

A Piece of the Loaf

A Biblical Model of the Assembly



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Part I. When you come together

The Last Supper. The very mentioning of this term puts images in our hearts and minds that may or may not match what actually happened in Scripture. So, what exactly happened? Let's dive into Scripture and ask that question. What we find might surprise, amaze, or even offend. But in order to be faithful to God's revelation in his Word, we really must ask, must we not?

- Chapter 1, “*Do this in remembrance of me*” — asks a simple question: What did Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him?

— explains...

1. “Do this in remembrance of me”

“Do this in remembrance of me.” For every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

--From 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

What did Jesus want us to do in remembrance of him? What are the implications of this for our understanding of the Body of Christ? In order to really understand this, we must first look at exactly what Jesus and the disciples did that last supper. Then we need to ask, “What did the early disciples understand Jesus to mean?”

The following outline describes what happened, and was produced simply by harmonizing what all of the Gospels and 1 Corinthians say about the Last Supper.

1.1. A harmony of the Last Supper

- Start of the meal (Mk 14:17; Matt 26:20; Luke 22:14)
 - Jesus predicts his betrayal (Mk 14:18; Matt 26:21)
 - Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you..." (Luke 22:14)
 - “Fruit of the Vine” shared: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18)
- During the meal (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26; 1Cor 11:23)
 - Jesus washes disciples' feet (John 13:1-17).
 - Bread broken; "This is my body which is broken for you" (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:17-18; 1 Cor 11:23-24); Jesus says: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-24)
- After the meal: Preparation for a time of teaching
 - “Fruit of the Vine” given to each individual AGAIN. "The cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood" (Matt 14:24-25; Mk 26:27-28; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:24)
 - "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-24)
- Jesus deals with the need for love in the Body
 - Jesus predicts his betrayal again! (Luke 22:21-38, Jn 13:18-30)
 - Disciples argue about who is greater (Luke 22:21-38)
 - Jesus predicts Peter's denial (Luke 22:21-38, John 13:31-38)
- Jesus leads a time of teaching and prayer
 - Vine/branches discourse (John 15 1-17)

- The World's hatred / promise of the Holy Spirit (John 15:18-16:18)
- Jesus tells about how he reveals the Father; overcomes the world (John 16:19-33)
- High priestly prayer (John 17)
- Jesus tells them to get money bag, traveling bag, cloak, swords (Luke 22:21-38)
- Conclusion of meeting:
 - Sang a hymn (Mk 14:26; Matt 26:30)
 - Depart for Mount of Olives (the mountain of the Holy Spirit—where olives are grown to be crushed.)

1.2. The Last Supper — A family meal

As we look at the outline above, a few things should immediately strike us:

- Broadly speaking, what we have is a picture or a description of a *family meal*, followed by a time of teaching by the *head of the house*.
- This happened on the occasion of a Passover meal, yet, none of the details of a Passover meal itself are described. The meal description itself is generic.
- From the perspective of the disciples, the time of teaching was *unplanned* and *spontaneous*.

When we look at this sequence of events a bit more closely, a few other things might strike us:

- At the beginning of the meal, Jesus invited the disciples to share the “fruit of the vine”, or in their culture, the wine.
- At the end of the meal, Jesus shared “fruit of the vine” *again*, immediately before he began the time of teaching.

Since wine is the sort of beverage that one sips, rather than guzzling down a glass all at once, the reasonable expectation is that Jesus had them share the wine at the beginning of the meal, they sipped it throughout, and then he offered them a refill, as it were, to begin the time of teaching.

But Jesus didn't stop there, the second time he divided the wine, Jesus did two things:

- He identified the wine with the new covenant in his own blood.
- Just as he had with the bread, he commanded the disciples to “Do this in remembrance of me.”

What did Jesus want the believers to do in remembrance of him? The wine had been shared throughout a full meal. Was that the context that Jesus intended or was he simply referring to the elements of the bread and the wine when he told us to “Do this in remembrance of me”?

The easiest way to answer this question is to ask how the disciples themselves understood Jesus. We are separated from him by around 2000 years, by language, by culture, etc. But the disciples and early apostles had none of these impediments. Let's start by looking at Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

1.3. Comparison to Paul's description of a church meeting

In Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, Paul is addressing various problems in the Corinthian church, and as a result, describes how he wanted their meeting to be run. To begin, let's outline the topics that Paul covers when he discusses what to do “When you come together” in 1 Corinthians 11-14:

Table 1.1. The Love Feast in 1 Corinthians

| 1 Corinthians | The Last Supper |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Lord's Supper as a full meal • The problem: Some over-ate and got drunk before their brothers even arrived (11:17-22) • Reminder of how Jesus instituted the meal (11:23-26) • Discerning the Lord's Body is part of healthy spiritual life (11:27-32) • Conclusion: If you're that hungry, eat a bit before you come to the Supper (11:33-34) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start of the meal (Mk 14:17; Matt 26:20; Luke 22:14) • Jesus predicts his betrayal (Mk 14:18; Matt 26:21) • Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you..." (Luke 22:14) • “Fruit of the Vine” shared: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the Kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:17-18) • During the meal (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26; 1Cor 11:23) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus washes disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). • Bread broken; "This is my body which is broken for you" (Mk 14:22-24; Matt 26:26-29; Luke 22:17-18; 1 Cor 11:23-24); Jesus says: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-24) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spiritual Gifts connect the Head to the individual Members of the Body • Introduction: What lifts Jesus up as Lord is from the Holy Spirit (12:1-3) • The gifts are given to individuals for the benefit of all (12:4-7) • Different manifestations of the same Holy Spirit in different people (12:8-11) • We are different members of the same Body (12:12-31) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After the meal: Preparation for a time of teaching • “Fruit of the Vine” given to each individual AGAIN. "The cup that is poured out is the new covenant in my blood" (Matt 14:24-25; Mk 26:27-28; Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:24) (Wine given to each individual is a picture of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit because the wine is a symbol of the blood, and speaking spiritually, our life is the Holy Spirit, the blood of Jesus flowing through the Body of Christ.) • "Do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:23-24) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus deals with the need for love in the Body |

| 1 Corinthians | The Last Supper |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gifts without love are just lifeless noise (13:1-7) • Gifts will cease when we see Jesus face to face but love never ends (13:8-13) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus predicts his betrayal again! (Luke 22:21-38, Jn 13:18-30) • Disciples argue about who is greater (Luke 22:21-38) • Jesus predicts Peter's denial (Luke 22:21-38, John 13:31-38) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When you come together, spiritual gifts enable Jesus to lead His Body • Prefer to edify others when seeking tongues versus prophesy (14:1-19) • The use of tongues and prophesy in evangelism (14:20-25) • The order of service in an early church meeting (14:26-33a) • Women should remain under authority in the church (14:33b-36) • This teaching is the Lord's command (14:37-38) • Summary on tongues / prophesy / orderliness (14:39-40) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesus leads a time of teaching and prayer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vine/branches discourse (John 15 1-17) • The World's hatred / promise of the Holy Spirit (John 15:18-16:18) • Jesus tells about how he reveals the Father; overcomes the world (John 16:19-33) • High priestly prayer (John 17) • Jesus tells them to get money bag, traveling bag, cloak, swords (Luke 22:21-38) |

When we line up the topics covered by Paul next to those covered by Jesus during the Last Supper, one thing immediately jumps out at us: With the exception of the subject matter of Jesus's final address, they used the *exact same structure*. And regarding the subject matter of the teaching, Jesus had an actual teaching to give the disciples, but Paul was more concerned with telling the Corinthian church how to have a meeting where Jesus could continue to speak to his Body as directly as he had during the Last Supper.

Is this a coincidence?

This servant of the Lord finds it hard to believe that this is a coincidence. It seems that Paul intentionally followed the form that Jesus had initiated when he had said, “*do this in remembrance of me.*” And if that weren't enough, Paul ends his discourse with the following:

14:37 If anyone considers himself a prophet or spiritual person, he should acknowledge that what I write to you is the Lord's command. 14:38 If someone does not recognize this, he is not recognized. (NET)

1.4. Conclusion

Jesus had a full meal with the disciples during which he shared the bread and fruit of the vine. Paul told the Corinthians how to hold a full meal in honor of Jesus that includes sharing the bread and the fruit of the vine.

After supper, Jesus poured each disciple a second helping of the fruit of the vine, forshadowing the gifts of the Holy Spirit enabling each disciple to hear him individually. Then he gave a teaching to the entire body of disciples. Similarly, Paul described how Jesus, through the gifts of the Holy Spirit operating in love, desires to speak through each individual in a particular way, so that when put together, the entire Body would be able to hear and understand Jesus teaching them.

These two things were the essential ingredients for Jesus. And they were the essential ingredients for Paul. For Jesus, having these things was *both necessary and also sufficient*. The same was true for Paul.

Is it true for us?