Part 0 of 1: Perspectives on the Lord's Supper

with

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Welcome to The Table where we discuss issues of God and culture. I'm Darrell Bock, Executive Director for Cultural Engagement at The Hendricks Center at Dallas Theological Seminary, and our topic today is one of the sacraments or ordinances, we'll be talking about what that is, of the church, namely the Lord's Supper. And certainly it's the one element of the church service that is repeated in our worship and so we're going to take a look at the history of it, what it signifies, the discussion, some might say debate, that has operated around this material.

And I have two consummately qualified people with me to discuss this, Michael Svigel and Scott Horrell, both doctors, both teach Systematic Theology here at the seminary, and so I thank you guys for coming in and being a part of this conversation with us in which we discuss something that a lot of people go through but sometimes may not appreciate all the aspects of what goes into it.

So Michael, I'll start with you. First of all, what do we call it, a sacrament, an ordinance? What's the deal there?

Yeah, that's a great question. It's interesting, the doctrinal statement of our institution, Dallas Seminary, calls it both sacrament or ordinance, and then the statement sacrament and ordinance, because really in Protestant circles, those terms are sometimes used interchangeably, sometimes used with specific emphases. Ordinance usually emphasizes that this is something Christ has ordained for the church to do on an ongoing basis as well as baptism. Baptism is the one ordinance for conversion and then the ongoing observance would the Lord's Supper and Christ has ordained these things to be marks of the church.

Sacrament tends to emphasize that this is a sacred rite, that this does something for you spiritually, some special blessing, a means of sanctification, or something like that. In some of the I guess harder sacramental traditions, it's even viewed as a means of saving grace, your Roman Catholic traditions, for instance. But really, these two sometimes can be used interchangeably.

But usually, one would say that a sacrament conveys –

Something, yeah.
Darrell Bock – something, so we're talking about something – and one of the views that we're going to be talking about in a minute is the memorial view of the Lord's Supper and if you have a memorial view of the Lord's Supper –

Michael Svigel You tend to call it an ordinance.

Darrell Bock That's right, versus a sacrament, because of the distinction that's going on there.

Now Scott, how is that in terms of introducing this and the distinction? Did we do okay?

Scott Horrell Well, I think you did fairly well, yes. I think it's interesting that when you see the church pick up with baptism, which parallels the Old Testament circumcision as one was brought into the covenantal family, and then of course the Sabbath was an ongoing regular reality of the Old Testament, so the Lord's Supper, now you have two new visible signs that distinguish the church I would say from Israel but also distinguish the church in the world, these external realities that identify us as Christs.

Darrell Bock There's an interesting phrase that comes in 1 Corinthians when the Lord's Supper is being discussed and it ends after he's gone through the elements. It says, "You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," which means that the Lord's Supper is a statement. It's actually a message to proclamation. It's an affirmation, if I can say it that way, and I dare say that many people who think about the Lord's Table probably don't think about the fact that they're making a statement when they engage in the worship of taking the elements.

Michael Svigel That's right. I mean really the Lord's Supper is a tangible, edible confession of faith. We are participating in symbolically the body and blood at least. Everybody thinks it's a symbol. Everybody knows it's a symbol of something. The question is is it more than just a symbol? And so we are confessing several things, the death of Christ, the real physical body of Christ, the real incarnation, and because we are continuing to participate in this prior to the kingdom, we're anticipating the return of Christ. So it's really a very rich image of a lot of things, not just one thing.
**Scott Horrell**

Yeah, I like really to call it the Grand Central Station of Christian faith because you have the pascal lamb, of course the whole Passover motif and the sacrificial realities of the Old Testament, but then of course our savior as the lamb of God, as Mike was saying, we then we look back and thank in this memorial sacrament our Lord's death on the cross, but in a way also as I partake of the Lord's Supper, again and again, I think but as the Lord gave his life for me, so we are part of a body of Christ, and in a way, the body of Christ relives this life in some ways. There are martyrs in our day that are giving their lives literally for our Lord and as I partake of the Lord's Supper, I should be willing to do that as well.

But then it arcs into the future as well as we look at the Lord's return and his physical lordship as he eats and drinks again or he waited until that great supper of lamb with apparently real bread and the real cup.

**Darrell Bock**

I've heard the phrase used of this meal, and it's a way I do like to think about this, as a kind of covenant reaffirmation, I'm reaffirming the relationship that God has given me by his grace and the means by which he provided it, and in that, there's an affirmation and it's not an individual affirmation. It's a corporate affirmation that we all make together as we partake together of the Table. What do you think of that way of thinking about things?

**Michael Svigel**

Yeah, I use the exact same image, that baptism is this rite of initiation into the covenant community where we become one member of this body, where we exercise gifts, and mutually encourage and build up one another, and then the Lord's Supper is that covenant renewal, that reconsecration where we together as one body are offering ourselves in consecration and really weekly, I believe originally it was a weekly reaffirmation of this baptismal pledge to live this Christian life as a disciple.

**Darrell Bock**

So we enter into our identification with the death of Christ. We reaffirm our role and participation in the covenant. I take it's the covenant that the death establishes, so we're thinking –

**Michael Svigel**

Correct, cup of the new covenant…

**Darrell Bock**

– cup of the new covenant here, so we could perhaps go into more detail.
The Table Podcast

*Michael Svigel*  
We won't, though, not at this time.

*Darrell Bock*  
[Laughs] That's right, but nonetheless, so Christ's death establishes the hope of the new covenant, two of which the key provisions are forgiveness of sins on the one hand and the idea of the law written on the heart or the idea of the spirit being sprinkled clean so that the spirit can come in, that kind of picture, so all that is at work.

Now that's a relatively simple summary and overview that we just went through to kind of orient people, but actually –

*Michael Svigel*  
And fairly noncontroversial up to this point.

*Darrell Bock*  
That's right. Now we're gonna shift gears and talk about the history of the way this has been viewed and I'm gonna use phrases like – one of the things of theology is that you need a translator to do theology, right, 'cause we use all these terms that only theologians use and sometimes not even in their spare time, and then everyone else goes, "What in the world does that stuff mean?" So we've got transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and we've got this whole spectrum of things, so let's just start with our terms and then we'll talk our way through kind of what the conversations have been.

So transubstantiation, the position of what segment of church history and then what's going on with that idea? Scott, I'll let you do that.

*Scott Horrell*  
Sure. Transubstantiation is the official statement of Roman Catholicism and in many respects also Eastern Orthodoxy, that is that you have, as you partake of the Lord's Supper, you have the bread, typically unleavened bread, and you have the wine, and yet while visibly that is bread and the cup, the wine, yet that becomes in a miraculous way the actual flesh and blood of our savior. So it is transferred into or trans – what's the word I want to say there? Help me out? But it's made into –

*Darrell Bock*  
Reconfigure [laughs].

*Scott Horrell*  
Even as you eat bread and drink wine, it becomes the Lord's flesh and blood and there's some strong scriptures that would point that way.
Darrell Bock: Are you thinking about John 6 and –

Scott Horrell: John 6. You want me to read it right now?

Darrell Bock: Yeah, well, you can if you want. Sure. We're into scripture reading. That'll work.

Scott Horrell: This is the famous NET Bible. I'm not sure who wrote it but –

Darrell Bock: That's exactly right, but it catches everything.

Scott Horrell: The debate is around the living manna falling from heaven and Jesus says he is the living bread that came down from heaven and anyone eats from this bread, he will live forever. "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." And they begin to react very strongly and Jesus pushes it even further, doesn't he? "I'll tell you the solemn truth. Unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise him up on the last day for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. The one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood resides in me and I in him."

It goes on from there and of course at that point…

Darrell Bock: Which verses were you reading?

Scott Horrell: That's John 6 really starting with Verse 48 on down through 53.

Darrell Bock: Yeah, and the interesting thing is it's actually very graphic imagery that you're dealing with there because the idea of eating is the word that gets used for how cows chew cud. I mean it's also munching is almost a very graphic –

Michael Svigel: He lost a lot of his audience over that, almost his own.
Darrell Bock: Yeah, he sure did, right at the end. Yeah, that's right. Some of the disciples it said walked away because of the vividness of that imagery and of course the discussion that comes about John 6 is whether this is a direct illusion to the Lord's Table or whether this is in fact a very graphic description of his death and how we view it, and of course how you think about that obviously impacts then how you view the Supper.

So that's transubstantiation, and that was, as you said, it's the Catholic view of things, and the mass – this is probably worth spending a little time on. The mass is observed in the Catholic Church daily.

Michael Svigel: Somewhere in the world, at any given time, Christ's body and blood are being offered.

Darrell Bock: In the context of the Roman Catholic Church, yeah, and so some people ask the question why is the mass so central in Roman Catholic theology? I think it's a good question to ask and reflect on because the service in the Catholic Church is very much built around the Table in a way distinct from Protestant services.

Scott Horrell: Well, you're both thanking God for the sacrifice in Christ, but also, that is a reinstitution. That is a kind of sacrifice, as you say, of our Lord at every moment, as Mike's making clear.

Did you want to go back to the other forms of transubstantiation but –

Darrell Bock: We'll move on in a second. I want to stay here for a second. So the idea here is that you observe the mass. This is a very sacramental – to go back to our earlier language – a very sacramental view of the Supper because there actually is grace conferred –

Michael Svigel: Saving grace, yeah.

Darrell Bock: Not just any grace, it's saving grace.
This is the real thing, so you are by ingesting the bread and the wine which has in its invisible immaterial essence become not just body and blood but containing the whole of Christ, body, blood, soul, and divinity, you are therefore ingesting elements that are life giving to your soul and body. So in late Middle Ages throughout the Reformation period, the Roman Catholics were accused, and not without reason, for an idolatry of the mass because the logic was if that really is after the consecration by the priest, the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the divine God man, then should it not be adored with the same kind of worship you would show toward God?

And the Protestants responded to what they called the idolatry of the mass because of the logic of the theology where that led them, and it led them to, for all practical purposes, worshipping the bread and the wine.

Interesting.

Yeah, now I think I'd like to say, most people are almost completely unaware of in terms of the way the service is viewed and the actions that are undertaken.

Well, we've come now to consubstantiation. Okay, same set of questions. Who's associated with this view, and why did it emerge, and now we're probably in a mode where we're not only having to deal with why did it emerge but what is it reacting to, and again, Scott, I'll let you set the table on this, consubstantiation. I call this the over, under, around, and through view.

Well, you just said it. As the reformers broke from the Catholic Church, they carried much of their studies with them. Luther did not want to say this is actually now the flesh and blood of Christ that some actual substantive will change, but rather as you say, around and through, you're still eating the bread and drinking the wine, but there is a kind of hypostatic union of the two.

It's kind of like a Velcro attachment to the elements or something?
Hypostatic union is what we talk about, the two natures of Chris in one person, and so as in Christ himself, the divine subsumes the human, the two are living together in the one person of our Lord, Jesus, and so in the bread and the wine, there is the presence of the Lord that infuses or encapsulates, how can we put it, in and around, as you say, the actual substance, yes.

Yeah, 'cause consubstantiation means the substance is with the elements as opposed to the elements being transformed.

Becoming, yeah. One image that is used is the iron in the fire where Luther will say you put an iron in the fire and it starts to glow red. Well, the iron hasn't changed its substance but it has taken on the character of the fire, which is also an image used for the doctrine of Christ and the deity in humanity, so that same kind of idea

So infused isn't too strong of term and yet they are not confused, one with the other.

Okay, now obviously a reaction to some degree of Roman Catholicism without an attempt to completely go in a different direction, so what are we sharing and not sharing with Roman Catholic teaching when we go to consubstantiation?

Oh, you still see a very real presence of our Lord that's not strong enough –

In the elements.

– in the elements, themselves, but you're stepping away from the idolatry, as Mike's put it. You're stepping away from this miraculous transformation of these elements into real flesh and blood that would be the theme of transubstantiation. So con is close. You're stepping away, but you're not stepping away very far.

Okay, and so is there still a sacramental view of what's taking place?
Oh, of course, absolutely. There is the transmission of a saving grace though that by faith within Lutheranism that is transmitted to the believer as he partakes of that Lord's Supper or the Eucharist.

Okay, so there's something happening at the meal as well.

Absolutely.

Yeah, okay. Now I guess the next thing to do, and I know that there are more than these but these are certainly the big three, we've got Zwingli, I'll go ahead and introduce the figure here, and what is sometimes called the memorial view. I don't know if that's actually an accurate reflection of what he taught, but so let's talk about we're dealing with a spectrum here and I guess as we move down the spectrum, we're becoming less sacramental, if I can say it that way. So Zwingli's view, obviously another Protestant view but certainly different than Luther. How did Zwingli view the Lord's Supper?

And Mike, I think I'll let you handle this one.

Sure. Yeah, Zwingli was probably reacting even more definitely against Roman Catholic transubstantiation view, and so he took the bread and the wine as symbols. They did not contain or become the physical actual body and blood of Christ. He made a strong case that that would be a theological problem because it would mean that the physical human nature of Christ had taken on characters of divinity and could be everywhere present. He said that would be a problem because Christ is bodily at the right hand of the Father.

So he said it is a consecrated symbol. It becomes a holy thing for the purposes of our participation of the meal, and with that came this idea that it isn't doing anything in any automatic sense. You're not partaking of anything that is giving you blessing automatically. It is really a sermon without words, in a sense. It is communicating something in a memorial or a reverential kind of sense, so it's much more of something going on in your mind and your heart than what's going on on the actual Table.
Now it does strike me that this is a very almost personalized look at the Table and we lose or we risk losing a little bit of the corporate feel of the event in thinking about it. I mean when I heard the word memorial and maybe this is reacting more to the English word, I'm thinking about this being primarily a reflective exercise of one kind or another.

Sure. It's reflective, it's meditative, it's devotional, although he doesn't go really far. He doesn't take it out of the context of the community, it really depends on the individual's reflection and faith in response to that.

So not only do you lose the sacramental dimensions that the other views have that are not so much a part of this, but also there is I almost think the proclamation side of it gets underemphasized, if I can say it that way, because it becomes this more privatized experience almost. Is that fair?

Yeah. When you read Zwingli himself, he goes out of his way to shoe that he's not dismissing the significance of the Lord's Supper, ten things that this still is doing. I think in what becomes the tradition of the memorial view, that's where you go. It sets you off. The boat starts to drift pretty soon.

In my tradition, I'm in a Free Church tradition. I've heard more setups explaining everything that the Lord's Supper doesn't do and by the time you get to the end of that, you're wondering why you're even doing it.

It's kind of like those commercials for drugs that say take this drug and then there's 45 seconds of this may kill you by the time you're done, so you're more than welcome to have it.

I grew up in a tradition in which this was the dominant view and was kind of my initial take on the Supper. In all honesty, it struck me, as time has gone on and I've read the scripture and reflected on it, that I have the feeling it doesn't quite say enough.

It tells us what it doesn't do but it doesn't really start asking constructively why are we doing this? What does it do? How are we supposed to do it? What benefit do we get from this and what are we saying with it?
And of course sometimes in some services, the Lord's Supper ends up being like a tag on to the main service, and so you feel like, well, this is the appendix.

Scott Horrell

It's removable.

Darrell Bock

And so we've gone from a very different place versus the Roman Catholic mass where it's central and we've come to this odd place where we're kind of the, well, it's a nice thing to do and we're asked to do it, but don't ask too much more.

Michael Svigel

And historically, it feels like a pendulum swing, right? The Roman Catholics were taking it too far in this direction and we swing a little bit too far.

Darrell Bock

And this was a big deal in the history of the church.

Michael Svigel

It was. It split Martin Luther and Zwingli from having a unified reformation.

Darrell Bock

Now there's a very famous incident that took place in the history of the Reformation known as the Marburg Colloquy, and I'll try and set this up and I'm setting this up as a non-church historian, so if I botch it, just let me know. But my understanding is that the colloquy was a meeting of Luther and Zwingli. There was a list of 15 issues that they were supposed to discuss. Don't ask me to name what the 15 are, and they pretty much negotiates their way pretty successfully through most of the list and then they came to the Lord's Supper.

Now tradition is about this, in fact I've seen a painting in – there's a very famous painting in Germany that when you visit one of the sites, it may have been – I'm not sure if it's Marburg or somewhere else.

Michael Svigel

The castle, I think.

Darrell Bock

Where is it?

Michael Svigel

Maybe at the castle. I can't remember.
Yeah, I can't remember where it is either, but it is the famous incident of Luther taking his knife and carving into the wood – I don't remember if this is in Greek or in German. I think it was in Greek. We'll keep it that way. New Testament people will like that version of the story.

Or Latin or something, yeah.

Or Latin, who knows? The words, "This is my body," and saying, "Until you can tell me this doesn't mean what it says, we can't agree." So obviously there's something behind all that. What's going on?

Yeah, like we said earlier, Martin Luther held that when Jesus said, "This is my body," that bread and wine really did contain the body and blood of Christ, and so you were literally ingesting Christ's body and blood. So he shared that view with the Roman Catholic position, with some differences that we mentioned before. Whereas the other member at the Table was Zwingli, who we saw was a total opposite. This is Christ's body and blood are not actually present. It is a figure of his body and blood, and so they could not see eye-to-eye on that. They both accused each other of heresy's regarding Christ. Zwingli was accused of separating the deity and humanity of Christ, being an historian, and Luther was accused of mixing up the deity and humanity and saying the human nature and the bodily form could be everywhere present, and they left in absolute disagreement and disunity.

And so we weren't able to see a uniting of the Protestant Reformation as a result, so the ramifications of that obviously were very, very significant for the Reformation movement, which was already a minority movement and now it split.

They needed to be together at the time, yeah.

Yeah, and they were split as a result, so very, very famous event, and like I said, it's marked itself not just in church history but really in European culture to a certain degree because you talk to Europeans who know a little bit about your history and they're quite aware of that event. The Swiss Reformation and the German Reformation never came together because of that.
Now we've mentioned three views. Now those aren't the only views. There's one view that we haven't put out on the Table yet and that is the reform view of the Last Supper, so how did Calvin walk into this situation?

**Michael Svigel**

Yeah. Now Calvin is coming about a half a generation. He wasn't one of the original reformers, so he already had the debate in the background and in many ways, his position became a mediating position between Luther and Zwingli, and so Calvin agreed with Zwingli that this was not physically present in the bread and wine, the body and blood of Christ. He saw that it would be a Christological problem, but he also said this isn't a mere empty symbol. This isn't doing nothing. This isn't just a memorial. This isn't just dependent on what we think of it.

Christ is, he would say, present at the observance of the Supper in a unique and life-giving way and in way that brings blessing, but I like to think of it more in terms of Christ is present in the same way that he was present at the Last Supper, as the host of the Supper, and by dining with Christ, you are participating in the blessing, and the partaking of him, and communing with him.

And he had this interesting line in his Institute, Book 4, where he says, "We are in a sense ushered into the presence of Christ by the means of the spirit who can transcend space." And so it's sometimes called the real spiritual presence, but that's a little bit of misleading. It's really the real presence of Christ at the Table with us by means of the spirit, and so he is the host of the meal and we are communing with him.

**Darrell Bock**

So would a description of this as a mystical meal be accurate?

**Michael Svigel**

In a sense, yeah. He is saying we are mystically but truly fellowshipping with Christ, and in that sense, the bread and wine become symbolically sacramentally or consecratedly, just as a man and woman are pronounced husband and wife and really become husband and wife, though nothing has really changed with them, they've been consecrated as such, the bread and wine which is common becomes sacramentally body and blood of Christ in an official sense and is functioning then as part of the sacred meal.
And one of the indications that something like this is going on is I take it the warning that comes with the meal that says that a person should really reflect on the spiritual state that they're in as they partake of the elements.

Exactly, yeah. In my tradition, that had a pretty I would say low, a very memorial view of the Lord's Supper. They would tell us what it doesn't do but then they would warn us and they would say, "But make sure you don't eat of this unworthily because you could get sick and die." And I thought, "That doesn't make sense. If you do it wrong, you die. If you do it right, nothing happens." It didn't quite make sense, especially when you see 1 Corinthians 10 talking about the cup of blessing that we bless. The New Testament has a bit richer understanding of the Lord's Supper.

You just reminded me of a question I didn't ask in the beginning that I probably should have, but sometimes we call this the Eucharist, so what's going on with that language?

Yeah, it's hard to find the term Eucharist. It means thanksgiving. It's hard to find that language specifically referring to the Lord's Supper clearly anyway in the New Testament. There are a couple of passages possibly. You do see it very, very early in church history, though, already with a document called the Didache in the first century –

Yeah, very early.

-- refers to, but sometimes Eucharist is referring to the elements, but other times it's referring to the observance itself, which is bigger than just the ingestion of the elements.

And the idea here is almost that the meal is supposed to be some kind of a celebration or some type of thanksgiving –

Yeah, a thanksgiving.

-- so that there's an attitude that comes with it that's more than reflection. There's an engagement there –

There's fellowship and there's -- yeah.
Darrell Bock – that you don't see when you just think of the memorial idea, and so it's an interesting phrase by which to describe the meal, and as you said, it comes in very, very early in terms of the way it's characterized because the meal is a part of the worship that you participate in.

So let's turn our attention here to some practical questions and that is I'll ask a simple question. Obviously the Roman Catholics observe this daily. Protestants observe this –

Michael Svigel It depends on who you are, where you are, and when.

Darrell Bock Yeah. At the church that I'm in, it has brethren roots, so it's weekly for us. I know churches that do it quarterly, churches that do it whenever.

Scott Horrell In cell groups and not as a church together.

Michael Svigel Annually, I've seen.

Darrell Bock That's right.

Michael Svigel Monthly is pretty common.

Darrell Bock So what in the world is going on with that? Where is that coming from?

Scott Horrell The Lord does invite us to do this regularly when we come together. I mean that's pretty clear.

Darrell Bock As often as you eat and drink it, which is not very specific, I might say.

Scott Horrell And I think the concern was that it might be done unworthily too often and therefore to restrict it to certain times, but that participation weekly, I'm in a church that does that as well, is one of the reasons I go to church. I love that time together. That is again, the holy of holies. That is the absolute center, along with the fellowship, and the other forms of worship, and so forth –
Darrell Bock Opening up of the Word, of course.

Scott Horrell – of my walk with God. So I'm not sure there's any strict way the New Testament puts it forward to be done in a prescribed way and yet it is described as usually I think the Lord's Day, Sundays, when the offering is taken when they come together, that would have been normative in the New Testament church.

Darrell Bock Yeah, I'm also at a church that the way they build the service is to actually point towards the Table that comes at the end, not as an appendage, but very much as the high point of the service.

Scott Horrell Climax, yeah.

Darrell Bock And it's built up that way. The way in which the elements are presented to the body make that point on a regular basis and so that's how we observe it and I find it the same thing, that it's a nice, reflective, affirming time. We usually tie it to a creedal affirmation as well that it becomes a key part of the service for us.

Michael Svigel We already mentioned some of the imagery, and the meaning, and the significance of the Lord's Supper with Old Testament imagery and New Testament meaning, this idea of reconsecration, and reaffirming your baptismal pledge, and all these things. The observance is rich enough that it doesn't need to get stale and you don't have to change your messages to point to the Lord's Supper. It's there and you can always make it work. It's a very rich image.

I'm a member of a church that does it monthly, although I and even the pastor both hold that historically, it's pretty easy to demonstrate that this was a weekly observance as an essential part of worship.

Darrell Bock I've always found that variation interesting and along with the logistics of the meal. Let me talk about one particular logistical detail that everyone probably doesn't think a lot about but it probably does cross their mind. The whole idea of the common cup which strikes terror in anyone who's interested in things like germs and that kind of thing, so again, another different custom is in some traditions, you get a common cup. Everyone's drinking the wine in particular from the same cup, whereas in other traditions, these are separated. Is there any history to that other than hygiene or what's going on?
Yeah, common cup seems to be pretty common early on. I participated in common cup observance once when I was in Germany on sabbatical and we attended a small group service in the evenings, and it was interesting, as that thing was being passed around, there were a few that were doing intinction, which was dipping the element, the bread, into the wine and then partaking. By the time it got to us, my wife and I, we just sipped from the cup and prayed to God that everything was gonna be okay. But it was real wine, so that does change things a little bit. It can be awkward.

I have relatives who are in an Episcopal church and if you go to service with them, that's a common cup. Everyone comes forward and they do the little wiping of the edge before everyone partakes.

Yeah, to make you feel better.

That's exactly what that is. But there actually is an important symbol that's wrapped up in the idea of common cup.

Yeah. Think of the intimacy of the fellowship there.

It is the recognition – it's kind of the opposite of the risk on the memorial side – that this is something we share and –

Communion, yeah.

Yeah, don't take that too literally [laughs].

I'm communing, right?

Yeah, so we all participate in it together. Scott, any observations on how we observe the Table?
Scott Horrell

I think there's such variation there. There's certain freedoms that we have in the scriptures, aren't there, for cultures and across time. As a missionary, we struggle sometimes in church planting. Well, okay, are we going to use the one cup or the many? You've got people with venereal disease and all the rest that are there, and yet, we tended toward the one cup. I began to move toward real wine for a lot of reasons. I think the fermented life of the grape has symbolism even as the unleavened bread, ironically, of getting rid of the evil as well and the purity of the bread, I think those have realities.

But sometimes it was hard to know what do you do, for example, after the Lord's Supper? In a new church plant in a foreign country, sometimes kids would start running up and grabbing the bread and eating it as a snack after church, the bread that we had just celebrated as the symbol of our Lord's death, or drinking the juice as grape juice.

Darrell Bock

And not necessarily doing so because they're being, how can I say, disrespectful –

Scott Horrell

Oh, no, not sacrilegious, no.

Darrell Bock

Because you're dealing with very poor people, I would take it, for whom a meal would be important?

Scott Horrell

Well, or just maybe undisciplined kids as well. There is a question what do you do? For many traditions, they put the wine back into the bottles and in a few cases, they sit behind the pulpit and drink it, and the bread as well. I would, as a church planter, say, "What do I do?" There's too much to eat sometimes. As we've mentioned before, it's nice to have a full church so that doesn't happen, but do you just throw it in the garbage? Of course not. And yet it's just a symbol but yet it is in some sense now sacred.

Michael Svigel

It's set apart from daily use, though.

Scott Horrell

Do you give it away to the poor? Do you burn it? What do you do with it? So I struggled with those things and I found that with more time, I wanted to in some way – I'm certainly not a consubstantiationist or something like that, but I wanted to treat that consecrated bread and cup in a reverent way, whatever else might be involved.
And I might add that, just to throw something in here, when we were talking about 1 Corinthians 11 and how partaking unworthily, which I would think if it's just a memorial and I'm not thinking much about it, so I take it and it's not a big deal 'cause it all depends on my faith, then why are some sick and even dead amongst you? So there's more going on than merely a symbol entirely dependent on my faith and my perception. There seems to be a stronger element going on there as well.

_Darrell Bock_

Yeah. There's a sense in which it's in the worship service for a reason and there's something sacred and set apart about what's going on, figuring out where that is on the spectrum and how that exactly works is something that obviously the church has been talking about for a long time and to some degree and certain circumstances debating, but there still is this sense that this rite – and again, remind people. This is the one rite of the church that an individual member goes through repeatedly. The rite is obviously something that we do repeatedly. We sing hymns repeatedly, but this is the one commanded thing that Christ tells us to do to remind us I think how central Christ's sacrifice is, to point us to the grace of God that we're at the Table not because of anything that we have done but because of what he has done, those kinds of ideas.

And I think it's also a part and this is another element of the application, to get us to remind us that we are not entitled to the blessings that we receive from God, that God purchased those privileges for us at great cost and sacrifice, and sometimes I think we in the West in particular tend to think about our entitlements and that actually gets in the way of our spirituality. The meal is a wonderful reminder of the fact that it's his shed blood that brings us into fellowship with God.

_Michael Svigel_

And it's something you receive as well. You are receiving it from those who have prayed over it and have passed it around. You are receiving it together. It's also the one thing that we do in church that involved simultaneously all of the senses.

_Scott Horrell_

That's a good point.
You're tasting, you're smelling, you're hearing, you're whatever you're doing, smelling, I don't know, but all of these things are you're involved fully in this observance and you are, again, consecrating. You're supposed to be consecrating yourself. You're supposed to be reconciling with one another.

Okay, now consecrating yourself is another one of these phrases that we might throw in, but what exactly does that mean?

Yeah, many in the early church associated the coming to the Table with Romans 12 and offering your bodies as living sacrifices, that the Augustans said that the body of Christ that we offer at the altar is we as the body offering ourselves in consecration weekly to reaffirm – going back to this idea of reaffirming our commitment to discipleship, and to the Christian life, and to one another. In that sense, it actually is accomplishing something, reconciliation within the body as well as a continued reconsecrating or rededicating our lives to him. So in a sense in the early church, there was an altar call every week at the end of the service. There was a Table call to rededicate.

Yeah, but it was an altar call not to come to faith but an altar call to –

To reaffirm.

– reaffirm and reflect your faith.

Exactly.
Scott Horrell: I think in all this, too, complementing that, as we look at the soteriology of heaven, there we see the lamb, the lamb, the lamb, so over and over again, so the marriage supper of the lamb of course speaks to that in Revelation 19, what Jesus anticipated in offering this, but you look at Revelation 5, "And to the lamb you're worthy to take the scroll, to open its seals, because you were killed and at the cost of your own blood, you've purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation." The Lord's Supper certainly arcs into the future, doesn't it? It's our hope, and so as we look at Revelation 5, "And to the lamb you're worthy to take the scroll, to open its seals, because you were killed and at the cost of your own blood, you've purchased for God persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation." The Lord's Supper certainly arcs into the future, doesn't it? It's our hope, and so as we consecrate now, this is the lamb, what 27, 28 times in the book of Revelation. Jesus is the lamb. That becomes his title that tells us what he did on the cross before, what we will worship him forever and ever for having done for us.

Michael Svigel: Yeah, so it's anticipation of this kingdom. One of my colleagues, Glen Kreider, says that each time you take the Lord's Supper, you're hoping it's your last until the kingdom.

Scott Horrell: That's very nice.

Michael Svigel: And I like to say it's just enough to make you hungry for more and you're longing for that marriage supper of the lamb that's coming in the kingdom.

Darrell Bock: And of course the reminder is who is worthy? I'm back to the entitlement theme again. Who's worthy to receive this and to have done this for us? And of course it's only the lamb who is worthy and it's not something that, again, we bring anything or contribute anything to. Your picture of it's something we receive, it's the gift that we experience that's very, very important in thinking through this.

Okay, we're almost out of time here. Any last thoughts about things that we haven't said about the supper that perhaps should be said in terms of observing it or practical things that we think about as we do it? Obviously it's more than just sitting there and going, "Yeah, back there somewhere in the dusty past, Christ died for me." It's so much more than that.
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Scott Horrell

Yeah, I guess one more thing still thinking theologically rather than practically at this point, but in heaven, as we look at that throne of God and the lamb over and over again and the myriads, and myriads, and myriads of worshiping the lamb for what he has accomplished forever. It just dwarfs all of our efforts, all of our supposed worthiness or lack of worthiness because we're purchased by God. It speaks of the grace of God that over arcs everything else, our simple faith in trusting the Lord symbolized in that taking of the Lord's Table has eternal effect. It's just overwhelming to me sometimes.

Darrell Bock

Yeah, and that's why I like the word Eucharist because it is –

Scott Horrell

Mm-hmm, thanksgiving.

Darrell Bock

– a sense of thanksgiving. It does engender in the reminder, in the reflection, in the participation, in the covenant affirmation, a gratitude that we're supposed to have that a great debt has been paid on our behalf, something we could not have paid for and taken care of on our own.

Michael, any final thoughts?

Michael Svigel

Yeah, I would say even that I hold that the bread and wine are symbols of Christ's body and blood, that they aren't empty symbols. They're accomplishing something. They have rich meaning that we really need to retrieve in our worship services.

Darrell Bock

Well, I want to thank you for coming in and talking about the Lord's Table with us. This is a rite that people regularly go through in the service that they think somewhat about but perhaps not enough and to have a sense of the history and what's gone into it is an important thing and to be moved to reflect on the goodness, grace, and kindness of God is something that's worth the time.

So we thank you for being a part of The Table and we look forward to having you back with us again soon.