

# The Lord's Supper:

## Part of a meal or after a meal?

I have friends involved in bringing Biblical teaching regarding the church to believers who have never had it modelled to them. Few have seen true house-churches operating under apostolic guidelines that glorify God. Part of meeting together is the sharing of a meal and serving one another in it. This leads on naturally to breaking bread. However, my friends believe that the Supper is part and parcel of this family feast with little distinction given to the memorial. I believe this to be wrong. I believe that there is clear evidence that there is a demarcation line between the communal meal and the Supper. This is to ensure sufficient reverence is given to breaking bread and that there is ample opportunity for prayer and worship as the Lord leads. This paper seeks to examine the evidence for this.

### The meal

Since my friends have made an apologetic for the communal meal<sup>1</sup> (and I have written on it several times also) there is no need to give a lengthy exposition here. Paul clearly sets the Supper within the framework of a meal in 1 Cor 11 and the Lord instituted the memorial after the paschal supper, which was a feast. Early Christian writings mention this several times calling it the *agape* (pl. *agapai*), or 'love feast' (2 Pt 2:13; Jude 12). It was a time when the rich could perform genuine fellowship by helping the poor at the outset of the meeting of the gathered church.

It was natural for the Corinthians to do this, as there were many Greek guilds, fraternities and clubs established for various reasons, often to serve a false god. The religious clubs had a communal festive meal as a central feature, and this meal would often lead to excesses of drunkenness and greed, while some groups abandoned themselves to debauchery. Therefore it was natural to practice a communal meal as part of religious services – but the view that this festive meal was the service itself derives from ancient occult practice.

This is why Paul very clearly establishes a strong and obvious demarcation line in 1 Corinthians 11 between the communal meal (where he condemns its abuses) and the practice and theology of the Lord's Supper. There is no divine command to practice the meal but there is an imperative to celebrate the Lord's Supper consisting of bread and wine. We do not sin if we avoid the meal but do sin if we fail to properly honour Christ in the Supper by focusing upon him alone.

Because the communal meal (*agape*) became so prone to abuses, it was gradually abandoned amongst the early churches. As a result of scandals in the practice of the love-feast, the Councils of Laodicea (c. 320) and Carthage (397) prohibited them. Later councils renewed this prohibition such as Orleans (541) and Trullo (692) and Aix-la-Chapelle (816). In history it has been occasionally adopted in some groups (such as the Dunkers,<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Ekklesia, To the roots of Biblical church life*; Steve Atkerson ed. NTRF.

<sup>2</sup> An ascetic, asexual, non-violent, contemplative group originating in 1724, who dressed like Dominican monks, and settled in the countryside near Philadelphia. They immersed their followers. Men did shave head or beard while men and women had separate dwellings, worship and government. They were vegetarians, except at love-feasts when they ate mutton. They taught works righteousness and denied an eternal hell. Their church practice was similar to English Baptists, although they allowed participation by members.

Moravians<sup>3</sup> and Sandemanians<sup>4</sup> and the Eastern Orthodox Greek Church), however many of these have later fallen into error. It is good to have a communal meal if this serves the body in an edifying way and if it leads folk to celebrate the Supper with reverence after the meal. However, if it leads to abuses then it ought to be left off. It is my view that mingling the Lord's Supper in a communal meal and calling the whole feast 'the Lord's Supper, where people are socialising and chatting, is such an abuse.

There are very serious warnings about abusing the Supper in 1 Cor 11, and these should make us very wary of making any mistakes. The biggest mistake is to fail to concentrate upon Christ with reverence and thanks. This mistake is committed when the meal is said to be the Supper.

## The Lord Supper is after the communal meal

### The apostolic command

The most clear scripture is this:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.' (1 Cor 11:23-25)

The key words are: 'In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper.' This is plain and simple; it was after the communal meal that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.

The KJV reads, 'when he had supped'. Young's Literal is closer to the Greek and reads, 'after the supping'. The actual Greek text is *meta. to. deipnh/sai* which is transliterated as: *meta to deipnesai*, and means literally: 'after the dining'.

Now everything hangs on what *meta* can mean. Like many Greek prepositions it does have a range of meanings: 'with', 'among', 'together with', 'of close association', 'to be on the side of', 'to stand by', 'help', 'against', 'by means of', 'after', 'behind', 'beyond'. The grammatical context secures the actual meaning. The Greek scholar AT Robertson states this.

After supper (*meta to deipnh/sai*). *Meta* and the articular aorist active infinitive, 'after the dining' (or the supping) as in Lk 22:20. [*Robertson's Word Pictures*, in. loc.]

The grammatical context secures the meaning as 'after' and not 'together with'.

In his notes on 1 Corinthians 11, the eminent commentator Albert Barnes says this,

*When he had supped* - That is, all this occurred after the observance of the usual paschal supper. It could not, therefore, be a part of it, nor could it have been

<sup>3</sup> The Moravians were the resurgence of the Bohemian Brethren after the Thirty Years War when refugees found safety with Count von Zinzendorf in Saxony (1722). They established their own church on Pietist principles in 1724. They were a strong missionary movement and John Wesley's conversion was through a Moravian missionary. Their concept of church is thoroughly misguided, often being a 'church within a church', such as a separate group operating within Lutheran or Anglican churches. Their Gospel was Arminian, tending towards universal ideas (which is why they were at home in Lutheranism) and the formal theological stance was the Lutheranism of the Augsburg Confession; but great latitude was allowed for members.

<sup>4</sup> Followers of John Glass and his son-in-law Robert Sandeman (1718-1771). They had many heretical ideas, chief of which was that faith is not a divine gift but merely intellectual; thus they were mistaken on justifying faith and assurance. They avoided all forms of emotionalism or appeals for repentance in evangelism and denied the need for conviction of sin. They were cold, dour people.

designed to be a festival or feast merely. The apostle introduces this evidently in order to show them that it could not be, as they seemed to have supposed, an occasion of feasting. It was after the supper, and was therefore to be observed in a distinct manner.

See also Jamieson Fausset and Brown's commentary (quoting JA Bengel's *NT Word Studies*),

*1Co 11:25 - when he had supped*--Greek, 'after the eating of supper,' namely, the Passover supper which preceded the Lord's Supper, as the love-feast did subsequently. Therefore, you Corinthians ought to separate common meals from the Lord's Supper [BENGEL].

### **The example set by Christ himself**

And He took bread, gave thanks and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' Likewise He also *took* the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup *is* the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.' (Lk 22:19-20)

The Greek construction here is identical to that used by Paul, *meta. to. deipnh/sai*, or *meta to deipnesai* and means the same thing.

It is important to note this separation from the Passover meal since one represented the Old Covenant and the other established the New; there was no mixing up of the two. Jesus established a new order in his blood, typified by the wine, and this was the fulfilment of what the Passover merely pointed towards. There was a distinction between the Old Covenant communal meal and the establishment of the Lord's Supper.

*After supper:* Only Luke records this detail. It is added to mark the distinction between the Lord's Supper and the ordinary meal.

M R Vincent, *Word Studies in the NT*.

### **The problem of Matt 26:26-28**

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.' [Mark 14 follows Matthew.]

Here Matthew seems to contradict both Luke and Paul by saying, 'as they were eating'. However, this is not a great difficulty, but merely the way Matthew has summarised the events; this happens frequently in the Gospels. Also, since his purpose is mainly to address Jews, he is trying to emphasise the Supper within the context of the Passover. In the same way if we were describing a Christmas meal we might say, 'As we were having dinner we pulled the crackers'. Now it is not normal to pull Christmas crackers while eating food. The crackers are pulled when the meal is finished and the plates removed so there is room for bits of paper, presents, jokes and exploding tapers. It is just a colloquialism to say, 'as we were having dinner'.

Another point is that Jesus blessed the bread before breaking it. It is inconceivable that while Jesus was praying that the disciples were eating food.

All commentators are agreed that the Supper was instituted at the close of the Passover when people were finishing eating their food. At the time when the house-father would have gone on to the next stage of the ceremony, the eating of the last morsel of lamb and

thus stopping all further eating, instead Jesus did something new (e.g. see RCH Lenski, *Interpretation of Luke*). He stopped the proceedings and established the Supper.

We must give some weight to what actually occurred at this moment. The disciples must have been astonished. Here Jesus, in the midst of the most important Jewish festival of the year, stops the proceedings and declares that he is instituting the New Covenant, which is to be symbolised by bread and wine representing his body and blood. As faithful Jews they were either shocked that the Son of God was cancelling the Old Covenant at that moment, or if they had read and understood Jeremiah, was declaring that he was the fulfilment of the promised New Covenant, long awaited but little understood. Either way, this was a sudden sea-change from eating a religious feast to a massive change in salvation history. There is a strong demarcation line between the Passover feast and what Jesus instituted. The idea that there was a nonchalant establishment of the momentous ordinance of the Supper in the midst of general eating is ridiculous.

Finally note verse 30, 'And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.' Right after Matthew quotes the Lord's words about the bread, wine and the kingdom, he states that they went out after singing a hymn. There was no continuation of the feast, it had ended. Thus the bread and wine occurred after the dining not in the middle of it.

There is no Biblical support for the idea of eating the Supper within the context of eating other food.

### **The historical practice**

Though this is of less weight, it is worth noting that for 2,000 years the evangelical church of all stripes has made a feature of celebrating the Supper as a distinct ritual separated from a meal and other aspects of the liturgy. It is true that most churches have missed the point of the communal meal, being set in formal liturgies and not in homes. However, some European church traditions were set in homes for many centuries, and included communal meals. Even so, the Lord's Supper was a distinct part of the meeting. This tradition came down from apostolic practice.

### **Practical common sense**

If a house church has a number of young children present, it clearly makes sense to move to a different room or remove cutlery, plates and remaining food to minimise distractions and for due consideration of safety. If there is to be a distinct time of concentrating upon the Lord's death in quietness and worship, it is wise to ensure that the children are away from knives, forks and glass, and not able to mischievously pick at remaining food. It is most unwise to try to properly perform the Lord's Supper in the context of the dregs of a party.

### **The unity of the bread and wine**

Some interpret the 1 Cor 11 and Lukan passages as implying that there was a gap between the bread, taken during the feast and the wine taken later. This is merely the shorthand way that Paul, quoting Luke, has written; 'after supper' refers to both the bread and wine. Theologically the bread and wine must occur together, as intended by the Lord; it makes no sense for them to be separated. Furthermore the narratives in Matthew and Mark clearly show that they were united and not separated.

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.' (Matt 26:26-27)

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke *it*, and gave *it* to them and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it. (Mk 14:22-23)

The bread and wine are to be taken together as a unit.

### **Context**

The Lord's Supper is set within the general context of a communal meal, as my friends ardently point out, but not within the confines of eating this meal. The Supper occurs at the end of the eating as a distinct event, symbolising a celebration of the New Covenant in Christ's blood.

In the Ancient Near East the custom was to recline for meals where food was on low tables. Fingers would be used to handle food and it was common for people to pass food to others, as Jesus did for Judas. In this relaxed setting it was easy to cease eating and worship God for his provision in Christ. This is far removed from the modern situation of sitting at formal tables, back straight, using cutlery with good etiquette. Worshipping at a formal table is not easy or helpful. The modern situation is far removed from what Jesus experienced.

The situation described by my Biblical colleague Steve Atkerson in *Ekklesia*, is even further removed from a setting where worship is encouraged, where he describes people sewing, chatting, kids running around playing and people standing with plates and cups as at a party. The bread and wine are just eaten as with anything else. Such a setting is fine for the communal meal, but there needs to be a distinction from this and the Supper. Even the original Supper was set within the context of a special religious celebration, not a secular feast.

It is crucial that there should be quiet, an opportunity for silent worship, prayer, and exhortations, and thus there needs to be a removing from the party atmosphere or the formal dining table. The Lord's Supper is not the communal feast but the bread and wine; this is why the phrase 'breaking bread' became a synonym for the Supper (Acts 2:42, 46, 20:7).

[As an aside, the Greek word for 'Supper' designates an evening meal and thus it comes naturally after a communal afternoon meal. The early church usually met in the evening, or later, when slaves had some spare time. Celebrating the Supper early in the morning does not comply with this background.]

### **A short exposition of 1 Cor 11: 21ff.**

1. Paul distinguishes between the 'Lord's Supper' and 'his (anyone's) own supper' (v21). The latter refers to the person sharing the communal meal. In this case it is a condemnation of rushing in to eat his fill before others in a greedy manner. The sin was that some were left hungry while others were replete. However, the point here is that Paul separates the personal supper (communal meal) from the Lord's Supper.
2. Paul then isolates what is central in the Lord's Supper; he itemises the bread and wine and explains their theological significance (v23ff).
3. He isolates two of Jesus' Messianic actions in the Last Supper as constituting our memorial ritual – bread and wine. He mentions nothing of a communal meal having any sacramental significance at all.
4. He isolates Jesus' commands to his church – take bread (v24) and drink wine (v25). Nothing is commanded regarding a meal with other food.
5. He only says 'do this in remembrance of me' regarding bread and wine. We will still be obeying Jesus if we never have a communal meal in church meetings.

6. He says that only two ritual things proclaim the Lord's death – bread and wine (v26).
7. He says that there is only a penalty for dishonouring Christ if we abuse the bread and wine, not if we abuse a communal meal (v27-29). Note especially verse 27, 'whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.' Guilt arises from abusing these elements, not eating a social meal wrongly.
8. There is a difference between, 'Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper' (v20) and, 'when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry' ... (v33). The Corinthians were focused on eating a meal and selfishly being greedy instead of being centred upon coming together to eat the Lord's Supper. (In fact they were partisan as well; the rich shunned the simple food of the poor and rushed to eat their own expensive delicacies, which they could have eaten at home.) When we eat a communal meal, we should do so with good manners and love - helping the poor and hungry; this is a good preparation for the Supper. But the reason for our coming together at all is to eat the Lord's Supper. This is indeed a meal but of bread and wine (supper = literally, 'evening meal' [*deipnon*]); but it is also a sacrament – a material symbol of divine grace. The communal meal is not a sacrament.

I believe that this passage shows us clearly that making the meal a focus of church life is dishonouring the Lord as it takes attention off the cross and worship, and results in condemnation. It focuses upon man instead of God. Anyone who makes the meal to be the Lord's Supper itself and demands that a communal meal is a vital part of church life is cultic; it is establishing an idea of man as having priority over God's clear teaching in scripture.

### Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is just that – it is a symbolic, memorial feast of bread and wine, instituted by the Lord himself to be celebrated in the way he stipulated that is totally distinct from a human supper. It is set within the confines of worship, not of feasting, since it is a reminder and proclamation of his death until he returns (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:26). It requires reverent thoughtfulness not relaxed partying. Believers should separate from the previous communal eating and gather in reverence to give thanks for the sacrifice of Christ pictured in the bread and wine.

A final thought regards the seriousness of this matter. 1 Cor 11:27 and 29 say this,  
**Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.**

In my view it is utterly unworthy to celebrate the Lord's Supper within the confines of a feast, banquet or a dinner party. It fails to take into account the seriousness of the matter in hand, which concerns the symbolism of the establishment of the New Covenant, based upon Christ's death. Quiet, reverent worship and feasting are not good bedfellows.

Failing to discern the Lord's body also has reference to unity and coming to the table in honesty and without hypocrisy. Problems between members must be ironed out before taking part or there will be disciplinary judgment. However, that is not the only thing Paul has in mind. His chief concern earlier was the wrong eating and drinking in a party style (v21). Thus partaking in the Supper in a context of feasting is not suitable at all. We do not have God's sanction to include the Supper within general feast or banquet. It is a vital feature of Christian worship that has its own focus completely separate to a communal meal. We must eat the bread and drink the wine in a worthy manner.

The Lord Supper is AFTER the dining.

Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version*  
© Thomas Nelson 1982

**Paul Fahy Copyright © 2008**  
**Understanding Ministries**

Contact

[understandingministries@yahoo.com](mailto:understandingministries@yahoo.com)

## Appendix One

# Some responses to actual questions

### **Are you demanding an end to a communal meal or a thorough separation of a meal from the Lord's Supper?**

I am not insisting on a complete separation between a communal meal and the Supper, but on a disjunction between the socialising that is part of the meal and the worship/prayer/thanksgiving that is the constituent of the Supper. There should also be a separation of the bread and wine instead of it being on the same plate and eaten with other food (as per the practice of some).

### **Why focus so much on what Paul says instead of Matthew?**

- It is important to be clear on something. In establishing practice we must follow the Lord's final words to the church – that is apostolic teaching. He sent the Holy Spirit to guide the inspired apostles to give us his final words and this is the touchstone of authority.
- Also, didactic apostolic teaching is more authoritative than historical narrative; we do not use narrative to formulate doctrine and practice without didactic corroboration.
- Furthermore, Paul's testimony is much nearer to the cross than the Gospel accounts and he tells us that it came by direct revelation from the Lord. 1 Cor 11 is thus the most important scripture in this matter – it regulates all others.
- Consequently, what Paul tells us in 1 Cor 11 is definitive, and this focuses upon the bread and wine as a separate entity. You have to struggle to find any details or emphasis on a meal that is positive.

### **Are you not diminishing the precedent of the Passover meal?**

- It is a mistake to follow the Passover meal (with its constituents) as a precedent for the Lord's Supper, as some do. We are not continuing what went on there at all but following the new instruction Jesus gave as Messiah – the establishment of the bread and wine as symbolic of the New Covenant in his blood. If we followed everything from the Last Supper, we would also be having lamb and bitter herbs. The details of the Last Supper are the background to the introduction of the Lord's Supper, but are not the precedent.

### **Surely the Passover, Supper and wedding banquet are all meals?**

- Some make much about the fact that Passover was a meal, the final wedding banquet is a meal (can they even be sure of that or is even that symbolic?) therefore the Lord's Supper is also a meal. Even the word 'supper' means a meal. There are some mistakes here. This makes the Passover meal a type of a symbol. What folly is that? The Passover (inc. the transitional Last Supper) was a type of the cross and substitutionary atonement which was fulfilled at Golgotha. The types end in Christ, they point to and are completed in Jesus, they are a shadow of Christ not a shadow of a thing or ritual. The final wedding banquet is surrounded in symbolism and we must be careful what we say; there is little we can make definitive statements on to be read backwards to today. The Lord's Supper is a symbol given to the church as a constant aide memoir – to remind the church all the time about the cross. The Passover does not point to the Lord's Supper but to Christ. [In the same way circumcision (type) does not point to



baptism (symbol) but to the cutting away of the old nature and the evil Adamic heart at conversion. In this I disagree with Covenant theologians.]

- A valid, but secondary point, is that if those who state that the Supper = the communal meal are right then the church has got this completely wrong for 2,000 years. Where was God's sovereignty in guiding the church into truth on such a vital issue as this if this is true? It cannot be true. Some may say that, 'Well the church has got it wrong for 2,000 years on meeting in homes informally; it therefore could have got the Supper wrong also'. This is a mistake. Throughout history there has been a continual testimony of groups meeting in homes informally. Some of these groups had names (Cathari, Paulicans, Albigenses, United Brethren, Waldensians, Plymouth Brethren – and yes some went astray) but many others were ignored by formal church history. Even the great Puritan theologian John Owen planted two home churches, which he pastored, though he also ministered in established independent churches. At various times huge numbers met in homes or the countryside, e.g. in Scotland in the killing times.

### **What was the point of the *agape* feast?**

In the early church the communal meal (*agape* / *agapai*) was a practical illustration of mutual edification and an opportunity for the rich to bless the very poor with a good meal one day a week (Paul alludes to this being abused in 1 Cor 11). The focus of such poor folk would not have been worship but satisfying their hunger. Though not conducive to reverence at all, it was a good thing. The rich needed not to feast (which they could afford to do at home anyway) but to share. The priority here was fellowship. The priority in the Lord's Supper is Christ – remembering the cross, thanksgiving, worship, prayer and expectation of the future kingdom. The disciples ate together and fellowshiped during the meal and only afterwards celebrated the Supper by focusing only on the Lord, not each other.

### **Could not the Supper be taken during the communal meal as a separate item?**

Surely the Lord's Supper, though disjoined from any communal meal, does not have to be at a separate table. It could equally well be by means of calling everyone around the table to a time of special focus on the Lord in the middle of the meal.

The matter of tables is unimportant. The Lord's Supper could be shared round a table while the communal meal could be like a picnic on the floor. The setting is incidental and we have no precise instructions. However, the Lord's Supper is a specific event where all the focus is upon Christ and his work. The impression given by Paul is that this was after a communal meal, and this is also borne out by the Gospels (read correctly). It would thus be inappropriate to celebrate the Supper in the middle of a communal meal, only for that meal to continue afterwards. It is far more logical that edifying ministry should follow the Supper. Furthermore, try stopping young hungry children halfway through eating to be quiet and reverent!

**From 1 Cor 11 24-25 does it not follow the biblical pattern to have a time of focus on the Lord in the taking of the bread *during* the meal and a time of focus on the Lord in the taking of the wine *after* the meal. 'While they were eating, Jesus took bread and blessed it.' (Matt. 26:26) 'In the same manner He also took the *cup*, after supper.' (1 Cor 11:25) N.B. 1 Cor 11:24 does NOT say that He took the *bread* after supper.**

The distancing of the bread from the wine is addressed in the content of this paper; see there. No Biblical commentator in history endorses this separation. No church has practised a separation except the Roman Church.

### **Paul's account of the Supper is secondary to the Gospel accounts**

Matthew's gospel *is* apostolic writing. Matthew was one of the apostles and he was inspired by the Holy Spirit to write his gospel as his contribution to apostolic teaching. In 1 Cor 11, Paul refers, by implication, to the oral accounts of the apostles who were present at the institution of the Lord's Supper. In this sense, his account is secondary but, of course, it still carries the weight of apostolic authority. I am sure that Paul did not listen only to the Lord, but also to the other apostles. Certainly his teaching is inspired by God but Paul does not claim that the whole corpus of his teaching was received directly from God. Paul's description of the "current practice of the Supper" includes references back to its institution at the Last Supper. Therefore his account (of the Last Supper) is secondary - because it refers back to the institution event, I presume, described to him by the other apostles.

Matthew was an apostle but his Gospel is not apostolic teaching. He wrote as a historian compiling oral and written records from other sources added to his own knowledge. Paul's teaching is not secondary by any means because he received it directly from the Lord. When God wanted the church to have instruction on the Supper, Jesus revealed it directly to Paul who wrote with God's authority on this specific issue before any Gospel was written. Also the Gospels were not addressing the current practice of the Supper (which by then was established anyway) but recording the details of the Last Supper without any comment.

Furthermore:

1. Paul does claim that his teaching was direct from God e.g. 'I command, yet not I but the Lord' (1 Cor 7:10). When Peter called Paul's letters scripture (2 Pt 3:15) this means that Paul received his teaching from God, which even Peter found hard to understand in parts (2 Pt 3:16). Paul's Gospel did not come via Peter or anyone else.
2. Occasionally Paul adds something which he says is from his own wisdom (which the Spirit adopts as scripture anyway – so it was from God) e.g. 1 Cor 7:12.
3. Note: 'But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.' (Gal 1:15-19) Paul's teaching and theology was divinely revealed to him.
4. After 14 years of ministry Paul took his Gospel and theology to the apostles James, Peter and John afterwards who recognised his authority. He did not glean it from them. 'Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem ... and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.' (Gal 2:1, 9).
5. We don't know if Paul ever knew Matthew and he was probably dead before Matthew's Gospel was written.
6. Note 1 Cor 11:23: '**For I received from the Lord** that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ...' The basis of Paul's instruction on the Supper results directly from revelation and establishes its divine authenticity. This is a key point! Paul received this instruction from God before the Gospels were written. 1 Corinthians is an early letter of Paul (about 55 AD) and this would have been the most important instruction on church practice in the early days. The later Gospels backed it up and Luke's was written with Paul's words in mind under Paul's guidance. There is nothing secondary about this at all.
7. In laying down the precedent there is no separation between the bread and the wine.

If we want to be right about the Supper, we must focus on 1 Cor 11.

**Summary of problems with equating the Supper with a meal**

In short it is sin because:

- a) It isn't Biblical.
- b) It ruins the symbolism of the Supper, taking it from being centred on atonement to looking forward to a heavenly party.
- c) It is not reverent to God.
- d) It is not conducive to decency and order.
- e) It takes attention away from Christ and dishonours him.
- f) It sets a terrible example for children to follow (worship is superficial).
- g) It follows the practice of certain heretical cults (like the Dunkers) and has no historic provenance. There was a good reason why the early church stopped having *agapai* – they led to disorder.

Any practice that is not based on scripture will lead not only into deception but further deceit over time.

**Final conclusion**

The meal is not the Supper.

## Appendix Two

# The testimony of eminent Biblical scholars

### Jamieson Fausset and Brown

On 1 Cor 11:20

The love-feast usually preceded the Lord's Supper (as eating the Passover came before the Lord's Supper at the first institution of the latter). It was a club-feast, where each brought his portion, and the rich, extra portions for the poor; from it the bread and wine were taken for the Eucharist.

### Matthew Henry

On 1 Cor 11:17-22

Their *Agapai*, or *love-feasts* ... were annexed to the supper.

### John Gill

On 1 Cor 11:20

Now there being a great deal of good eating and drinking in this ante-supper, many of them came together for no other end but to partake of that, at least this was their chief view, and not the Lord's supper; or when they did meet together on this account, it was in such an irregular and disorderly manner, and **they confounded these suppers together**, and behaved so ill at them, and ate the Lord's supper so unworthily, that it could not be rightly called eating of it; or when they had eaten their ante-supper in such an indecent way, neither staying for one another, nor keeping within the bounds of temperance and sobriety; at least having indulged their carnal appetites to such a degree, and raised themselves to such a pitch of gaiety and cheerfulness; it was not fit for them to eat the Lord's supper, **to go from such a full meal to the table of the Lord**. This was called the Lord's supper, because he was the author of it; and he is the subject of it; and for him, the remembrance of him, it is appointed, kept up, and continued. [Emph. PF]

### Adam Clarke

On 1 Cor 11:20

**This is not to eat the Lord's Supper** - They did not come together to eat the Lord's Supper exclusively, which they should have done, and not have made it a part of an ordinary meal.

On 1 Cor 11:21

**Every one taketh before - his own supper** - They had a grand feast, though the different sects kept in parties by themselves; but all took as ample a supper as they could provide, (each bringing his own provisions with him), before they took what was called the Lord's Supper.

### Albert Barnes

On 1 Cor 11:20

**The Lord's supper** - That which the Lord Jesus instituted to commemorate his death. It is called "the Lord's," because it is his appointment, and is in honour of him; it is called "supper" (*δεῖπνον deipnon*), because the word denotes the evening repast; it was instituted in the evening; and it is evidently most proper that it should be observed in the after part of the day. With most churches the time is improperly changed to the morning - a custom which has no sanction in the New Testament; and which is a departure from the very idea of a supper.

On 1 Cor 11:21

They had not only erred, therefore, by misunderstanding altogether the nature of the Lord's supper, and by supposing that it was a common festival (i.e. communal meal PF) like those which they had been accustomed to celebrate.

### The People's New Testament

On 1 Cor 11:20

**For every one partaketh before others his own supper.** It was customary in Corinth to eat a meal together as did Christ and his disciples the night of the Lord's supper. After this came the Lord's supper.

### Vincent's Word Studies

On 1 Cor 11:20

The Eucharist proper was originally celebrated as a private expression of devotion, and in connection with a common, daily meal, an *agape* or *love-feast*. ... The social and festive character of the meal grew largely out of the gentile institution of clubs or fraternities, ... which expressed and fostered the spirit of good-fellowship by common festive meals, ... The communion-meal of the first and second centuries exhibited this character in being a feast of contribution, to which each brought his own provision.

On 1 Cor 11:25

After supper

Only Luke records this detail. It is added to mark the distinction between the Lord's Supper and the ordinary meal.

### Robertson's Word Pictures

On 1 Cor 11:20

It is possible that here the term applies both to the *Agape* or Love-feast (a sort of church supper or club supper held in connection with, before or after, the Lord's Supper) and the Eucharist or Lord's Supper.

On 1 Cor 11:20

It was conduct like this that led to the complete separation between the Love-feast and the Lord's Supper. It was not even a common meal together (*Koinéon deipnon*), not to say a Lord's *deipnon*. It was a mere grab-game.

### Charles Hodge

On 1 Cor 11:17-34

It was, however, the early custom to connect the Lord's supper in the strict sense of the words with an ordinary meal. As this sacrament was instituted by our Lord at the close of the Paschal supper, so it appears to have been customary at the beginning for the Christians to assemble for a common meal and to connect with it the commemoration of the Redeemer's death. ... it is clear from the paragraph before us that at Corinth at least, the sacrament of the Lord's supper was connected with a regular meal. This may have arisen, not so much from the original institution of the Eucharist in connection with the Paschal supper, as from the sacred festivals both of the Jews and Greeks. Both classes had been accustomed to unite with their sacrifices a feast of a more or less public character. It is also evident that, agreeably to a familiar Grecian custom, the persons assembled brought their own provisions, which being placed on the table formed a common stock. The rich brought plentifully, the poor brought little or nothing.

The evil to which he referred was not merely that **they had degraded the Lord's supper into an ordinary meal**, but that in that meal they were divided into parties, some eating and drinking to excess, and others left without any thing, vs. 20, 21. **This was not only making the Lord's supper a meal for satisfying hunger — contrary to its original design**, but a cruel perversion of a feast of love into a means of humiliating and wounding their poorer brethren, v. 22. ... From this account it follows, first, that **the Lord's supper was designed not as an ordinary meal**, but as a commemoration of the death of Christ. [Emph. PF]

**Ellicott's Bible Commentary** (Charles John Ellicott)

On 1 Cor 11:20

The whole meal, the agape or 'charity feast' (Jude 12), was distinguished from other meals by being united to the Lord's Supper. To these charity feasts the Christians brought contributions of food – the rich of their abundance, the poor whatever they could afford – and the food thus provided was partaken of in common by all.

On 1 Cor 11:20

Here follows a description of the conduct and mode of proceeding at this feast, which **renders it impossible (verse 20) for it to be the Lord's Supper.**

**FL Godet on 1 Corinthians**

On 1 Cor 11:20-34

This rite was preceded by a feast in common, called *deipnon*, supper, a term from which it follows that the celebration took place in the evening.... These feasts, of which the Holy Supper formed the close, were called *agape*, that is to say, love-feasts (Jude ver. 12). ... These agapae had degenerated at Corinth into something like those feasts of friends in use among the Greeks, where men gave themselves up to drinking excesses, such as we find in the *Symposium* of Plato. ... the rite of the Supper which formed its close. Chrysostom supposes that the agape took place after the Holy Supper; evidently a mistake. It was not till later that this different order was introduced, till at length the meal itself was totally abolished.

Ver 21. By the way in which they act, they change the sacred feast into an ordinary supper, which has no longer anything in common with the sacred feast which it should recall.

Ver 22. ... We learn from this first rebuke how thoroughly distinct in the apostle's eyes was the feast of the Supper from a common feast, even when taken in the most Christian spirit and hallowed by thanksgiving.

Ver 27 ... the light and frivolous way of communicating whereby the Corinthians made this sacred feast a joyous banquet.

### **FW Grosheide**

On 1 Cor 11:20-34

Love feasts did not belong to the church's prescribed duties ...

When speaking of love feasts the apostle did not say that they were instituted by Christ. With Holy Communion, however, institution by Christ is the main point. ... By speaking of proclaiming Jesus' death Paul implies that the Lord's Supper is not just a meal in commemoration of the Lord but also a meal of confession.

### **RCH Lenski**

On 1 Cor 11:20

First came the Agape or Love Feast, a joint meal of which all the members partook. At the conclusion of this meal the Sacrament was celebrated. No evidence has been discovered to substantiate the view that the Sacrament was ever divided so that the Agape was placed between the eating of the sacramental bread and the drinking of the sacramental cup. .... the Agape leading up to the sacrament.

On 1 Cor 11:23

The Agape is not a divine institution. Therefore Paul lays down no regulations concerning it. His concern is the Sacrament.

## **Conclusion**

I can find no sound Reformed, Brethren, Anglican or Lutheran commentary which states that the Agape meal and the Lord's Supper are identified together as one (i.e. are mingled together).

It is difficult to supply quotes in brief since the discussion of the Supper occupies many pages in the commentaries. Much that supports my contention (the traditional contention) that the Supper is distinct from, but following, a communal meal requires extensive quotations, which is not possible in a short paper. Needless to say, all the major commentaries agree with the position of this paper: the Lord's Supper is distinct from, but flowed out of, a communal meal.

Furthermore, we could state, as many theologians do, that there is no divine command to eat a communal meal together and in history it has often led to many forms of abuse (which is why it was abandoned). We do not sin if we neglect a communal meal, but we seriously sin if we abuse the divine command to celebrate the Supper properly with due reverence to Christ. Eating the bread and wine superficially, within a communal meal and socialising, is such an abuse and is sin.