

Removing Gospel Barriers 2

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Our church recently had communion called the Eucharist, Greek for “to give thanks.” The ritual reminded me of an experience I had in the European Study program that I completed for my history degree. When in Italy, our class visited the site of Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. Allied leaders had bombed many historic churches containing the works of master artists that either destroyed, or severely damaged, some. The destruction included the Santa Maria delle Grazie, the church in Milan, Italy, where Leonardo painted *The Last Supper* mural in 1495 directly on one of the walls. On August 15, 1943, a high explosive bomb landed near the church, demolishing it. The wall with the mural was still standing because Leonardo's work was protected against attacks by surrounding it with sandbags and scaffolding.

While there I met a California pastor. As we began talking, I noted that on the table in *The Last Supper* pictured a complete meal. I mentioned that I often flew out to California to present my apologetic lectures in churches. He then told me, “When you fly out I would be honored if you preached a sermon at my church. And while you are there, I want to invite you to supper.” He added, “Your supper will be one saltine cracker and two ounces of grape juice.” Noting that he was smiling, he added, “That would be an insult wouldn't it?” I nodded in agreement. He was implying that the common communion ritual in many churches insults Christ. In his church communion is not a remnant of the Last Supper, but a real supper fit for a king, King Jesus.

In the New Testament several different ways to celebrate the Eucharist were mentioned. The Scripture says that, as a final and specially prepared Passover supper was ending, “Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to his Apostles, saying, “Take, eat” (Matt. 26:26). “This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). This Christian ordinance has been celebrated in churches anywhere from once a month to once a year.

Conversely, it is clear from the Bible that the Lord’s Supper was a full meal. In Corinth, some people were eating and drinking before everyone had arrived (1 Cor. 11:21-22, 33-34). Paul instructed them to wait for everyone, so that they can share the meal consisting of food and drink. If some are too hungry to wait, they should snack at home first so that the meal can be enjoyed with everyone present (1 Cor. 11:34). Some people were even over eating or drinking at the meal (1 Cor. 11:21).

The Lord’s Supper was a time for Christians to gather with one another during a meal, where they could enjoy conversation and sharing in intimate fellowship with believers, tell stories, and build relationships (1 Cor. 11). Synonyms for ‘communion’ are closeness and unity. Part of the meal would include reminding people of the bread and wine symbolism that they were drinking, that through the broken body of Jesus and His blood shed for us, we have unity with one another as the Body of Christ and forgiveness of sins through His shed blood. It was also a time of formal teaching or discussion as part of the meal (cf. 1 Cor. 12-14, Acts 20:7).

When teaching college microbiology, our textbook listed the main ways harmful bacteria spread. One was by intinction (Latin for “to dip in”) at the Eucharist which, especially with children, could result in fingers ending up in the intinction cup. Cultured intinction liquid in a Petri dish typically grows many bacterial colonies, including *Escherichia coli* and *Staphylococcus aureus*. These are the leading bacterial pathogens associated with infections and bacteremia (bacteria in the bloodstream) in old-age populations. In summary, a full Eucharist meal was the closest to the scriptural requirement. Conversely, as millions of Christians have learned the “traditional” way, many churches will likely continue following this centuries-old tradition. As long as it *continues to be celebrated* is the important thing.

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