "Strangely, we are indebted to the Corinthians for messing up their celebration of the Lord's Supper. . . . the Corinthians' trouble serves for our instruction" (*First Corinthians*, IBC [Louisville: John Knox, 1997], 203).

<sup>2</sup> For brief expositions of the Lord's Supper, see T. R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 730–34; P. J. Gentry, "The Lord's Supper, BF&M Article 7b," in *An Exposition from the Faculty of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* (Louisville: The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2001), 25–28, available online: <http://www.sbps.edu/pdf/bfmexposition.pdf>, and J. M. Hamilton Jr., "The Meaning and Significance of the Lord's Supper," *Gospel Witness* (August 2008): 6–7.

The first section of this essay, then, will survey the problems in the Corinthian church and the way that Paul addresses these with the gospel. The second part focuses in on 1 Corinthians 10–11,<sup>3</sup> where Paul explains the Lord's Supper as an identity-shaping proclamation of the gospel. The essay will then conclude with brief reflections on what Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians means for contemporary church practice.

### *Problems in the Corinthian Church*

In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses what he has heard from the Corinthians<sup>4</sup> about the difficulties facing the church: schisms, immorality, idolatry, and then the misbehavior when the church gathers for worship. Paul confronts each of these threats to the Corinthian church with the truth of the gospel. Thus, if Romans is the letter where Paul most systematically explains his gospel, 1 Corinthians might be the one that most directly applies the gospel to Christian life in a church.

Paul addresses the divisions in the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1–4, the sexual sin and confusion in the church in chaps. 5–7, the appropriate response to food offered to idols and avoiding idolatry in chaps. 8–10, inappropriate behavior when Christians gather for worship in chaps. 11–14, mistaken thinking on the resurrection in chap. 15, and then in chap. 16 he prepares the church for his next visit.<sup>5</sup> This summary of the nature of the problems Paul addresses in 1 Corinthians 1–10 seeks to highlight the way that Paul confronts each of these issues with the good news of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

<sup>3</sup> First Corinthians 10 functions as a transitional section of the letter in which the Lord's Supper is introduced as a decisive consideration in the discussion of idol meat in 1 Corinthians 8–10. At the same time, because the Lord's Supper is an element of Christian worship, introducing the topic paves the way for Paul's discussion of Christian worship in 1 Corinthians 11–14. Cf. E. E. Ellis, "ΣΟΜΑ in First Corinthians," in E. E. Ellis, *Christ and the Future in New Testament History*. NovTSup 97 (Boston: Brill, 2001), 165; repr. from *Int* 44 (April 1990): 32–44.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. what seem to be Paul's references to reports he has received from Corinth in 1 Cor 1:11; 5:1; 11:18; 15:12, and the wording of 7:1,5; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1,12, which seems to indicate Paul is addressing a list of questions posed to him by the Corinthians.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. the summary of "The Structure of 1 Corinthians" in R. E. Ciampa and B. S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *CNTOT* 695–96.

### 1 Corinthians 1–4, The Gospel Against Factionalism

The factionalism seen in the first four chapters seems to have arisen from worldly standards of evaluation that, Paul asserts, would empty the cross of its power (1 Cor 1:17). The members of the Corinthian church were identifying themselves with particular Christian teachers—whether Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or even Christ Himself (1 Cor 1:12). This preference for one teacher over another perhaps had to do with the distinctive strengths and emphases of the particular teachers, and by identifying with such strengths, whether the suffering of Paul, the eloquence of Apollos, the boldness of Cephas, or even the piety and perfection of Jesus Himself, the members of the Corinthian church became “puffed up” (4:6), evidently esteeming themselves superior to others in the congregation who identified with a different set of strengths seen in a different teacher.<sup>6</sup>

Paul dismantles this proud, divisive way of thinking by explaining that by worldly standards—the kind that result in their boasting over one another (1 Cor 4:6–7,10)—the gospel is a stumbling block because it appears to be folly and weakness (1:18,23). If one is drawn to the gospel by the eloquence or wisdom of the one proclaiming the gospel, the cross could be emptied of its power (1:17). How? Because someone drawn to eloquence might confess Christ merely because they felt the appeal of an eloquent, wise orator. Such a person is in danger of trusting human wisdom rather than God's power (2:4). In such a case, the power would be in the speaker's ability rather than in the cross of Christ. Moreover, Paul asserts that people do not come to know God by wisdom but through “the folly of what we preach” (1:21), which means that no one can boast that they were wise enough to find their way to God (1:29).

Paul's saving message is offensive to different kinds of people for different kinds of reasons: the idea of a crucified Messiah seems foolish to Gentiles and scandalous to Jews. For Jews, the concept of a crucified Messiah is a contradiction in terms. It looks like proof that the crucified one was not, in fact, the Messiah (cf. Acts 5:36–37). For Gentiles, the idea that a god might become human would represent a foolish decision to surrender power in exchange for weakness, as can be seen from Origen's account of the objections of Celsus<sup>7</sup> and

<sup>6</sup> In this essay Scripture quotations are the author's translation.

<sup>7</sup> Origen reports that Celsus objected to the incarnation on the grounds that “if he came

Tertullian's reply to Marcion.<sup>8</sup> Thus, from human perspectives, Jesus' mission looks like a failed project. And this is exactly Paul's point, because what looks foolish and weak to the eyes of the world is in fact the wisdom and power of God.

The truth of the gospel is not something discovered by those with secret or elevated insight but given to those who are called (1 Cor 1:24). Those who are called are not the wise, powerful, and noble by worldly standards, but the foolish, shameful, and weak (1:26–28).<sup>9</sup> God did it this way so that no one could boast before Him (1:29). God did it this way so that Christ would be everything to those who embrace the gospel (1:30),<sup>10</sup> with the result that those who embrace the gospel identify themselves with Christ and boast only in Him (1:31; 4:6).

Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 1–4 is that the gospel is not a message that one receives by virtue of one's individual strengths and distinctive advantages. Rather, the gospel is a message that declares all people bankrupt before God, all people unable to understand the message apart from the revealing power of the Holy Spirit (2:10–14). This means that the distinctive appeal of the personalities who proclaim the gospel is irrelevant (3:5; 4:6). God has set things up so that no one can take credit for their own salvation, but by identifying with particular teachers, the Corinthians are acting as though they have

down among men, he must undergo a change, and a change from good to evil, from virtue to vice, from happiness to misery, and from best to worst. Who, then, would make choice of such a change?" (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, 4.14, cf. also 4.18; 5:2 [ANF 4:502, 504, 543]).

<sup>8</sup> Tertullian asks, "Will you find anything to be so 'foolish' as believing in a God that has been born, and that of a virgin, and of a fleshly nature too, who wallowed in all the before-mentioned humiliations of nature? . . . according to the world's wisdom, it is more easy to believe that Jupiter became a bull or a swan, if we listen to Marcion, than that Christ really became a man. . . . For which is more unworthy of God, which is more likely to raise a blush of shame, that *God* should be born, or that He should die? . . . And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible" (Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 5.4, 5.1, 4 [ANF 3:524–25]). I owe these references to Origen and Tertullian to O. Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple: Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 323–25.

<sup>9</sup> Not for a moment denying that "if Paul says that there were not many in the Corinthian congregation who were wise, powerful, and wellborn, then this much is certain: there were some. As early as Origen this passage was cited as an objection to Celsus's opinion that in Christian gatherings one would find only the lower classes" (G. Thiessen, "Social Stratification in the Corinthian Congregation: A Contribution to the Sociology of Early Hellenistic Christianity," in *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, ed. and trans. J. H. Schütz [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982], 72, citing Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.48).

<sup>10</sup> See the lucid discussion of 1 Cor 1:30 in B. Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006), 200–205.

something other than Christ in which they can boast (1:31; 3:21; 4:6,18–20). Paul presents the gospel to the Corinthians in these chapters as a message that will unite the church because it nullifies all the things that divide worldly minded people from one another. Christians have nothing but what they have received, and thus they cannot boast as though they somehow earned what they have (4:7). Paul seeks to undermine the factionalism in Corinth, then, by demonstrating that the gospel of Jesus Christ is a leveler of persons. Those who embrace the gospel will boast only in Christ, and they will be inclined to celebrate their own folly and weakness that Christ might be seen as strong and wise (3:18; 4:8–13).

### 1 Corinthians 5–7, The Gospel Against Sexual Immorality

Having addressed the factionalism in Corinth with the humility-producing, leveling influence of the gospel, Paul moves on to address their sexual immorality and confusion. The leaven of sexual immorality has no place in the church because the church is a new, unleavened lump since Christ, the Passover lamb, has been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:1–8). This means that “anyone who bears the name of brother” (5:11), i.e., anyone who identifies him or herself as a believer, yet who refuses to repent of sin, is to be put out of the church (5:9–13). The lawsuits Paul addresses in 1 Cor 6:1–8 may or may not be related to sexual immorality,<sup>11</sup> but the response Paul commends has to do with the gospel. Rather than wronging and defrauding the brothers (6:8), the Corinthians should, like Christ, suffer wrong and be defrauded (6:7). Similarly, the Corinthians should not join themselves to prostitutes because they “were bought with a price” (6:20, cf. 6:12–20). This idea that they “were bought with a price” is also applied to the question of marital and societal status (7:23). The Corinthians are to be identified as those purchased at the price of the death of Jesus, which

<sup>11</sup> For possible connections between 1 Corinthians 5–6, see J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, AYB 32 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 232. Thiessen (“Social Stratification in the Corinthian Community,” 97) suggests, “The object of such suits are βωρτικά, probably affairs of property or income.” By contrast, B. W. Winter (“Civil Law and Christian Litigiousness [1 Cor 6:1–8],” in *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001], 65) connects the lawsuits to the divisiveness in 1 Corinthians 1–4 and writes, “This ‘strife and jealousy’ arising out of the issue of Christian leadership was also expressed in litigation, with one of the leading Christians taking another leading Christian to court.”

means they identify themselves as those to whom the gospel has been applied. That identity is to shape their behavior.

### 1 Corinthians 8–10, The Gospel Against Idolatry

From factionalism (1 Cor 1–4) and immorality (1 Cor 5–7) Paul turns to idolatry in 1 Corinthians 8–9. Having raised the issue of food offered to idols, in chap. 8 he addresses the “knowledge” of some, which appears to be causing them to disregard the needs of those with weaker consciences (1 Cor 8:1–2,7). Again the gospel informs Paul’s reply: by their knowledge, the brother for whom Christ died is destroyed (8:11). There is a clear contrast here between Christ, the strong who surrendered His rights and died for the weak, and the Corinthians, whose “authority” proves to be “a stumbling block to the weak” (8:9). Paul then defends his own freedoms and rights (9:1–12a,13–14) in order to highlight the ways he surrenders his rights and freedoms as he seeks to serve others and thereby win them to faith in Christ (9:12b,15–27). In this Paul is building to his call for the Corinthians to follow him as he follows Christ (11:1). Just as Jesus forsook fleshly standards of privilege and authority, significance and wisdom, so also Paul does “all on account of the gospel” in order that he might “partake of it” (9:23).

As noted above, 1 Corinthians 10 is a transitional chapter in the argument of the letter. On the one hand, Paul concludes his discussion of food offered to idols. On the other hand, the way he concludes this discussion opens the door to the matter of Christian worship in chaps. 11–14. From the argument that Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 10, it seems that the Corinthian Christians had drawn false conclusions from their baptism and participation in the Lord’s Supper. Thus, 1 Corinthians 10 sheds light on the problems in the Corinthian church that will be addressed by Paul’s exposition of the identity-shaping proclamation of the gospel, the Lord’s Supper, in chap. 11 (see the next section of this essay).

From what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10, it seems that either the Corinthians were assuming they would escape judgment because they had been baptized and were partaking of the Lord’s Supper, or perhaps Paul anticipated this assumption and sought to combat it in

1 Cor 10:1–13.<sup>12</sup> In 1 Cor 10:1–5, Paul explains that Israel was typologically baptized and ate the Lord's Supper but did not please God: they “were baptized into Moses” (1 Cor 10:2) and they “ate the same spiritual food” and “drank the same spiritual drink” (10:3–4). Perhaps the identification of the rock from which Israel drank as Christ (“and the rock was Christ,” 10:4)<sup>13</sup> is meant to guard against a Corinthian objection that Israel was judged because Israel's “baptism” and “Lord's Supper” were not as effective as what the Corinthians experienced. Paul's proof that Israel's version of baptism and the Lord's Supper did not protect them from judgment is stated in 10:5, “But God was not pleased with most of them, for their bodies were strewn in the wilderness.”

Paul states plainly in 1 Cor 10:6 that “these became types of us,” then warns the Corinthians not to sin and face judgment as Israel did (10:6–10). Typology consists of historical correspondence and escalation between persons, events, and institutions in the stream of Israel's salvation historical experience.<sup>14</sup> The points of correspondence in view between Israel and the Corinthian church include their experience of baptism, their partaking of the Lord's Supper, and their sin. Paul details the sins of Israel, which resulted in judgment, in 10:6–10. The upshot of the typological comparison is then stated in 10:11, and the note of escalation is sounded as well: “Now these things happened

<sup>12</sup> Cf. G. D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 443: “The nature of this argument strongly suggests that those who ‘think they stand’ (v. 12) do so on the basis of a somewhat magical view of the sacraments.” Similarly J. E. Smith, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Word Study: Acts–Ephesians*, ed. D. L. Bock (Colorado Springs: Cook, 2006), 273; Schreiner, *Paul*, 376–77; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 614.

<sup>13</sup> See G. K. Beale's treatment of this text, in discussion with the views of Peter Enns, in “Did Jesus and the Apostles Preach the Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Revisiting the Debate Seventeen Years Later in the Light of Peter Enns' Book, *Inspiration and Incarnation*,” *Them* 32.1 (2006): 32–37.

<sup>14</sup> Arguing for the pre-existence of Christ on the basis of “ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ in 1 Cor 10:4,9,” and citing Goppelt, E. E. Ellis asserts, “The passage explicitly identifies the . . . events . . . as ‘types . . . for us, as happening ‘typically’ . . . and ‘written for our admonition’ (10:6,11). It uses the terms ‘technically [as an] advance presentation’ intimating eschatological events” (*Christ and the Future in New Testament History*, 90). For my efforts to flesh out typological interpretation, see “The Virgin Will Conceive: Typological Fulfillment in Matthew 1:18–23,” in *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew*, ed. J. Nolland and D. Gurtner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 228–47, and “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification between Joseph, David, and Jesus,” *SBJT* 12.4 (2008): 52–77. See also my Julius Brown Gay Lecture presented at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on March 13, 2008, “The Typology of David's Rise to Power: Messianic Patterns in the Book of Samuel,” available online in audio: <http://www.sbts.edu/MP3/JBGay/20080313hamilton.mp3> or text format: [http://www.sbts.edu/pdf/JBGay/the\\_typology\\_of\\_dauids\\_rise\\_to\\_power2008-03-101.pdf](http://www.sbts.edu/pdf/JBGay/the_typology_of_dauids_rise_to_power2008-03-101.pdf).

to them typologically, but they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come" (10:11). The fact that the ends of the ages have come in the dawning of the already-not yet kingdom of Jesus<sup>15</sup> means that the significance of these events is increased in God's economy. Paul argues that just as God judged the Israelites who sinned, even though they were baptized into Moses and partook of the "type" of the Lord's Supper, so also God will judge the Corinthian Christians who sin, even though they have been baptized and partake of the Lord's Supper (10:12–13).<sup>16</sup>

Because God will judge, Paul urges the Corinthians to "flee from idolatry" (10:14), and he presents an argument—"as to sensible people" (10:15)—that they do so. This argument consists of two premises and a conclusion:

*Premise 1:* Paul explains in 1 Cor 10:16–17 that partaking of the cup and the bread at the Lord's Supper unites Christians in fellowship with Christ by partaking of His body and blood in the bread and cup.

*Premise 2:* Paul explains in 1 Cor 10:18–20 that the OT teaches that those who eat sacrifices partake in the altar, which means that those who eat food offered to idols fellowship with the demons to whom the idol meat was offered.

*Conclusion:* in 1 Cor 10:21–22, Paul concludes from these two premises that one cannot partake in the Table and cup with both Jesus and demons, because to do so is to provoke the Lord to jealousy and He cannot be overcome.

Paul then seems to turn from meat that would be eaten in the temple of an idol (1 Cor 10:14–22) to meat sacrificed to an idol, sold in the market, and eaten in homes (10:23–11:1).<sup>17</sup> He may be responding to Corinthian slogans ("all things are lawful for me") in 1 Cor 10:23,<sup>18</sup> but

<sup>15</sup> For the already-not yet in Paul, see Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 97–108, 734.

<sup>16</sup> Schreiner (*Paul*, 287) writes, "Thus in 1 Corinthians 10 he reminds the 'knowers'—who feel free to eat even in idols' temples—that even though the Israelites were freed from Egypt, though they experienced a baptism of sorts at the Red Sea, though they experienced an anticipation of the Lord's Supper in eating manna and water from the rock, though they had Christ's presence in their midst, they were still judged by God. . . . Israel's destruction is a type of God's eschatological judgment (1 Cor 10:11) and functions as a warning to the church. . . . One cannot partake of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice by eating at his table and then proceed to eat at the table of idols and share in the 'benefits' of demonic powers. God will not tolerate such idolatry."

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 441, 475–78; D. E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 486–87.

<sup>18</sup> Fee (*First Corinthians*, 479) suggests that "everything is permissible" in 1 Cor 10:23 is a Corinthian slogan. So also Smith, "1 Corinthians," 277; D. Burk, "Discerning Corinthian Slogans through Paul's Use of the Diatribe in 1 Cor 6:12–20," *BBR* 18.1 (2008): 99–121; J. E. Smith, "The Roots of a 'Libertine' Slogan in 1 Cor 6:18," *JTS* 59.1 (2008): 63–95.



in any case his point in 1 Cor 10:23–24 is that the Corinthians should seek what benefits and edifies others. In 10:25–31 Paul instructs the Corinthians that since the earth belongs to the Lord, they are free to eat without bothering about the source of the meat—unless doing so will harm the conscience of another. They are to live for God's glory, whether eating or abstaining (10:31), and they are to follow Paul as he follows Jesus—and that means inconveniencing themselves as they seek the benefit of others that they may be saved (10:31–11:1).

The issues Paul has been dealing with in the first 10 chapters of 1 Corinthians do not vanish once we arrive at chap. 11. The factionalism (1 Cor 1–4) and problems with sexuality (1 Cor 5–7) continue to be addressed with the gospel that overturns such behavior. The immorality confronted in chaps. 5–7 reflects a failure to honor and obey God where issues of sex and gender are concerned, and in 1 Cor 11:2–16 Paul teaches the Corinthians how they are to honor God with respect to gender when the church is gathered for worship.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the factionalism seen in chaps. 1–4 is to have no place at the Lord's Supper, which Paul addresses in 11:17–34. Paul's instructions on what is proper during the worship of God all through 1 Corinthians 11–14 serve as a kind of antidote to the idolatry challenging the church at Corinth, which Paul dealt with in chaps. 8–10. False worship (1 Cor 8–10) is to be replaced with true worship (1 Cor 11–14). We have seen that Paul has opposed factionalism, immorality, and idolatry with the truth of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 1–10. We are now ready to consider Paul's explanation of the Lord's Supper as an identity-shaping proclamation of the gospel.

<sup>19</sup> See especially T. R. Schreiner, "Head Coverings, Prophecies, and the Trinity: 1 Cor 11:2–16," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. J. Piper and W. Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 117–32, available online: <http://www.cbmw.org/rbmw/rbmw.pdf>, and id., "A Review of 'Praying and Prophesying in the Assemblies: 1 Cor 11:2–16' by G. Fee," *JBMW* 10.1 (2005): 17–21, available online: <http://www.cbmw.org/Resources/Book-Reviews/Praying-and-Prophesying-in-the-Assemblies-by-Gordon-D-Fee-from-Discovering-Biblical-Equality>. For my attempt to synthesize the gender passages in the NT, see "What Women Can Do in Ministry: Full Participation within Biblical Boundaries," in *Women, Ministry and the Gospel*, ed. M. A. Husbands and T. Larsen (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 32–52.

## *The Lord's Supper: An Identity-Shaping Proclamation of the Gospel*

The earliest church seems to have met on a daily basis in the homes of believers to break bread (Acts 2:46). As time passed and the church settled into normal patterns, they moved to a weekly meeting. On the first day of the week, the church would gather to break bread (Acts 20:7).<sup>20</sup> Just as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal, so the early Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper seems to have taken place in the context of a meal.<sup>21</sup>

Not only is it important to understand that the early Christians took the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day in the context of a meal, but it is also important to recognize that they did so in homes.<sup>22</sup> Scholars generally follow Jerome Murphy-O'Connor's analysis of what this would entail.<sup>23</sup> In what follows I will summarize some of these conclusions and interpret what Paul says in light of them, but from the outset I must stress that the main lines of the argument here are not dependent upon any particular reconstruction. The argument here is that the Corinthians should identify themselves as those who have been redeemed by the death of Jesus and are united to Him and other

<sup>20</sup> For worship on the first day of the week, see Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple*, 378–85. I. H. Marshall identifies “the Breaking of Bread” as part of “The New Testament Vocabulary” for the Lord's Supper, citing Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11; 1 Cor 10:16, and referencing also Ign. *Eph.* 20:2 and *Did* 14:1 (*Last Supper and Lord's Supper* [Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997], 14–15, 158). F. F. Bruce writes on Acts 20:7, “The breaking of the bread was probably a fellowship meal in the course of which the Eucharist was celebrated (cf. 2:42)” (*The Book of Acts*, rev. ed., NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 384). See also E. J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 414; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 699.

<sup>21</sup> B. B. Blue (“Love Feast,” in *DPL* 579) writes, “The separation of the meal/*agapē* from the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist, was made in the second century. Justin Martyr (c. 150) indicates that by his time the common meal and Eucharist (as sacrament) were separate observances. . . .” Citing Justin Martyr *1 Apol.* 65–66. Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 428–29. Skarsaune helpfully traces the line of development from the Jewish Passover meal to the early Christian celebration of the Lord's Supper (*In the Shadow of the Temple*, 399–421). E. E. Ellis writes that Paul's comments in 1 Cor 11:17–34 “initiate, quite unintentionally no doubt, a process that in time will eliminate the meal altogether from the observance of the Supper” (*Pauline Theology: Ministry and Society* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 113). Ellis's point only stands if when Paul recommends eating in one's own home, he separates the meal from the Lord's Supper rather than making a comment about the spiritual state of the Corinthians.

<sup>22</sup> See B. B. Blue, “Architecture, Early Church,” in *DLNTD*, 91–95.

<sup>23</sup> J. Murphy O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth: Texts and Archeology*, 3rd ed. (Wilmington: Glazier, 2002 [1983]). A. C. Thiselton (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 860) speaks of O'Connor's work as “a foundation . . . which has transformed exegesis since the early 1980s . . . .” Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 428) calls attention to the fact that some recent scholars have disputed this reconstruction.

Christians by faith. Instead of their actions declaring these realities, their behavior at the Lord's Supper was pointing to status distinctions recognized by Roman culture, and the observance of these status distinctions amounted to a denial of their unity as the body of Christ. Paul confronts this misbehavior with an explanation of the way the Lord's Supper proclaims the death of Jesus, unifying all those who proclaim it as they confess their common need for and equal standing under the mercy of God at the foot of the cross. Moreover, the identity of those redeemed by Jesus is to be shaped by this gospel such that they follow Christ in laying down their lives for others. The Corinthian Christians were not doing this, and Paul therefore rehearses for them what he had taught them earlier: that the Lord's Supper is an identity-shaping proclamation of the gospel.

As we consider the behaviors reflected in what Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we can be helped toward a clearer picture by what has been discerned of the architectural and social realities of Roman Corinth. Then as now, wealthier people could afford private homes as opposed to dwelling in apartments. As Fee points out, this would mean that the host of the Christians gathering for worship would be the patron of the meal.<sup>24</sup> Schnabel writes,

Jerome Murphy-O'Connor concludes on the basis of the architectural features of the Roman atrium house and the Greek peristyle house . . . , whose largest room could accommodate between thirty and forty people, that the Christian house churches had about that same number of members. In some exceptional cases it was possible that up to one hundred people could gather in private houses with large rooms.<sup>25</sup>

This is relevant to our consideration of the Lord's Supper because, as Fee points out, "The triclinia average about 36 square meters (about 18 x 18 ft.). If they actually reclined (triclinium = a table with three sides on which to recline) at such meals, there would be room for about 9 to 12 guests at table."<sup>26</sup> And as Schnabel observes, "The early Christian house churches existed in the context of the hierarchical social structures of Roman society."<sup>27</sup> Both architectural and social realities are relevant for what Paul says to the church in Corinth in 1 Cor 11:17–34. Richard B. Hays writes,

<sup>24</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 533.

<sup>25</sup> Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1304.

<sup>26</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 533, n. 11.

<sup>27</sup> Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1304.

The host of such a gathering would, of course, be one of the wealthier members of the community. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that the host's higher-status friends would be invited to dine in the *triclinium*, while lower-status members of the church (such as freedmen and slaves) would be placed in the larger space outside.

Furthermore, under such conditions it was not at all unusual for the higher status guests in the dining room to be served better food and wine than the other guests . . . A number of surviving texts from this period testify to this custom among Romans (and Corinth was, we must recall, a Roman colony).<sup>28</sup>

The situation we find in 1 Cor 11:17–34, then, is another instance of Paul addressing Corinthian sin with Christian gospel. The passage seems to break down into four parts:

- A 11:17–22 Corinthian anti-gospel divisions at the Lord's Supper
- B 11:23–26 Proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes
- B' 11:27–32 Partaking in a worthy manner
- A' 11:33–34 Receiving one another at the Lord's Supper<sup>29</sup>

The remedy for the problematic behavior outlined in 1 Cor 11:17–22 is proposed in 11:33–34, and the worthy manner in which the Corinthians are to proclaim the Lord's death as they partake of the Lord's Supper (11:23–26) is outlined in 11:27–32. We will consider these each in turn.

### Anti-gospel Divisions

If the architectural and social picture sketched above does indeed inform what was happening in Corinth,<sup>30</sup> we can immediately

<sup>28</sup> Hays, *First Corinthians*, 196, citing Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 2.6. Fee (*First Corinthians*, 542, n. 55) also cites relevant texts from Juvenal (*Satire* 5) and Martial (*Epigram* 3.60). Similarly Smith, "1 Corinthians," 286. Part 1 of O'Connor, *St. Paul's Corinth* lays out and discusses an array of potentially relevant texts from antiquity (3–147).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Fee, *First Corinthians*, 532. This structure better captures the thought of the passage than does the tri-partite division (A 11:17–22; B 11:23–26; A' 11:27–34) put forward by Garland (*1 Corinthians*, 535) because it reflects the two occurrences of "ὧστε," "therefore/so then" (11:27,33) and it captures the way that 11:27–32 matches 11:23–26 in teaching the Corinthians how to partake worthily, while 11:33–34 provides the remedies to the problems outlined in 11:17–22. Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 426, who divides the text into five parts: 11:17–22, 23–25, 26–28, 29–32, and 33–34.

<sup>30</sup> When bringing background considerations such as these to bear on our interpretations, we should bear in mind that these things *might* inform what was happening in the church in Corinth. What we have in the text of 1 Cor 11:17–34 does not explicitly declare that the church met in the homes of wealthy members, that wealthy members of the church brought their own private meals (see below), and that the host and patron invited his elite friends into the triclinium, leaving those of lower ranks in the atrium or elsewhere. The interpretation proposed

understand what Paul says in 11:17—“not for the better but for the worse you come together.”<sup>31</sup> Paul has pointed to the unifying nature of the Lord's Supper in 10:16–17:

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not participation in the blood of the Messiah? The bread which we break, is it not participation in the body of the Messiah? Because there is one bread, we the many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

As Jay Smith writes, “the Lord's Supper is a *koinō niq* ‘a communal participation, a sharing together’ in Christ's redemptive work and identity and all that this solidarity with him means and entails.”<sup>32</sup> This term *koinō niq* which means “fellowship” or “participation,” is used elsewhere by Paul to describe his “fellowship” in the sufferings of Christ and conformity to His death (Phil 3:10). Paul also uses the term to describe the way the Macedonians shared in the ministry to the saints by their generous gifts (2 Cor 8:4). Participating in the body and blood of the Messiah, then, would appear to point to union with Christ in His death and resurrection (cf. Gal 2:20; Eph 2:5–6). Those who bless the cup and break the bread are celebrating their participation in Christ's death and the benefits it achieved (1 Cor 10:16). Moreover, since they are united to Christ, they are also united to one another—they are “one body” partaking of “one bread” (10:17). This means that the celebration of the Lord's Supper enacts the solidarity of the members of the church and her Messiah, in whose body and blood, death and resurrection, she participates. This solidarity with Christ entails another: the solidarity of the members of the church with one another in the body of Christ as they partake of the one bread. But

here fits these circumstances, but as noted above, the reading adopted herein is not ultimately dependent upon them and they are not the main point Paul is making. The issue Paul has with the church in Corinth is simply that their conduct at the Lord's Supper is in conflict with what they are ostensibly proclaiming in the Lord's Supper. Participation in the Lord's Supper declares that their identity is determined by the gospel and that the gospel is a message of One who was rich becoming poor so that others could be rich by His poverty (cf. 2 Cor 8:9). The behavior of the Corinthians at the Lord's Supper instead affirms social distinctions between those who have and those who do not have, and this denies the gospel and demonstrates that their identity has not been reshaped by it.

<sup>31</sup> The verb *συνέρχομαι*, “come together,” occurs five times in this passage, the first three instances (11:17,18,20) highlighting the disjunction between the physical “coming together” and the church's failure to realize a corresponding spiritual “coming together,” and the last two calling for it (11:33,34). Hays (*First Corinthians*, 194) cites an interesting parallel describing “the many” “coming together” as “one personality” for the “better” in Aristotle, *Politics* 3.6.4.

<sup>32</sup> Smith, “1 Corinthians,” 276.

rather than affirming the unity of the body, that is, the church, the actions of the Corinthians are divisive:<sup>33</sup> “For first,<sup>34</sup> indeed, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it” (1 Cor 11:18). Paul’s comments that follow elaborate on the nature of the divisions he addresses. Here we note a verbal link between 11:18 and 1:10, established by the use of the word “divisions” (*schismata*) in both places.<sup>35</sup> Paul’s statement that he believes what he has heard “in part” means, as Fee writes, “that he really does believe it but also acknowledges that his informants are scarcely disinterested observers.”<sup>36</sup>

Paul then indicates that the hard work of church life—plowing, planting, sowing, watering (cf 1 Cor 3:6–9)—not only means that those who serve will get dirt under their fingernails, it also reveals who is approved: “For it is even necessary for there to be factions among you, in order that the approved might be manifest among you” (11:19). Schreiner correctly concludes that those who are not approved “are not truly believers.”<sup>37</sup> The crucible of church life reveals

<sup>33</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 433.

<sup>34</sup> C. K. Barrett (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, BNTC [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1968], 260) observes that no “secondly” follows the “first,” but A. T. Robertson (GGNT 1152) suggests “the contrast is implied in verses 20 ff.” This would seem to indicate that Robertson takes Paul to mean: first, there are divisions among you (11:18), and second, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat (11:20). Alternatively, Robertson and Plummer write, “Possibly there is no antithesis; but some find it in the section about spiritual gifts (xxii.1 f.)” (A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St Paul to the Corinthians*, 2nd ed., ICC [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1914], 239).

<sup>35</sup> See Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 850.

<sup>36</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 537. The position Hays endorses, that this is a rhetorical way for Paul to highlight his incredulity at the Corinthians’ outrageous behavior, seems strained in light of the more direct ways Paul expresses his indignation elsewhere in the letter (see below) (Hays, *First Corinthians*, 295; similarly Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 261). Fee’s view is superior to others that have been proposed because Paul does argue as though he believes that the abuses that have been reported are indeed occurring. Robertson and Plummer suggest that Paul “will not believe that all he hears to their discredit is true” (*First Corinthians*, 239), a view which does not fit well with Paul’s statements about human nature and the behavior of the Corinthians elsewhere—would he have believed the report addressed in 1 Cor 5:1–5 if this view were correct? Thiselton (*First Corinthians*, 858) writes, “Paul avoids unnecessary confrontation and especially rash, overly hasty speech,” but this hardly matches Paul’s vigorous interaction with ideas he disputes (cf. 1 Cor 4:8–21; 5:3–5; 6:5; 11:22. Cf. 15:35–36, “But someone will ask . . . ? Fool!”). Nor am I convinced by Winter’s argument that the phrase should be rendered “I believe a certain report” (*After Paul Left Corinth*, 159–63), since the summaries of the usage of μέρος in LSJ (s.v., 1104–05), MM (s.v., 389–99), L&N (s.v., 2:160), and BDAG (s.v., 633–34) all seem to indicate that the word signifies “part/portion,” with meanings such as “matter/business” being derived from “one’s portion in the business;” meanwhile, the adverbial accusative reflected in the rendering “in part I believe it” seems very well established.

<sup>37</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 733.

whether the participants have received God's Spirit and been enabled to understand the gospel and its implications for how they should conduct themselves (2:12). The contextual implication of 1 Cor 11:19 is that those who are "approved" will adhere to Paul's teaching on the Lord's Supper.

Paul's words in 1 Cor 11:20 probably would have been shocking to the members of the Corinthian church. Again, if the architectural and social scene that scholars have put together informs this passage, the members of the Corinthian church were conducting themselves according to expected and accepted patterns of behavior in Roman Corinth in their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul declares that they are not, in fact, eating the Lord's Supper because they are acting according to what was accepted custom among human beings: "When you come together in the same place, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" (11:20).

Paul begins to underscore the fundamentally counter-cultural nature of the Lord's Supper as a proclamation of the Lord's death in 11:21: "for in the eating each one devours his own supper, and one goes hungry while another gets drunk." In this translation I have rendered the term *prolambanō* "devours." This translation assumes that the prefixed preposition *pro-* is serving to intensify the meaning of the verb (take vigorously = devour) rather than indicating temporal priority (take beforehand).<sup>38</sup> The temporal aspect of the preposition *pro-* is widely recognized,<sup>39</sup> but it does not seem to fit the context, where some six phrases in 11:18–21 point to the church being gathered when this action takes place: (1) "when you come together" (11:18);<sup>40</sup> (2) "as a church" (11:18); (3) "divisions among you" (11:18); (4) "when you

<sup>38</sup> BDAG, s.v., 872, places the use of *προλαμβάνω* in 1 Cor 11:21 under the first subheading, with text in bold that reads "to do someth. that involves some element of temporal priority." By contrast, BAGD, s.v., 708, places the use of this verb in 1 Cor 11:21 under the second subheading, with the explanatory comment (lacking in BDAG), "in uses where the temporal sense of *προ-* is felt very little, if at all." I owe this observation to the discussion in Smith, "1 Corinthians," 285–88. For a discussion of linguistic evidence, with the pertinent observation that in Gal 6:1 the verb simply means "taken/caught," see O. Hofius, "The Lord's Supper and the Lord's Supper Tradition: Reflections on 1 Cor 11:23b–25," in *One Loaf, One Cup: Ecumenical Studies of 1 Cor 11 and Other Eucharistic Texts*, ed. B. F. Meyer (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1993), 91. See also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 540–42; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 197.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., BDAG, s.v., 864; A. T. Robertson, *GGNT*, 620–22; BDF § 213.

<sup>40</sup> D. B. Wallace (*GGBB*, 655) states that "about 90% of the time" the genitive absolute participle (here *συνερχομένων ὑμῶν*, also in 11:20) is temporal. Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 433) sees a concessive nuance in the participle ("Although you hold your meetings in one place") but also acknowledges the temporal nuance.

come together” (11:20); (5) “in the same place” (11:20); (6) “in the eating” (11:21).<sup>41</sup> These phrases indicate that the problem is one that happens once all the members have gathered, rather than one that begins before some members of the church arrive.<sup>42</sup>

The picture of what was happening is given a little more detail in 1 Cor 11:22: “For do you not have houses for eating and drinking? Or do you despise the church of God, and do you shame those who have not? What do I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I do not praise you.” This salvo of questions seems directed at “those who have” rather than at “those who have not.”

The question about the homes they have where they can eat and drink is suggestive, and when we combine it with Paul’s observation in 11:19 that divisions are necessary and the command to eat at home if one is hungry in 11:34, the question suggests that the Corinthians should evaluate their actions. They are eating their own supper rather than the Lord’s Supper (11:20–21), and they should do that in their own homes, not in the church (11:22).

Paul understands the behavior of “those who have” to be such that it both despises the church and shames “those who have not.” It seems, then, that cultural norms were controlling what happened when the Corinthian church gathered to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

<sup>41</sup> On the phrase ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, which I have rendered “in the eating,” cf. D. Burk, *Articular Infinitives in the Greek of the New Testament: On the Exegetical Benefit of Grammatical Precision*, New Testament Monographs 14 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2006), 95–96: “BDF suggests that ἐν τῷ plus the present infinitive denotes contemporaneous time while ἐν τῷ plus the aorist infinitive denotes antecedent time [§404 and (2)]. . . . Ernest Burton has rightly rejected this view of the aorist tense in ἐν τῷ plus the infinitive [*Syntax of the Moods and Tenses of New Testament Greek*, 50]. . . . Simply put, the infinitive uses tense morphemes not to grammaticalize time, but verbal aspect. . . . The articular infinitive emphasizes the *locative* use of the dative case.” This would seem to indicate that the “temporal ‘location’” (Burk, *Articular Infinitives*, 92) is in view with the whole church gathered to eat at the same time. Similarly Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 89. See also BAGD, s.v. ἐν, II.3, 260, discussing ἐν τῷ plus the aorist infinitive, “the meaning is likewise *when*. Owing to the fundamental significance of the aor. the action in such a construction is not thought of as durative, but merely as punctiliar.” BDAG has changed the last phrase to read, “Owing to the fundamental significance of the aor. the action is the focal point” (BDAG, s.v. ἐν, 10.c, 330).

<sup>42</sup> Hofius makes a similar observation about ἕκαστος “each one” and ὃς μὲν . . . ὃς δὲ “one goes hungry, another gets drunk” (“The Lord’s Supper,” 89–90, cf. 92). Pace Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 434–35, who maintains that temporal nuances are in view in both 11:21 (“goes ahead with his own meal”) and 11:33 (“wait for one another”). For discussion of relevant lexical evidence, see B. W. Winter, “‘Private’ Dinners and Christian Divisiveness (1 Cor 11:17–34),” in *After Paul Left Corinth*, 144–48 (142–58). Fee also claims “there is no clear evidence of the verb *prolambanō*’s being used this way [temporal priority] in the context of eating” (*First Corinthians*, 542).



The “haves” were perhaps eating superior food and greater quantities of it. Evidence for the superior food of the wealthier members of the church might be seen in the statement, “each one devours *his own* supper” (11:21, emphasis added).<sup>43</sup> This understanding sees Paul’s reference to drunkenness in 11:21 as a hyperbolic characterization of the way the “haves” disregarded the inferior, insufficient provisions of the “have nots.”<sup>44</sup> So if those in the church of higher social standing and greater means were enjoying a sumptuous feast in the triclinium, while those of lower status—a judgment that itself denies the leveling influence of the gospel—were left in an outer room such as the atrium or court to make do with food of lower quality, we can understand why Paul would say such behavior despises the church and shames the “have nots.”<sup>45</sup>

To be specific: this behavior shames the church because rather than depicting the need common to all—rich and poor, slave and master, male and female, Jew and Gentile—the need for the gospel that is proclaimed in the Supper, the observance of what seem to amount to class distinctions at the Supper enacts the socio-economic distinctions of the pagan Roman culture.<sup>46</sup> This behavior of the Corinthians shows that their identity has not been reconfigured by the gospel. As Paul has done throughout the letter of 1 Corinthians to this point, so he does here: he confronts Corinthian error with Christian gospel.

### Proclaiming the Lord's Death

Paul introduces his description of the Lord's Supper with words that mark what follows as traditional material: “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you” (1 Cor 11:23).<sup>47</sup> Paul then

<sup>43</sup> For a concise summary of the evidence, see Smith, “1 Corinthians,” 285–86. For further discussion, see Winter, “Private Dinners and Christian Divisiveness,” 154–58. For a summary of the proposals that favor Winter's view, see Fee, *First Corinthians*, 540–41. If B. B. Blue is correct that a famine struck Corinth soon after Paul left, the situation would have been exacerbated by food shortages (“The House Church at Corinth and the Lord's Supper: Famine, Food Supply, and the *Present Distress*,” *CTR* 5.2 (1991): 221–39).

<sup>44</sup> So also Smith, “1 Corinthians,” 286; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 542–43.

<sup>45</sup> Similarly V. P. Furnish, *The Theology of the First Letter to the Corinthians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 79.

<sup>46</sup> So also Furnish, *Theology of First Corinthians*, 83: “Instead of demonstrating the new life that is established in the gift and claim of the cross, its celebrations demonstrate, rather, that considerations of social status continue to prevail even among those who profess to belong to the company of Christ.”

<sup>47</sup> Cf. 1 Cor 15:3. Larry Hurtado writes, “Paul's recitation of early tradition in 1 Cor 11:23–26

recounts the words and actions of Jesus at the Last Supper in terms that correspond most closely to Luke's Gospel,<sup>48</sup> and Luke was one of Paul's traveling companions who might have been with Paul in Corinth.<sup>49</sup> The statement, "what I also delivered to you," in 11:23 establishes that Paul had previously taught these traditions to the Corinthians.<sup>50</sup> As Paul retells the story in the context of this letter, the self-giving of Jesus, which Christians are to remember as they partake of the Lord's Supper, exposes and rebukes the selfish behavior of the Corinthians at the Supper.

Jesus and His disciples were apparently celebrating the Passover when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.<sup>51</sup> From Paul's account of what Jesus said and did that night, it appears that Jesus interpreted what was about to take place (His death, resurrection, ascension, and the building of the church) through the framework provided by Israel's

indicates that the cultic significance of Jesus in the meal was not a Pauline innovation, but stemmed from earlier Christian circles" (L. W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 146). Paul's is the earliest account of these events that we have (Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 244; Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 429). For a wider study of "Traditions in 1 Corinthians," see E. E. Ellis, *The Making of the New Testament Documents* (Boston: Brill, 2002), 69–94.

<sup>48</sup> For easy comparison of the Synoptic accounts of the Last Supper, see K. Aland, ed., *Synopsis Quattuor Evangeliorum*, 4th ed. rev. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1995 [1963]), 436–37 (§311). Elements of the account that are unique to Luke's Gospel among the Synoptics but are also recounted by Paul include the following: ". . . which is for you; do this for my remembrance.' . . . So also the cup, after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood.'" For the possible OT texts that influenced the accounts in the Gospels and in 1 Corinthians, see C. J. Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice: How Patristic Authors Can Help Us Read the Bible," *WTJ* 66 (2004): 2, 18–19.

<sup>49</sup> The "we" passages begin in Acts 16:10, but the next first person plurals are used in 20:5 and following, so we cannot be sure that Luke was with Paul in Corinth during the visit narrated in Acts 18:1–17.

<sup>50</sup> Osvaldo Padilla writes, "With his usual meticulousness, Martin Hengel . . . argues that in the unusual chronological detail inserted by Paul in 1 Cor 11:23 ('in the night that Jesus was betrayed') it is possible to deduce that Paul related the entire passion narrative to the congregations he founded" (review of Christian Grappe, ed., *Le Repas de Dieu/Das Mahl Gottes: 4. Symposium Strasbourg, Tübingen, Upsala, 11–15 septembre 2002*. WUNT 169 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004], in *BBR* 18.1 [2008]: 178–79). Cf. M. Hengel, "Das Mahl in der Nacht, 'in der Jesus ausgeliefert wurde' (1 Kor 11,23)," in *Le Repas de Dieu/Das Mahl Gottes*, 115–60.

<sup>51</sup> See Thiselton's excursus, "Was the Last Supper a Passover Meal? Significance for Exegesis" (*First Corinthians*, 871–74), where having discussed the relationship between John and the Synoptics, he concludes, "Jesus presided at a Passover meal which proclaimed his own broken body and shed blood as the new Passover for Christian believers." Collins ("The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice," 3 and n. 6) urges that the Eucharist be interpreted in light of OT peace offerings, and that the early fathers understood this, while later fathers failed to distinguish between various OT sacrifices, resulting in the misconception of the Eucharist as a propitiatory sacrifice (*ibid.*, 8–9). For the Lord's Supper as a Passover meal, see also Köstenberger's essay in this volume.

history. In order to appreciate the interpretive moves Jesus made, and in order to see the way that Paul carried forward the interpretive strategy he learned from Jesus,<sup>52</sup> we must briefly recount salient elements of the exodus from Egypt and the Passover celebration.

As the climactic plague, Yahweh promised to slay every firstborn in Egypt (Exod 11:4–5). The Israelites were to kill a lamb and place its blood on the doorposts and lintel of their homes (12:6–7, 21–23). Seeing the blood on the doorpost, Yahweh passed over the homes covered by the blood (12:13, 23). The deliverance was to be commemorated yearly by the Festival of Unleavened Bread (12:14, 24–27; 13:3–10). For seven days, the Israelites were to remove leaven from their homes, on pain of being cut off from the people (12:15). The people fled in haste, with no time for the leaven to work through the dough (12:34). Yahweh then claimed the firstborn of Israel for Himself, who were to be redeemed by sacrifice (13:1–2, 11–16). Yahweh led Israel out by a pillar of cloud and flame (13:21), and He parted the waters of the Red Sea for Israel to pass through on dry land (14:21–22). As the people moved through the wilderness, Yahweh provided bread from heaven (16:4) and water from a rock (17:6) for the journey to the promised land.

Celebrating the Passover feast commemorating these events with His disciples on the night He was betrayed, Jesus took the symbolism of the hasty departure from Egypt—the unleavened bread—and turned it in a new direction.<sup>53</sup> Paul relates “that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was delivered up,<sup>54</sup> took bread, and having given

<sup>52</sup> E. E. Ellis does not cite the connections I will draw here between, for instance, Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 5:7–8 and the teaching of Jesus recounted in 11:23–26, but I am following the lines of his argument in “Jesus' Use of the Old Testament and the Genesis of New Testament Theology,” in *Christ and the Future*, 20–37. Similarly D. Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 158–59.

<sup>53</sup> Gentry, “The Lord's Supper,” 26. There is no basis in the text for Hans Conzelmann's assertion, “In contrast to the Synoptics, the Supper in the Pauline version is not characterized as a Passover meal” (*A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, trans. J. W. Leitch, Her [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975], 197).

<sup>54</sup> The same verb is used in the statements “what I also *delivered* to you” (παρέδωκα) and “in the night he was *delivered up*” (παρεδίδετο). Though translations typically render this “in the night he was *betrayed*” (ESV, HCSB, KJV, NAS, NIV, NJB), commentators seem to prefer “delivered up,” which preserves the possible allusion to Isa 53:6, where the same verb is used. See J. Ziegler, *Septuaginta: Vetus Testamentum Graecum Auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Göttingensis editum XIV: Isaias* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1939, 1983). Hofius writes, “The passive παρεδίδετο describes the act of God and the verb is used in the sense of Rom 4:25; 8:32. Cf. Isa 53:12” (“The Lord's Supper,” 76, n. 4). Robertson and Plummer (*First Corinthians*, 243) write, “To translate ‘was betrayed’ confines the meaning to the action of Judas; whereas

thanks, he broke it<sup>55</sup> and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; this do for my remembrance’” (1 Cor 11:23–24).<sup>56</sup> Whereas the unleavened bread at the Passover reminded Israel of their hurried flight from Egypt, Jesus identifies the bread with His body. This indicates that Paul learned his interpretive method from Jesus Himself: Jesus explained His death and resurrection as typologically fulfilling what was celebrated in the Passover—the exodus from Egypt. Taking his cue from this, Paul interprets the events of Israel’s history as types of Jesus and those He redeems (e.g., 1 Cor 10:1–13). That is to say, Jesus presents His body, broken for His people, as the new exodus replacement of the bread eaten in the Passover feast commemorating the exodus from Egypt.<sup>57</sup> Just as Israel was instructed to *remember* what took place at the exodus by celebrating the Passover (Exod 12:14;

the Father’s surrender of the Son is included, and perhaps is chiefly meant, and the Son’s self-sacrifice may also be included.” Hays argues that God is the one handing Jesus over rather than Judas being the one betraying Jesus (*First Corinthians*, 198). Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 436 follows this view, asserting that Paul never refers to Judas or what he did (but, as Prof. Schreiner has pointed out to me, Paul’s comments on the Lord’s Supper are also rare). Barrett (*First Corinthians*, 266) also prefers this view. Cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 197, n. 44: “It must not be taken too narrowly in the present passage, i.e. merely of Judas’ betrayal.” On the other hand, arguing that the treachery of Judas is in view, Fee (*First Corinthians*, 549) writes, “Paul is here referring to the ‘tradition,’ and the Gospel traditions place the announcement of the betrayal at the time of the Supper.”

<sup>55</sup> Thiselton (*First Corinthians*, 875) observes that “in the context of the Last Supper and the Lord’s Supper all four accounts include the same pair of Greek words ἄρτον . . . ἐκλάσεν (Matt 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Cor 11:23b,24a).”

<sup>56</sup> For a modern Roman Catholic perspective defending the idea of the “Real Presence,” see Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 438–39, 444, 446. Contrast Fitzmyer’s view with that of Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 876–77, Hays, *First Corinthians*, 199, and Fee, *First Corinthians*, 550. Gentry (“The Lord’s Supper,” 27) gives four concise reasons transubstantiation is a misunderstanding: (1) figurative language is used; (2) the Lord’s Supper is rooted in the Passover, which used symbols to memorialize what took place at the exodus; (3) festivals in pagan religions were also symbolic, so a literal understanding of “this is my body” would have required further explanation; and (4) Jesus twice said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” See also Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 100: “just as the cup or its content is *not* the new covenant in the sense of substance, neither is the bread in a substantial sense the body of Christ.” So also Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 734.

<sup>57</sup> I am suggesting that Paul learned his typological interpretation from Jesus. For an early Christian homily that carries forward the typological interpretation of the Passover being fulfilled in the death of Jesus, see Melito of Sardis (d. ca. 180) “On Pascha.” The first part (§§ 1–45) is conveniently available in R. A. Whitacre, ed., *A Patristic Greek Reader* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 79–98 (introduction and Greek text), 220–27 (English translation). For the full (§§ 1–105) critical text, see S. G. Hall, ed. and trans., *Melito of Sardis: On Pascha and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979). Such a view might also be reflected in *Did* 9:4 if the “broken bread” that “was gathered together and became one” is a reference to exiled Israel being regathered in the person of Jesus.

Deut 16:3), so Jesus instructs His disciples to continue to partake of the bread that is His body for His “remembrance.”<sup>58</sup>

Paul continues to narrate what Jesus said and did: “Likewise also the cup, after supper,<sup>59</sup> saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as often as you drink it, for my remembrance’” (1 Cor 11:25). The Supper that was eaten, again, was a celebration of the Passover meal. Jesus takes the cup that followed the Supper, and as He had done with the unleavened bread, transforms its symbolism. He identifies the cup as the symbol of the new covenant that He is entering into with His people (cf. Jer 31:31–34). The covenant with the nation of Israel was inaugurated with the blood of sacrificial animals (Exod 24:5–8) in the context of a covenantal feast (24:9–11). The new covenant is inaugurated by the blood of Jesus in the context of the Passover, which Jesus transforms into a celebration of the new exodus accomplished by His own death and resurrection (1 Cor 11:23–26). As Ridderbos writes, “Christ’s self-surrender is now, as hitherto the exodus of Israel out of Egypt, the new and definitive fact of redemption which in the eating of the bread and in the drinking of the wine the church may accept as such again and again from the hand of God.”<sup>60</sup>

Paul’s recitation of the institution of the Lord’s Supper confronts what was happening in the Corinthian celebration of the Lord’s Supper on two levels: first, the Corinthians are confronted at the level of the simple gospel message, which, second, confronts their conception of their identity as reflected in their behavior.

At the first level, the simple gospel message is presented in the retelling of what Jesus did on the night He was betrayed. This reiterates the need every member of the church has for the sacrifice of

<sup>58</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 441. Against suggested Hellenistic backgrounds for the remembrance in view, H. Ridderbos writes, “There is much more to be said for a link with the element of *anamnesis* in the ritual of the Jewish feast days, especially in the Passover meal. . . . The Lord’s Supper is herewith qualified as a redemptive-historical commemorative meal” (*Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. J. R. De Witt [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975], 421).

<sup>59</sup> For discussion of the meal, with an argument that there are no pointers “to the particularities of a Passover meal,” see Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 80–86. But the combination of Paul’s identification of Jesus as the Passover lamb in 1 Cor 5:7 and the clear connections between 1 Cor 11:23–26 and Luke’s Gospel, which Hofius acknowledges to be “clearly oriented to the sequence of a Passover meal” (83, n. 45), place the burden of proof on the case against Paul presenting the Lord’s Supper as being instituted in the context of the Last Supper, which was a Passover meal.

<sup>60</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*, 421.

Christ. Before God, every member of the church in Corinth stood condemned. Neither wealth nor social standing placed some nearer to God than others. First Corinthians 11:23–26 clearly states the significance of Jesus' death as the sacrifice that delivers His people: Jesus *broke* the bread He identified as His body, told His disciples that His broken body was *for them*,<sup>61</sup> and then said that the covenant was *in His blood* (1 Cor 11:24–25).<sup>62</sup> Those who embrace this message embrace the idea that they have nothing but Christ that can commend them to God (cf. 1 Cor 1:30). Thus, anything that distinguishes human beings as superior or inferior by worldly standards of measure is rendered *irrelevant* by the truth of the gospel.

At the second level, Richard B. Hays has it right: “Paul’s missionary strategy in his confrontation with pagan culture repeatedly draws upon eschatologically interpreted Scripture texts to clarify the identity of the church and to remake the minds of his congregations.”<sup>63</sup> As Hays says at another point, Paul “is calling for a conversion of the imagination—an imaginative projection of their lives into the framework of the Pentateuchal narrative.”<sup>64</sup> Paul wants the Corinthian Christians “to understand that they live at the turning point of the ages . . . they are to see in their own experience the typological fulfillment of the biblical narrative.”<sup>65</sup> The upshot of this is that “the Corinthians who still prize [the wisdom of the world] are oblivious to God’s apocalyptic delegitimation of their symbolic world.”<sup>66</sup>

To see how Paul reshapes the symbolic universe in the minds of the Corinthians, we must again remind ourselves that a letter like 1 Corinthians is occasional. Paul is not systematically explaining the way he sees the world. Rather, he is making assertions on the basis of what he previously taught the Corinthians, and these assertions arise from the narrative storyline that Paul wants the Corinthians to embrace as their own. In seeking to show how the statements Paul

<sup>61</sup> Fitzmyer (*First Corinthians*, 440) writes, “The vicarious sense of the prep. *hyper* can be found in 1 Cor 15:3,29; 2 Cor 5:14; Rom 5:6; 8:32. See also Sir 29:15; 2 Macc 7:9; 8:21 . . .” Thiselton adds Rom 5:8 and Gal 3:13 (*First Corinthians*, 878). Fee writes, “The words ‘for you’ are an adaptation of the language of Isa. 53:12, where the Suffering Servant ‘bore the sin for many’” (*First Corinthians*, 551).

<sup>62</sup> See Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 98–99.

<sup>63</sup> R. B. Hays, *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel’s Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

makes arise from this underlying thought structure, we are pursuing Pauline theology. In this case, Paul's statements reflect an appropriation of the pattern of events typified at the exodus from Egypt. Paul evidently intends the Corinthian Christians to identify themselves as redeemed slaves who follow Paul as he follows Christ in giving Himself for others. In their behavior at the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians are denying this identity and living out another, the one native to Roman Corinth rather than the Jerusalem above.

In fact, this conception of Christ and the church as the typological fulfillment of the storyline of Israel strengthens the idea that the Lord's Supper is in view when Paul mentions not eating with "one who is called a brother" yet continues in unrepentant sin in 1 Cor 5:11.<sup>67</sup> In 5:7 Paul declared to the Corinthians that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." Such a declaration implies that just as the slain blood of the Passover lamb on the lintel (Exod 12:21–22) shielded those in the house from Yahweh, who passed over that house (12:23), so also the blood of Christ covers His people, removing from them the threat of God's wrath. In 1 Cor 5:7 Paul also urges the Corinthians to "clean out the old leaven." At the exodus the Israelites were instructed to remove leaven from their homes for seven days, and anyone who ate leaven was to be cut off from the people (Exod 12:14–15). The benefits of the Passover were not applied to anyone who disregarded the command and ate leaven (12:15). They were not shielded from God's wrath but cut off from the people. So also, Paul calls the Corinthian church to "celebrate the feast not in the old leaven" (1 Cor 5:8), calling the church to cleanse itself from the one who has indulged in the "leaven" of sexual immorality (5:1–2). In the light of the Passover imagery throughout 1 Cor 5:1–11, it seems that when Paul says "not even to eat with such a one" in 5:11 he is referring to the exclusion of those who have partaken of the "old leaven" from the new Passover—the Lord's Supper.

The typological fulfillment of the exodus from Egypt in the new exodus of the death and resurrection of Jesus probably also informs Paul's comments about the Corinthians being the temple of the Holy

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 243–44: "Not only is one not to share the Lord's Supper with such a wrongdoer, but one should not be found in social contact with him, or even dine with him." Similarly Barrett, *First Corinthians*, 132: "This prohibition will evidently include (though it will not be confined to) his exclusion from the church's common meal (cf. Gal. ii.12; and see x. 16–21; xi. 17–34) . . ."

Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19) and his references to them being “bought with a price” (6:20; 7:23). Paul makes the typology between Israel and the church explicit in 1 Cor 10:1–13 (esp. 10:6,11). Through the events of the Passover, Yahweh redeemed Israel from slavery, brought them through the waters of the Red Sea, entered into a covenant with them at Sinai, took up residence among them in the tabernacle, and accompanied them as they journeyed through the wilderness on their way to the land of promise. It seems that the undercurrent of Paul's statements to the Corinthians—the narrative framework that results in him saying what he says—is that the Corinthians have experienced the new exodus: Christ is the new Passover lamb whose blood covers them and removes God's wrath; the waters of baptism match the waters of the Red Sea; they have entered into a new covenant; God has tabernacled in them by His Spirit, making them His temple;<sup>68</sup> and they journey through the wilderness toward the kingdom of God, partaking of the Lord's Supper as Israel partook of the manna and celebrated the feasts of God's deliverance.

It seems that Paul provides this narrative to the Corinthians as a way for them to understand who they are, what has happened to them, where they are going, and how they must behave. They are typologically reliving the story of God's redemption of His people, and Paul is calling them to identify themselves with those who believed and were delivered, those whose behavior corresponded with what God had done for them. The problem is that in the Corinthian celebration of the new Passover, the Lord's Supper, their behavior indicates that they are identifying themselves as Romans of social standing rather than as slaves rescued from the house of bondage.

The way that Jesus selflessly sacrificed Himself for others directly repudiates the way that fallen human beings seek to exalt themselves over others. But by observing the social distinctions of Roman culture at the Lord's Table the Corinthians were doing precisely that (11:17–22). Earlier in the letter Paul detailed the way that he laid aside his own rights and preferences for the benefit of others (9:1–23), and then he called the Corinthians to follow him as he follows Christ (11:1). The recitation of what Jesus did on the night He was betrayed rehearses the way that Jesus laid aside His rights and privileges and

<sup>68</sup> On this theme, see my study, *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NACSBT (Nashville: B&H, 2006).



gave Himself for others, and this has implications for the way the Corinthian Christians are to conduct themselves at the Supper.

Before taking up those implications, Paul summarizes the significance of what takes place in the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." It is clear from 1 Cor 10:16–17 that eating the bread and drinking the cup is participating in the body and blood of Christ. This means that in eating the bread and drinking the cup the Corinthians were by faith claiming for themselves the benefits of the death of Christ and identifying themselves with the body of Christ—the church. To proclaim the Lord's death is to celebrate His life-giving sacrifice of Himself, looking back to the cross, and at the same time forward to His return—"until he comes" (11:26).<sup>69</sup>

### Partaking in a Worthy Manner

Having proclaimed the Lord's death in the retelling of the institution of the Lord's Supper, Paul presents the church in Corinth with two main implications for behavior at the Lord's Table, each marked with the inferential conjunction *hō stē* which several translations render "therefore" in 11:27 and "So then" in 11:33. These two occurrences of *hō stē* mark the two main inferences Paul draws from what he has said to this point: first is the broad application that the Corinthians are to partake of the Lord's Table in a worthy manner (11:27–32), and second are instructions that apply specifically to what was happening in Corinth: they are to receive one another (11:33–34).

Whether or not Paul intended a chiasmic structure to 1 Cor 11:17–34, the text seems to fall out that way. The first section, 11:17–22, describes the Corinthians' problematic behavior, and the last section, 11:33–34 provides the specific remedy to that abuse. Similarly, the two middle sections correspond to one another, with the recitation of the institution of the Lord's Supper in 11:23–26 matched by general instructions on taking the Supper in 11:27–32.

Paul's first concluding thought is on taking the Supper worthily: "As a result, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord

<sup>69</sup> Hofius ("The Lord's Supper," 107–8) suggests that the proclamation in view should be understood as a reference to "the Eucharistic prayers spoken over bread and cup." Cf. also Furnish, *Theology of First Corinthians*, 84: "Paul's reference to the Lord's coming is one more expression of the eschatological expectation that surfaces repeatedly in this letter, from the opening thanksgiving (1.7–8) to its closing lines (16.22, 'Our Lord, come!')."

unworthily, he will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27). To be “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” is nothing less than being guilty of having “crucified the Lord of glory” (2:8, cf. Heb 6:6).<sup>70</sup> Thus, Paul declares in 1 Cor 11:27 that those who partake unworthily identify themselves with those who crucified Christ rather than with those for whom He was crucified. Those who partake unworthily are not with the “approved” (11:19). They neither proclaim the gospel nor is their identity shaped by it. They are unbelievers. They reject Jesus and put Him on the cross. They are guilty of His body and blood. This reading is confirmed by the references to drinking judgment to oneself in 11:29, experiencing God’s judgment in 11:30, and being condemned with the world in 11:32.

To clarify, I am arguing that those who have already died (11:30) were not Christians. Some hold that they were Christians whom the Lord killed in discipline,<sup>71</sup> perhaps in line with a similar (mis)interpretation of 1 John 5:16–17.<sup>72</sup> Against this, I am suggesting that a better parallel text is Rev 2:21–23. There Jesus threatens to throw unrepentant Jezebel and those who sin with her “onto a sickbed” and “into great tribulation,” and their only hope is to “repent of her works” (Rev 2:22, ESV). If they do not repent, they show themselves to be Jezebel’s children, and Jesus promises to “strike her children dead” (2:23, ESV). This matches what Paul says in 1 Cor 11:30–32. In 11:30 he says that many are weak and ill and some have died because of the way they have partaken of the Supper. Jesus has thrown some on the sick bed, and some of Jezebel’s children have already been killed. In the next verse, 1 Cor 11:31, Paul states that those who judge themselves rightly will not be judged. I would suggest that judging oneself

<sup>70</sup> So also Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 550–51; F. W. Grosheide, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 274. *Pace* BDAG, s.v. ἔνοχος, 338–39, where 1 Cor 11:27 is glossed “sin against the body and blood” under 2.b.γ “to denote the pers. (or thing) against whom the sin has been committed.” The reading adopted here would place 1 Cor 11:27 under 2.b.β., “to denote the crime,” such that “guilty of the body and blood” refers to the crime of rejecting and crucifying Christ. Obviously Paul is not charging the offenders with the literal death of Christ, but this charge is similar to the one in Heb 6:6 where those who reject Christ “crucify for themselves the Son of God”—the idea being that by rejecting Him they are casting their lot in with those who crucified Jesus.

<sup>71</sup> Fee (*1 Corinthians*, 565) says the judgment “does not have to do with their eternal salvation.” Hays (*First Corinthians*, 201) speaks of “lapsed Christians.”

<sup>72</sup> For an argument that the sin unto death in 1 John 5:16–17 “will amount to specific manifestations of unregenerate conduct,” see R. Yarbrough, *1–3 John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 308.

rightly leads one to conclude that repentance is necessary. The disciplinary action to which Paul refers in 1 Cor 11:32, then, appears to be the sickness and weakness designed to provoke repentance. Being condemned along with the world (1 Cor 11:32) appears to be the killing of an unrepentant, unregenerate person, which is only a foretaste of the “second death” that awaits those whose names are not written in the Lamb’s book of life (cf. Rev 20:14–15). In my judgment, the various references in this passage to those who are unrepentant confirm this interpretation: they are unapproved (1 Cor 11:19); they despise the church (11:22); they eat in an unworthy manner and profane the Lord’s body and blood (11:27); they eat and drink judgment on themselves (11:29); and Paul tells them to stay home (11:34). Of course, Paul knows that only God knows the heart, so in saying these things he hopes to provoke repentance. He hopes to prompt the Corinthians to judge themselves rightly (11:31), to be moved by the Lord’s discipline to avoid condemnation (11:32).<sup>73</sup> It seems likely that he even hopes for some of the unrepentant and unregenerate Corinthians to be converted by this direct confrontation with the gospel.

To avoid the guilt of unrepentance which results in death, Paul counsels the Corinthians, “But let a man examine himself and thus let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup” (1 Cor 11:28). In view of the immediate context, in which Paul has recited the proclamation of the Lord’s death (1 Cor 11:23–26), it seems that 1 Cor 11:28 is a call to examine one’s life in the light of the gospel. Paul here urges the Christians to ask themselves if they are by faith placing themselves under the blood of Christ in the way that the Israelites placed themselves under the blood of the Passover lamb. Are they recognizing their bankruptcy before God, with Christ as the only thing that can commend them to God, or are they relying on their status in the Roman world? Moreover, they are then to take the further step of evaluating their treatment of others, especially others in the church, by the standard of Christ’s self-giving of Himself: has their identity been so shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ that they now treat others the way that Jesus has treated them?

<sup>73</sup> Though they do not discuss this passage, I am applying the perspective articulated by T. R. Schreiner and A. B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), arguing that 1 Cor 11:27–32 functions the way that other warnings do: to preserve the elect. Garland also treats the warning as functioning this way (*1 Corinthians*, 554).

It is not only the immediate context of this passage, however, that cues us to the indicators Paul gives regarding what constitutes partaking unworthily and how he would have the Corinthians examine themselves. We must pursue what Paul intended by the references to eating and drinking unworthily and self-examination from what Paul has said throughout 1 Corinthians to this point.<sup>74</sup>

According to Fee, “Because the paragraph has had a long history of being read at the Lord’s Supper independent of its original context, its interpretation has also been independent of that context.”<sup>75</sup> In his view, “Paul’s concern is related directly to vv. 20–22, where some are abusing others at the Lord’s Table by going ahead with their own private meals. Such conduct is unworthy of the Table where Jesus’ death is being proclaimed until he comes.”<sup>76</sup> Thus, he sees the introspection that has been based on this passage as a “tragedy.”<sup>77</sup> In my view, Fee’s interpretation—which would apparently do away with the idea that “People are ‘unworthy’ if they have any sin in their lives, or have committed sins during the past week,”<sup>78</sup>—focuses too narrowly on the immediate context to the exclusion of the broader context.

There are other places in 1 Corinthians where Paul has addressed the Lord’s Supper, and it seems unlikely that the deviant behavior addressed there should be left out of consideration when we seek Paul’s view on what it means to partake in an unworthy manner. Paul brought the bread and the cup into his argument that the Corinthian Christians should flee idolatry (10:14–22, esp. 10:16–17). Surely Paul would regard unrepentant participation in idolatry as partaking unworthily.

It seems that Paul also has the Lord’s Supper in view in 1 Corinthians 5. He refers to Christ, the Passover Lamb being sacrificed in 1 Cor 5:7, followed by the reference to celebrating the feast not with old leaven in 5:8. Since Jesus transformed the Passover into the Lord’s

<sup>74</sup> For a rather different interpretation that focuses on “identification with Christ and the cross in the Lord’s Supper [as being] at the same time a dialectical passing through judgment as ‘guilty’ and ‘accepted’ or ‘rightwise,’” see Thiselton, *First Corinthians*, 898.

<sup>75</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 559.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 560.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 560, n. 10. Cf. 561 on 11:28, “which along with v. 27 has been the cause of untold anxieties within the church. This is not a call for deep personal introspection to determine whether one is worthy of the Table.” Against this, see Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 551: “the Supper is to be eaten in an atmosphere of self-examination.”

<sup>78</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 560, n. 10.

Supper on the night He was betrayed, the feast in view would seem to be the Lord's Supper. All this is followed by the call in 5:11 not to eat with professing Christians who continue in unrepentant sin. These observations indicate that anyone who refuses to repent of the sins Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians 5 (sexual immorality, greed, swindling others, idolatry, reviling others, and drunkenness [5:1–2,9–11]) partakes unworthily. Indeed, Paul calls the church to “purge the evil person from among you” (5:13, quoting Deut 17:7). This indicates that individual members of the church should not only be concerned to partake in a worthy manner themselves, but the church as a whole should seek to keep unrepentant individuals from partaking in an unworthy manner.<sup>79</sup>

It would seem, then, that at least everything Paul writes to the church in 1 Corinthians is relevant for what he says in 11:28, “But let a man examine himself and in this way let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup.” Is it likely that Paul would limit the self-examination he calls for here to the specific actions addressed regarding the way the Corinthian church is abusing the Supper? No doubt those things are included—surely he means for the Corinthian Christians to examine their hearts to make sure they are trusting in the death of Christ as the definitive sacrifice to reconcile them to God. Surely he also means for them to measure themselves by the self-sacrificial behavior of Jesus—are they following Him in laying down their lives for others just as He did? But the burden of proof would seem to be on anyone who would suggest that Paul did not intend the Corinthian believers to examine themselves with reference to what he said about the gospel being wisdom to the mature but foolishness to the world (1:23; 2:6), about wood, hay, and stubble approaches to ministry (3:10–17), about sexual immorality, homosexuality, and prostitution (6:9–10,15), about proper marital relations (7:1–40), about building others up (10:23), and about appropriate behavior during Christian worship (11:3–16).

The gravity of these issues can be seen in 1 Cor 11:29, where Paul writes, “For the one who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body.” The risk of eating and drinking judgment to oneself would seem to commend a thoroughgoing self-examination, rather than a less rigorous approach to the Supper. The

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 241; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 201–2.

idea of corporate personality, whereby the one stands for the many and the many are represented in the one, informs the reference to “the body” in 11:29. No distinction should be drawn between the body of Jesus and the church.<sup>80</sup> Both are in view. The one who does not examine himself does not recognize the significance of Christ nor of the body of Christ.

In what he says next, Paul seems to apply the interpretive strategy he modeled in 1 Cor 10:1–13 to the situation of the Corinthians in 11:30: “On account of this many among you are weak and sick and a good number sleep.” This assertion is reminiscent of the reference to the bodies of the Israelites being “strewn in the wilderness” in 10:5. Like the Israelites, the Corinthians have been baptized—but with a greater baptism into Christ—and they are partaking of superior spiritual food and drink in the Lord's Supper. And like the Israelites, the Corinthians have engaged in idolatry and sexual immorality, and God is not pleased with them. Like the Israelites, unbelieving Corinthians who associated with the church but lacked genuine faith have experienced God's judgment.

Paul's comments in 1 Cor 11:31–32 continue in this vein: “But if we judge ourselves rightly, we would not be judged; but being judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we might not be condemned with the world.” When Paul refers to judging oneself rightly in 11:31, it would seem that he has in view a self-examination (11:28) that rightly discerns the body (11:27,29). This would include discerning that all members of the body of Christ, the church, are on equal footing before the cross, which would exclude the kind of favoritism that reflects relative worth or status by the standards of Roman Corinth. So the church in Corinth is no doubt called here to what Paul will make explicit in 11:33–34.

In addition to this, however, it seems that Paul's comments about celebrating the feast not with old leaven in 5:8 are relevant, and there he identifies “old leaven” as particular sins. Perhaps, then, Paul is calling the church in Corinth to judge whether or not they have sufficiently dealt with the leaven of sin in their lives before they partake of the Lord's Supper. If we ask whether this would ever mean

<sup>80</sup> In keeping with his Roman Catholicism, Fitzmyer prefers the view that “acknowledging the body would mean taking stock of oneself in order to eat the bread and drink of the cup worthily as ‘the body and blood of the Lord’” (*First Corinthians*, 446).

that a believer should abstain from partaking in the Lord's Supper, we might have a relevant example from an instance in Israel's history. In Numbers 9 there is an account of some who were unclean and could not keep the Passover at the appointed time, and the Lord directed Moses to have them celebrate the Passover one month later, when they were clean (Num 9:6–12). A NT analog to this may be found in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, when He instructed His disciples that if they are offering a gift at the altar and recognize that a brother has something against them, they should go and be reconciled and then come and offer the gift (Matt 5:23–24). Given the way that Paul has described sin in the life of the believer as "leaven" in the context of the celebration of the feast—the feast that celebrates the sacrifice of Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Cor 5:6–8)—perhaps a believer recognizing that he has the "old leaven" of sin that he must deal with should abstain. We can also say that the cleansing out of the old leaven that Paul describes in 1 Cor 5:7 is probably a call to repent of sin. Perhaps, then, abstention from partaking of the Lord's Supper should be limited either to a recognition that one is unrepentant on some point, or to a situation in which one must be reconciled to a brother—something that cannot be handled before the rest of the body partakes. This interpretation seems to be reflected in the *Didache*:

On the Lord's own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. But let no one who has a quarrel with a companion join you until they have been reconciled, so that your sacrifice may not be defiled (*Did* 14:1–2).<sup>81</sup>

In the context of the mention of those who have suffered the Lord's judgment in the form of weakness, sickness, and death (1 Cor 11:30), the way to avoid judgment in 1 Cor 11:31 is to judge oneself rightly. This seems to entail recognizing sin and repenting of it, or, if one is either unrepentant or unable to be reconciled with an offended brother,

<sup>81</sup> While this text is not authoritative, it does reflect the practice of at least one group within early Christianity. I am grateful for fruitful discussion of this passage with Prof. Michael Haykin. Cf. also Collins, "The Eucharist as Christian Sacrifice," 6: "The early Christians required that believers be at peace with one another before they partook of the Eucharist." Similarly I. H. Marshall, "The Last Supper," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Contexts & Coherence*, ed. D. L. Bock and R. L. Webb, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 522.

abstaining.<sup>82</sup> Fee writes, “One does not have to ‘get rid of the sin in one’s life’ in order to partake,”<sup>83</sup> but surely the proclamation of the Lord’s death in the elements and the call to examine oneself are an occasion to take stock of one’s life and repent of all known sin. Judging oneself in this way delivers one from the Lord’s judgment. Indeed, this is itself a form of judgment from the Lord, whose kindness leads to conviction and repentance (Rom 2:4), and this kind conviction unto repentance would seem to be what Paul means when he speaks of the Lord’s discipline in 1 Cor 11:32. Those who experience this discipline that provokes repentance avoid the condemnation that comes upon the unrepentant world.

### Receiving One Another

Having given general instructions on how to partake of the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner in 1 Cor 11:27–32, Paul addresses the specific abuses of the church in Corinth directly in 11:33–34: “As a result, my brothers, when coming together to eat, receive one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you might not come together for judgment. Now I will arrange the rest when I come.” Above I followed those who understand the verb *prolambanō* in 11:21 to mean *devours* rather than seeing a temporal nuance that would communicate *eating beforehand*. So also in 11:33, I follow those who take the verb *ekdechomai* to mean “receive one another” rather than “wait for one another.” As noted above, at least six items in 11:18–21 point to the problematic behavior in Corinth taking place with the whole church gathered rather than before some of the members of the church arrive, and “receive/welcome” is an established meaning of this verb (3 Macc 5:26; Josephus, *Ant.* 7.351).<sup>84</sup> In giving this instruction, Paul seems to be calling the “haves” to welcome the “have nots” into their company. Rather than perpetuating the socio-economic distinctions of Roman culture, the Corinthian church is to display the radically unified identity of the body of Christ at the Lord’s Supper. They are to proclaim in their actions that they are identified with one

<sup>82</sup> Similarly C. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 234–35.

<sup>83</sup> Fee, *First Corinthians*, 566–67.

<sup>84</sup> See Hofius, “The Lord’s Supper,” 93–94; Winter, “‘Private’ Dinners and Corinthian Divisiveness,” 151–52; Smith, “1 Corinthians,” 287–88 (Smith cites several other passages in Josephus: *Ant.* 11.340; 12.138; 13.104; 13.148; J.W. 2.297; 3.32); Hays, *First Corinthians*, 202–3; Fee, *First Corinthians*, 567–68, citing also Tebtunis Papyrus I.33 from MM and LSJ.



another by means of their common need for Christ and their union with Him by faith.

The interpretation of v. 34 has gone in at least two directions. Fitzmyer writes, "If hunger really becomes a problem, there is another way of handling it, apart from eating at the common gathering ahead of others. Consumption at home would eliminate solitary or private eating in a common setting."<sup>85</sup> Against this, however, it does not seem likely that Paul would suggest that the Corinthians have to follow Christ and concern themselves with others when they gather with the church, but when they are at home they can indulge their appetites.<sup>86</sup> No, Paul is telling them that if they want to act like unbelievers they should not gather with the believers because to do so is to "come together for judgment" (1 Cor 11:34). If they want to eat their own dinners rather than the Lord's Supper they should do so in their own homes (11:20–22), identifying themselves with pagan Rome rather than Christ and His kingdom. Reading the passage this way sees Paul's words in 11:34 as a refusal to tolerate selfishness and a call to repent of such behavior.<sup>87</sup> Those who do not identify themselves as being in need of Christ's sacrifice, as redeemed slaves mercied by God, should not gather because to do so only places them under judgment.

### *Implications for the Contemporary Church*

In 1 Cor 11:17–34 the selfishness of the members of the Corinthian church at the Lord's Supper is confronted with the gospel of Jesus' giving of Himself on behalf of others. Paul calls the Corinthians to proclaim this gospel and have their identity and behavior shaped by it. They are to know their bankruptcy before God, to feel mercied and redeemed, and they are to follow Christ by giving themselves for others. When they are thus identified and shaped by the gospel, their celebration of the Lord's Supper will be an identity-forming proclamation of the gospel. They will be proclaiming the Lord's death.

From what Paul says in 1 Cor 11:17–34, it seems that the church partook of the Lord's Supper when they "came together," and from

<sup>85</sup> Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 448. So also Fee, *First Corinthians*, 568: "If you want to satisfy your desire for the kinds of meals that the wealthy are accustomed to eat together, do that at home, but not in the context of the gathered assembly, where some 'have nothing' and are thereby humiliated (vv. 21–22)."

<sup>86</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 733.

<sup>87</sup> Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 555.

1 Cor 16:2, it seems that the Corinthian church “came together” on the first day of the week. When combined with a text like Acts 20:7, which indicates that Paul’s practice was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper with the church when it gathered for worship on the first day of the week, this seems to be the early church’s practice. It is not clear to me why churches that seek to model themselves by the pattern of church life and structure seen in the NT would not also partake of the Lord’s Supper on the first day of the week. If it is objected that this would diminish its significance, my reply is simply that those who make this argument typically do not claim that weekly observance diminishes the significance of the preaching of the Word, the prayers of God’s people, the singing of Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and I doubt they would be disappointed to have weekly baptisms! The same practices and attitudes that keep preaching, praying, singing, and baptizing from having their significance diminished could surely be applied to the weekly celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

In the Lord’s Supper, we are proclaiming the Lord’s death: heralding that Jesus died for our sins. The gospel has more power to humble than any other force in the world. It places all on equal footing before the cross. This humbling power of the gospel then enables us to proclaim the Lord’s death as we live out the self-inconveniencing love for others modeled by Jesus, even unto death.

Just as the kind of idolatry that Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to flee was normal behavior in the wider culture of Roman Corinth, so there are idolatrous behaviors in contemporary culture that are considered normal. Just as there was rampant immorality in Roman Corinth, so all manner of sexual deviancy is considered normal in our day. And just as the Corinthians exalted themselves by identifying with those they thought were superior, so there is no lack of hero-worship and super-star Christianity today, to say nothing of rampant materialism and vainglorious displays of economic privilege. There are no favorites at the Lord’s Table. The only cure for factionalism, immorality, idolatry, and favoritism, then as now, is the gospel. Christ covers our sins, transforms our identity and self-conception, and leaves us an example that we should follow in His steps (cf. 1 Pet 2:21–25).

As we come to the Table, we must examine ourselves. If the pendulum has swung too far in the direction of introspection in the past,

that is not our problem today. In our flippant culture we are not reflective enough. Self-examination, however, is not an end to itself. It should be spurred by our awareness of the behavior of Christ, which in turn should lead to repentance and celebration of the sufficiency of Christ's death. Self-examination should be prompted by our understanding of Christ's love, and it should then be swallowed up in our awareness of God's mercy to those of us who believe—for the things about ourselves of which we become aware in our examination are all nailed to the cross of Christ. Let us proclaim His death until He comes!<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> A previous version of this essay was presented at the national meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in November 2008. I wish to thank Professor Thomas R. Schreiner for his careful reading and stimulating interaction on this study.