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The Terminology connected to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament

The New Testament uses various words and phrases to describe the Lord's Supper. No one term or phrase expresses all of the various dimensions of its meaning. Each description contributes to its overall meaning in a unique way. In this brief chapter, we will survey the New Testament terminology to lay a foundation for subsequent discussion.¹

THE NEW TESTAMENT ON THE LORD'S SUPPER

THE GIVING OF THANKS

The Lord's Supper involves the giving of thanks (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-24; and 1 Cor. 11:23-26).

²⁶While they were eating, Jesus took *some* bread, and after a blessing, He broke *it* and gave *it* to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' ²⁷And when He had taken a cup and given

1. This survey is not exhaustive. For similar surveys, see Letham, *The Lord's Supper*, 3-18; Maclean, *The Lord's Supper*, 13-39; Mathison, *Given For You*, 203-35; and Richard D. Phillips, *What is the Lord's Supper?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 7-13.

thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you;²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.²⁹ But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' (Matt. 26:26-29)

²²While they were eating, He took *some* bread, and after a blessing He broke *it*, and gave *it* to them, and said, 'Take *it*; this is My body.'²³ And when He had taken a cup *and* given thanks, He gave *it* to them, and they all drank from it.²⁴ And He said to them, 'This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.' (Mark 14:22-24)

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me.'²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23-26)

Because the Lord's Supper involves the giving of thanks the early, post-apostolic church identified it as the Eucharist, coming from the Greek word for thanksgiving.² At the Lord's Supper we are to express our thankfulness for the giving up of the Son of God for the eternal well-being of our souls and bodies. This is normally done in a formal way by the presiding minister thanking the Lord,

2. Cf. *The Didache* 9:1-5, esp. 9:1 and 5 (where the term 'Eucharist' [from the Gk. εὐχαριστία] clearly refers to the Lord's Supper) in Michael W. Holmes, Editor and Translator, *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 357-59. *The Didache* ('The Teaching') is an early church teaching manual. It was compiled most likely over several decades (possibly beginning in the first century) and completed sometime in the mid- to late-second century.

which also functions as a prayer of consecration.³ Without Christ giving himself up as he did, there is no hope for sinners. When we take the Lord's Supper, we are to express our thankfulness, our gratitude. This concept of thankfulness is probably one of the reasons we often say, 'We are going to *celebrate* the Lord's Supper.' Thankfulness is very appropriate, even necessary, when churches come together to take the Lord's Supper.

THE BREAKING OF BREAD

The Lord's Supper is called 'the breaking of bread' (Acts 2:42 and 20:7). Acts 2:42 says, 'They [the disciples] were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.' Acts 20:7 says, 'On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul *began* talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.' Both of these references likely refer to the Lord's Supper. In Acts 27:35 (notice the context beginning in v. 33) breaking of bread and giving thanks refers to eating food or a common meal. The breaking of bread in Acts 2:42 and 20:7, however, refers to the words of institution given initially by our Lord Christ and passed on to the first churches by the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 11:23). Breaking bread 'is a graphic portrayal of [Christ's] death on the cross, where his body was broken to secure our redemption.'⁴ When we break bread as churches, we have a graphic portrayal of Christ's death for us.

SHARING IN THE BLOOD AND BODY OF CHRIST

The Lord's Supper is called 'sharing in the blood of Christ' and 'in the body of Christ' (1 Cor. 10:16).⁵ 'Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread

3. We will discuss the importance of prayer during the Lord's Supper subsequently.

4. Letham, *The Lord's Supper*, 5.

5. We will discuss the translation of 1 Cor. 10:16 in Chapter 3.

which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?' The KJV translates 'sharing' as 'communion' which is why we sometimes call the Lord's Supper 'Communion.' Notice that this 'sharing' or 'communion' (KJV, NKJV, ASV [1901]) is a present-tense reality. It is something that takes place through the Lord's Supper. I will argue later from this that the Lord's Supper is more than a memorial meal. It does not call us to look only to the past – 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' There is something about the Supper that involves a present reality, a 'sharing' or 'communion' with Christ and the benefits he brings to our souls. We will discuss this in more detail in chapter two.

THE CUP AND TABLE OF THE LORD

The Lord's Supper is called 'the cup' and 'table of the Lord' (1 Cor. 10:21). 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.' This rite belongs to Christ the Lord. He instituted it. The table at which it occurs is his. The cup is his, as well. He presides over this table. He is Lord of the cup. He is not a distant, though interested, on-looker.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Lord's Supper is the Lord's (1 Cor. 11:20). "Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." The Lord's Supper is his. He owns it. It belongs to him. He presides over it. The food served is his. It is no ordinary meal. It is uniquely connected to his lordship. This is the only time in the Bible it is called *the Lord's Supper*. Notice that it is called the *Lord's* Supper. This word translated 'Lord's' (*κυριακός* [*kuriakos*]) is used twice in the New Testament – 1 Corinthians 11:20 and Revelation 1:10. It is an adjective. In 1 Corinthians 11:20 it modifies the noun 'Supper' and in Revelation 1:10 it modifies

the noun 'day'. It means 'belonging to the Lord'.⁶ It is called the Lord's Supper after his resurrection and ascension. The same goes for the *Lord's Day* (Rev. 1:10). The Lord's Day is a day peculiarly belonging to the resurrected and ascended Lord Jesus. The Supper is the same. It is a Supper that peculiarly belongs to him as resurrected and ascended. Though all suppers come from the Lord, not all suppers are 'the Lord's' in this sense. And, though all days come from the Lord, not all days are 'the Lord's.' There is both a distinction of suppers and a distinction of days in the New Testament. Just as the Lord's Supper has peculiar religious significance for Christians, so does the Lord's Day. All suppers are not alike, neither are all days alike. Both the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Day are Jesus Christ's in a unique manner and both get their names after he rises from the dead and ascends into heaven.

SOME PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

THE LORD'S SUPPER: COVENANTAL MEAL

The Lord's Supper is a covenantal meal (Matt. 26:26-29 and Mark 14:22-24). As the Old Covenant had a covenantal meal connected to covenantal blood in the special presence of God, so does the New Covenant. Listen to Exodus 24:1-11:

Then He said to Moses, 'Come up to the LORD, you and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and seventy of the elders of Israel, and you shall worship at a distance.² Moses alone, however, shall come

6. For further discussion of this word, see H. Bietenhard, 'Lord' in, Colin Brown, Editor, *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 2:518 referenced as NIDNTT hereafter and Richard C. Barcellos, 'The New Testament Theology of the Sabbath: Christ, the Change of the Day and the Name of the Day' in *Reformed Baptist Theological Review* V:1 (Spring 2008), 58-63. There I deal briefly with translational issues and the grammatical and theological relationship between 1 Cor. 11:20 and Rev. 1:10.

near to the LORD, but they shall not come near, nor shall the people come up with him.’³ Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the LORD and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, ‘All the words which the LORD has spoken we will do!’⁴ Moses wrote down all the words of the LORD. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.⁵ He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD.⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!’⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’⁹ Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel,¹⁰ and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.¹¹ Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

The ‘blood of the covenant’ indicates entrance into covenantal relations with God. Thus, when we take the Lord’s Supper, it is a covenantal renewal meal. It does not bring us into covenant with God; it reminds us that we are in covenant with him through Christ and enhances that covenantal bond. That’s why the Confession says, ‘The Supper is ... [for the] further engagement in, and to all the duties which [believers] owe to Him; and to be a bond and pledge of [believers’] communion with Him, and with each other’ (2nd LCF 30:1; WCF XXIX.1). When we take the Supper we are reasserting allegiance to the exalted Christ together. Michael Horton says:

The Lord's Supper, then, is a covenant meal. That means that while it is first of all a ratification of God's pledge to us, it also ratifies our pledge to God and to each other. It has both vertical and horizontal dimensions.⁷

THE LORD'S SUPPER: MEMORIAL ORDINANCE

The Lord's Supper calls us to look back; it is connected to the past – 'Do this in remembrance of Me' (1 Cor. 11:24). It has a memorial element to it, just like the Passover of the Old Testament (Exod. 12; 34:25; Lev. 9; Deut. 16). It is retrospective. It has something to do with the past. It looks back to redemption accomplished. The death of Christ, which was the exhaustion of damnation for us, is its memorial terminus, its stopping point, its target. When we take the Lord's Supper, let us never forget what we are remembering: the just One dying for unjust ones that he might bring us into the safe presence of God (1 Pet. 3:18). The Lord's Supper reminds us that redemption has been won for us by Christ, the captain of our salvation who brings many sons to glory (Heb. 2:10).

THE LORD'S SUPPER: PRESENT COMMUNION

The Lord's Supper has a present, spiritual benefit to it. 'Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?' (1 Cor. 10:16). We commune together in or share together the present benefits of his blood and his body given for us long ago. It is a covenantal meal. It is a bond and pledge of present communion with Christ and the benefits he purchased for us and gives to us.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: ESCHATOLOGICAL ANTICIPATION

The Lord's Supper is connected to the future (Matt. 26:29 and 1 Cor. 11:26). In Matthew 26:29, Jesus said, 'But I say to you,

7. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 159.

I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' In 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul said, 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.' Listen to Geerhardus Vos commenting on 1 Corinthians 11:26:

When Paul enjoins his readers to proclaim the Lord's death 'until he shall come,' this certainly is not intended as a mere chronological remark concerning the perpetual validity of the observance of the Supper in the church. It suggests rather the idea that when the Lord shall have come the necessity for further observance of the sacrament will no longer exist, and this in turn gives rise to the thought that in the present observance of it there is an anticipation of what the eschatological state has in store for the believer.⁸

The Lord's Supper is anticipatory. It not only points to the past and ministers grace in the present, it also points to the future, when the Son of God will drink of the fruit of the vine with us.

THE LORD'S SUPPER: THREE TENSES (PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE)

There are three tenses of the Lord's Supper – past (the accomplishment of redemption), present (the application of redemption), and future (the consummation of redemption). When we take the Supper, we do so in remembrance of Christ's death. At the Supper, we enjoy present communion with Christ. But our Lord said he will drink with his people in the future in his Father's kingdom. It is of interest to note that at the inauguration of the Old (Exod. 24:1-11) and New Covenants (Matt. 26:26-29) God was with his people, and eating occurred. There is also a prospect held out for us, an eschatological feast in the New Heavens and

8. Geerhardus Vos in Danny E. Olinger, Editor, *A Geerhardus Vos Anthology: Biblical and Theological Insights Alphabetically Arranged* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 185.

the New Earth (Matt. 26:29; Luke 14:15; Rev. 19:9). There will be eating and feasting at the consummation. All of this is due to the blood of the Lamb, slain for sinners, in order to bring us to God. The Lord's Supper reminds us of the past, blesses us in the present, and looks to future eating, future feasting with the Lamb in all his glory. As Vos said, in it 'there is an anticipation of what the eschatological state has in store for the believer.'⁹

9. Vos in Olinger, *Anthology*, 185.