

# An Exegetical Case for Close(d) Communion: 1 Corinthians 10:14-22; 11:17-34

Jeffrey A. Gibbs

The purpose of this essay is to answer the question, "What do the two Pauline texts under consideration (1 Cor. 10:14-22 and 11:17-34) say about the practice of close<sup>1</sup> communion?" Two considerations help to explain the approach of the paper, and to justify yet another attempt to show that the practice of close communion is grounded firmly in Biblical soil.

First, whenever possible, one ought to be able to derive doctrine and practice from Biblical texts that are actually talking about the topic at hand. That is to say, a discussion of close communion should be based primarily on the texts which discuss the matter of who should, or should not, commune, and why. It is not to be denied, of course, that other, more remotely related texts are significant and helpful.<sup>2</sup> But the farther away from the actual message of a text one gets, by means of a string of logical deductions, the more chance one runs of actually blurring the message of the text itself. These two texts are the only ones in the New Testament that actually speak in some

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<sup>1</sup>It is of no real significance, in my view, whether we use the term "close" or "closed." Historically, the distinctive uses may be of interest. What is meant, of course, is the theological based practice of excluding some persons present at worship from participating in the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper.

<sup>2</sup>Such texts would include, among others, those that speak of the larger issues of fellowship among Christians, and the importance of preserving true doctrine.

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*Professor Jeffrey A. Gibbs is Assistant Professor of New Testament Exegetical Theology at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, MO. He has been on the seminary faculty since 1992. This article was originally presented as a paper at a joint meeting of the Council of Presidents and the faculties of the St. Louis and Fort Wayne seminaries in August 1993.*

way about communion practice. Thus, they should be the basis for as much of one's understanding and policy as possible.

Second, I have attempted to write in such a way as might be convincing, or at least comprehensible to "outsiders," that is, to non-Lutherans or even to non-Christians. I have attempted to describe the what and the how of Paul's presentation. I've tried not to take too many shortcuts. Consequently, the argument of the paper hasn't proceeded "as far along" as it might have, theologically. But this is the chosen approach for two reasons. First, it is ultimately to "outsiders" that we as Missouri Synod Lutherans have most often the need to communicate our doctrine and practice of "close communion." Second, one's own understanding is enhanced when clarity and simplicity are pursued. Theologians and churchmen too quickly resort to shorthand. And shorthand can too quickly become slight-of-hand. Only the Spirit of God can bring conviction, faith, and change of heart. But it is our responsibility to be clear.

So with this as introduction, we proceed to the texts. I will briefly describe each text, making comments as are pertinent to the subject at hand. Then, after comments on each, I will offer deductions and implications which appear to flow directly from the material of the texts themselves. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 will receive the lion's share of attention. It will be helpful, however, to begin with 1 Corinthians 10:14-22:

<sup>14</sup>For this reason, my beloved, always flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup>(I am speaking as to wise people. You judge what I am saying.) <sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing which we regularly bless, it's the<sup>3</sup> participation

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<sup>3</sup>The noun, κοινωνία, is anarthrous, and in both occurrences in 10:16, it precedes the linking verb "is." This does not mean, however, that the noun is indefinite, "a participation." It is possible that the qualitative force of "participation" is being emphasized (cf. P. Harner, "Qualitative Anarthrous Predicate Nouns: Mark 15:39 and John," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (1973): 75). This does not fit well with the context, however. Paul does not seem to be stressing "participation, as participation," or something like that.

Rather, following the probabilities offered by Colwell's rule (cf. E. C. Colwell, "A Definite Rule for the Use of the Article in the Greek New Testament." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 52 (1933): 12-21), I take "participation" as a definite noun, "the participation." For Paul, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are the participation in Christ's body and blood. He could say this of no other act.

Although not in agreement with this choice, A. Robertson & A. Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, 2d ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1914), p. 212, call it "justifiable," since κοινωνία is the predicate. For a clear discussion of this and other aspects of the definite article in the Greek New Testament, see Murray Harris, *Jesus as God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992),

in the blood of Christ, isn't it? The bread which we regularly break, it's the participation in the body of Christ, isn't it? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we many are one body, for we all share from the one bread. <sup>18</sup>Look at "Israel according to the flesh." Those who regularly eat the sacrifices are participants in the altar, aren't they? <sup>19</sup>What, then, am I trying to say? That meat sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? <sup>20</sup>[No—I am saying] that the things which they regularly sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God. And I do not wish you to become participants with demons! <sup>21</sup>You are not able to drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you are not able to share the table of the Lord and the table of demons. <sup>22</sup>Or are we trying to provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than he, are we?

First, we will make some observations regarding St. Paul's argument in this paragraph. Then will follow what I regard as legitimate "deductions" from Paul's argument.

The first thing to observe is that Paul is not here discussing the Lord's Supper itself. Rather, the issue at hand is that of Christians attending the services of pagan temples at which sacrifices were made to the god of that shrine.<sup>4</sup> The leading sentence of the paragraph defines Paul's main exhortation: Flee idolatry! The paragraph is connected to the preceding promise (10:13) that God will provide the way out of temptations, so that the believers may endure. And, "on account of this," Paul says, "this is the way out—flee idolatry."

In this context, the statements of Paul about the Lord's Supper (as well as those about Israel's sacrifices and those of the idol shrines) are used to validate the command to flee idolatry. Paul's statements assume the realities involved, rather than arguing them.<sup>5</sup>

The realities are these. The cup, from which the Christians drink, is the participation in the very blood of Christ. The bread, broken, from which the Christians eat, is the participation in the very body of Christ. The genitive after the noun "participation," κοινῶντα, denotes

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pp. 301-313.

<sup>4</sup>In the following paragraph, 1 Corinthians 10:23—11:1, the specific issue at hand is the eating of meat, possibly meat sacrificed to idols, in private homes—either the home of a Christian, or the home of a pagan in which a Christian is present as a guest.

<sup>5</sup>Friedrich Hauck, "κοινός κτλ." in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 805, writes, "In terms of the common belief of antiquity it is self-evident for [Paul] that those who partake of the cultic meal become companions of the god."

the "thing" in which there is participation, the κοινόν that two or more share.<sup>6</sup> The dative, denoting those with whom one shares in the genitive object,<sup>7</sup> is not stated. The noun "participation" is understood to be definite, not indefinite; *the* participation rather than *a* participation. The definite article's absence is explained by the predicate noun's position in front of the linking verb. This cup and bread<sup>8</sup> are *the* participation in the blood and body of Christ.

In verse 17, Paul states the necessary implication of that participation: "Because there is one bread, we many are one body, for we all share in the one bread." The one food of which the communicants eat is the reason; it causes them to be members of one body.<sup>9</sup> To borrow with thanks a colleague's expression, the sacramental body "bodies" together the ecclesiastical "body." The wine which is the blood, and the bread which is the body, are the reason why the many members are one body, the church. One should say, of course, that there is no "automatic" sense in which this unity exists, apart from faithful reception on the part of the communicants. Nor is Paul saying that the participation in the blood and body of Christ initially created the unity of the body. Rather, "for also in one Spirit we all were baptized into one body" (1 Cor. 12:13; cf. Gal.3:27).<sup>10</sup> Nor can one deduce that the

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. J. Y. Campbell, "KOINONIA and Its Cognates in the New Testament." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 51 (1932): 355-356, 375; F. Hauck, pp. 797-798.

<sup>7</sup>Campbell, p. 375.

<sup>8</sup>One can ask why Paul here reverses the "normal" order of "bread—cup." It is impossible to be sure, of course. But perhaps by reversing the order given even in Paul's own account of the Last Supper (1 Cor. 11:22-25), Paul can make a smooth transition to the statement of verse 17. He mentions the cup-participation in the blood, and the bread-participation in the body. Then, from "bread-participation," he can move naturally to verse 17, "Because there is one bread, we the many are one body...."

<sup>9</sup>Werner Elert, *The Lord's Supper Today*, trans. Martin Bertram (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), p. 25, on verse 17: "Logically this sentence can have no other meaning than that a physical oneness of the communicants is effected through the eaten bread, that is, through each communicant's reception of a part of the broken bread." F. Hauck, p. 806, writes, "In the interjected statement of verse 17 Paul declares that at the Lord's Supper, as at sacrificial feasts, there is also fellowship between the participants. This is not apart from Christ. It arises out of common union with Him, as Christ is represented by the one loaf." Cf. R. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1937), pp. 411-412.

<sup>10</sup>Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), p. 470, creates a false dichotomy. He first states, quite correctly, that Paul is not saying here that the communicants become (for the first time) the church, the body of Christ, and he references 1 Corinthians 12:13. Incorrectly, he deduces from that truth that there is no causal sense in the clause, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἔνοχ ἄρτου μετέχομεν, and writes, "Rather, by this meal they affirm what the Spirit has already brought about through the death and resurrection of Christ."

cup- and bread-participation in Christ's body and blood is the way to overcome divisions in the church. Quite the opposite perspective is offered by Paul in chapter 11, as shall become apparent below. So, to be specific, one should say that here in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul is teaching that the Lord's Supper sustains and renews the believers in their identity as one body in Christ.<sup>11</sup> One of the effects and purposes of the Eucharist is the preserving of the unity of the church. The grammar here is inescapable. There is not one clause with a causal sense, but *two*—"Because (ὅτι) there is one bread, for (causal γάρ) all share from the one bread, we many are one body."

And this should not be surprising for Paul's readers. They know the parallel practice and reality of the Old Testament sacrifices. The people who ate of those sacrifices were participants in the altar, that is, in the blessings and realities mediated through the altar, weren't they?<sup>12</sup> Yes, they were (10:18). This is analogous to the Christian experience of participation in the body and blood of Christ, which makes the communicants into one body.

So then, what does this have to do with eating at idol shrines? Just this. It is not that the meat there sacrificed has any innate power, nor that the statues and images have a true existence (10:19). It is this. Those sacrifices of which those worshippers eat have been offered to demons. That is the reality undergirding that supper. And to eat of that supper is to become participants with demons, and that the Christians cannot do. Two opposing, warring, mutually exclusive realities are mediated through two different meals. To try to combine them in one life is to invite the jealous wrath and power of the Lord (10:21-22). Thus far Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. What deductions can be drawn from this text for our current issue of close communion? At least the following deductions seem valid:

1. Christians, characterized by their attendance at the Lord's Supper, cannot and must not partipate in non-Christian worship services.

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<sup>11</sup>Although Paul does not say how this is done in the Eucharist, the most natural explanation would be, "through the forgiveness of sins." That sacramental benefit, which sustains and renews the believer's life in Christ, also sustains and renews the believer's life with other believers in one body, the church. Cf. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 3.379; Werner Elert, *The Structure of Lutheranism* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1962), p. 316.

<sup>12</sup>F. Hauck, p. 805, writes that, in verse 18, "θεοιαστήριον is obviously used for God." This is not quite as obvious as Hauck asserts. Rather, his own statement, later in the same paragraph, is more likely to be correct: "For Paul the bread and wine are vehicles of the presence of Christ, just as the Jewish altar is a pledge of the presence of God."

2. By inference, non-Christians must not participate in the celebration of the Christian Lord's Supper.

3. The realities involved in the Eucharist are not created or altered by the attitude and/or faith of those who are eating and drinking. The cup and bread *are* the participation in the blood and body of Christ. In a similar manner, when false gods are invoked, and sacrifice offered to them, the demons with their reality are present, even if an individual Christian is there as participant.

4. To speak of "individuals" communing with their Lord in the Eucharist can lead to a serious misunderstanding. For the participation in Christ's body and blood, through eating and drinking, necessarily involves the individual with those with whom he or she is communing. This Paul explicitly states in verse 17—"Because there is one bread, we the many are one body, for we all share from the one bread."<sup>13</sup>

To move to the second text, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, I will again describe Paul's argument, and then draw valid deductions for application to the present situation:

<sup>17</sup>But as I direct this matter, I am not praising [you], because you keep on coming together, not for the better, but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For first of all, when you come together in the church, I have heard there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. <sup>19</sup>For even factions among you are necessary, so that those who are approved may be obvious among you. <sup>20</sup>Therefore, although you regularly come together in the same place, it is not for the purpose of eating the *Lord's Supper*,<sup>14</sup> <sup>21</sup>because each one takes *his own* supper beforehand<sup>15</sup> as he eats, and on the one hand, one is hungry, and on the other

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<sup>13</sup>This necessary connection of the "individual" communicant with the other members of the body is also implicit in the very term "participation." The element in the construction that remains unexpressed throughout Paul's discussion is that of the dative noun, the other persons with whom one is sharing the reality in the genitive case—the blood and body of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>Without explanation or reference, Lenski, p. 458, writes, "...for οὐκ ἔστι with the infinitive means 'it is impossible' to eat, and 'this' cannot be supplied, since coming together and eating are not identical."

<sup>15</sup>Peter Lampe, "The Corinthian Eucharistic Dinner Party: Exegesis of a Cultural Context (1 Cor. 11:17-34)." *Affirmation* 4, 2 (1991): 3, claims that the evidence that denies a temporal sense to the prefixed preposition, προ-, is almost non-existent. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, "Proclaiming the Lord's Death: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 and the Forms of Paul's Theological Argument," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1991 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering, Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1991), p. 598, claims otherwise.

hand the other is drunk. <sup>22</sup>You have houses for eating and drinking, don't you? Or do you wish to despise God's church, and shame those who don't have [as much as others]? What shall I say to you? Will I praise you? In this matter I will not praise [you].

<sup>23</sup>Because I received from the Lord that which I handed over to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night when he was being betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>and after giving thanks, he broke [it] and said, "This is my body which is on your behalf; do this for my remembrance." <sup>25</sup>Likewise also [he did with] the cup, after he had eaten, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink, for my remembrance." <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup>Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of [sinning against]<sup>16</sup> the body and the blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>But let a person examine himself, and in this way let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup. <sup>29</sup>Because the person who eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment against himself if he does not discern the body. <sup>30</sup>On account of this, many among you are weak, and sick, and many have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we were examining/discerning ourselves, we would not be being judged. <sup>32</sup>But if we are being judged, we are being disciplined by the Lord, so that we might not be condemned with the world. <sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, welcome<sup>17</sup> one another. <sup>34</sup>If anyone is hungry, let him eat in [his own] house, so that you may not come together with the result of judgment. And as for the remaining things, when I come, I will arrange [them].

In these paragraphs, Paul deals with a sinful abuse of worship in Corinth. It is apparent that he regards this problem as much more serious than that in the prior paragraph (11:2-16) regarding the proper

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<sup>16</sup>Fee, pp. 560-561, notes that the genitive with ἐνοχος refers to either "the person sinned against or the crime itself." I take it as the former (cf. Robertson & Plummer, p. 251). He takes it as the latter: "To 'profane' the meal as they are doing is to place themselves under the same liability as those responsible for that death in the first place.... 'to be liable for his death.'" Agreeing with Fee is Engberg-Pedersen, p. 607.

<sup>17</sup>Even if προλαμβάνει in verse 21 is translated "eat beforehand," it is not necessary to render ἐκδέχεσθε in verse 33 as "wait for" (cf. Heb. 10:13; 11:10; James 5:7). The meaning "welcome" (1 Cor. 16:11; Acts 17:16) suits the context well enough.

head-covering of women in worship. With the prior discussion, Paul began gently, with praise (11:2), which he then modified with an adversative, “but” (δέ, 11:3). Here, by contrast, his opening paragraph (vv. 17-22) is bracketed by, “I am not praising you,” and “In this matter I will not praise you.”<sup>18</sup> In the earlier material, Paul deals with practices and behaviors that he twice describes as “shameful” (11:4, 6) and contrary to the universal custom of the church (11:16). Here, it is something much worse.

Verses 17-19 show that, as was so characteristic with the Corinthian congregations, there were divisions (σχίσματα) in the church. They had divisions over allegiances to different teachers (1:10ff.), divisions manifested through unequal attention and care given to different members of the body (12:25). These different kinds of divisions should probably be seen as manifestation of a central, deep, cancerous problem—one of arrogance and competitiveness. They were proud that they were wise and strong. They needed to live in line with the counter-cultural gospel, which is the foolishness and the weakness of God (1:25).

In verse 20, Paul states that their divisions were effectively turning them away from the very purpose of their gathering together for worship. Verse 20 cannot mean, “your divisions are preventing the Lord’s Supper from actually being celebrated,” for their sin is against the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament (v. 27). Rather, by their divisions and sins against one another, they indicate that their “true intention” is really anything but “to eat the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>19</sup> They are more intent, as Paul writes in the next verse with biting irony, on eating “their own supper” (v. 21).

What was the nature of their sinning? It was sinning against fellow members of the church. The general outline of the situation is this.<sup>20</sup> In the context of public worship and the celebration of the

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<sup>18</sup>Lenski, p. 461, calls “I am not praising” in verse 17 a “grim irony.” Cf. also Engberg-Pederson, p. 593: “By contrast, in 11:17-34 Paul is *withholding* his praise, and precisely, as the transition from verse 22 to verse 23 makes clear, because the Corinthians have *not* stuck to the tradition which Paul had received from the Lord himself and passed on to them.”

<sup>19</sup>Fee, p. 540, is wrong in writing, “Thus, even though it is *intended* to be the Lord’s Supper that they are eating ‘in assembly,’ their carrying over to this meal the distinctions that divided them sociologically also meant that it turned out to be *not* the Lord’s Supper you eat.” Fee has it backwards. It *was* the Lord’s Supper, and that’s why their sins were so grievous.

<sup>20</sup>The specific setting and procedures are difficult, if not impossible, to nail down. It might be that the drunkenness and hunger is caused purely by inequitable consumption of the elements set aside for the Lord’s Supper itself. This strikes me as being highly



Lord's Supper, a community meal also occurred. During the course of that meal, sinful inequities took place that caused some to have an abundance, even an overabundance of food and drink, while other members of the church received so little that they remained hungry. This is the situation that has given rise to Paul's admonition and instruction. They were letting culture dictate. The practice within the church was perpetuating the *divisions* between rich and poor, high status and low in society. They were treating some members of the church as if they were more important than other members of the same body. In so doing, they were despising God's church, and shaming the members who did not have as much (v. 22).

But what is the root problem here, in the abuse of Christian Eucharistic worship? In Paul's mind, why does he say, with grim irony, "I will not praise you in this"? For Paul, the root problem is connected with the very nature of the Sacrament itself. Accordingly, Paul drives to the heart of the matter by citing the words of institution. It is because of what the words of institution reveal about the Sacrament. "I will not praise you...ὥρα (for/because) I received from the Lord that

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unlikely.

A setting which envisions the Eucharist in conjunction with a community meal is more likely. Several authors cite striking parallels from Greco-Roman social practice of community meals. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 159, envisions the homes of wealthy church-members, in which the patron supplies the food. The offense is the unequal distribution of food and drink, in accordance with normal social class distinctions (cf. Fee, p. 542, n. 55). Lampe, pp. 4-5, envisions a common meal to which people brought their own foods, but did not place the food in a common "potluck" fashion (cf. Engberg-Pedersen, pp. 597-598). Both Lampe (p. 5) and Fee (p. 533) mention the possibility of "division" due to the rich eating in the smaller "dining room," with the larger number of poor located in another room. But still, it is the problem of the rich having more than the poor.

On the other hand, it is not possible to determine the relative sequence of a "love feast" or "fellowship meal" that would have been observed in conjunction with the Lord's Supper itself. J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1964), p. 121, thinks "That the abuse of the celebration, against which Paul struggles in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, could have gained ground is more readily understandable if the communal meal proper, which was taken less seriously, preceded the sacramental act. Also, the advice of the apostle, in certain circumstances to eat first at home (1 Cor. 11:34; cf. v. 22) is best understood if the meal proper normally preceded the Eucharist." (Cf. Lenski, p. 458.) Engberg-Pedersen, p. 596, thinks that, because *μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνον* in verse 25 is adverbial to the implied verb, "likewise, [he took]...", "This means that Paul is certainly presupposing, in his rendering of Jesus' words, the following order of Jesus' meal with his disciples: blessing and distribution of bread—*δεῖπνον* (i.e., the meal proper)—blessing and handing round of the cup." This order of "eucharistic bread," actual meal, and "eucharistic wine" is also advocated by Lampe, pp. 7-8.

which also I delivered to you....” I will not praise you, because *this* is what the Lord’s Supper is, the body of Christ and the blood which establishes the new covenant. Paul reminds them of what they already had learned about the institution and nature of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord commanded the church to “do this,” that Jesus and His sacrifice for all might be remembered.<sup>21</sup> When the church receives this gift, this participation, it is at the same time the proclamation of Christ’s death, until He comes again.<sup>22</sup>

Then, Paul goes on to infer the real issue involved. His inference comes in verse 27; οὐτως, “So then....” What is really going on is that you are eating and drinking *the Sacrament* unworthily. And when you do that, you become guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ, that is, against the Sacrament itself. And it is for this reason that there has been sickness and death in your midst. Let a person examine himself (v. 28), and in this way, οὐτως, not as you have been

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<sup>21</sup>I find the discussion of Jeremias, pp. 237-255, intriguing. His conclusion that it is God who is to remember Jesus, and not the disciples, corresponds more closely to the Palestinian use of “memorial formulae.” In addition, to understand the Lord’s Supper as the prayer that God would “remember” Jesus’ death as “an eschatological event” (p. 253) provides a strong tie to the phrase, “until he comes.”

In direct response to Jeremias’ position, see Douglas Jones, “ἀνάμνησις in the LXX and the Interpretation of 1 Cor. xi:25,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 6 (1955): 183-191. Jones argues, pp. 188 and 191, among other things, that the more natural understanding of Jesus’ words, “for my remembrance” derives from the Passover setting in which the Last Supper took place. In that setting, the Passover itself was for a “remembrance” (זִכְרוֹן, Ex.12:14; LXX, μνημόσυνος) by the Israelites. Also in favor of the view that it is the church that is to “remember” Jesus in the Eucharist, see H. Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar* (Adelaide: Lutheran Publishing House, 1959), pp. 304-310.

<sup>22</sup>In our circles, it is common to make this logical move, on the basis of verse 26:

1. The celebration of the Eucharist is proclamation.
2. Proclamation involves confession.
3. Confession needs to flow from agreement.

4. Therefore, we should be in doctrinal agreement with those with whom we commune. (Cf. Samuel Nafzger, “Who Is Invited to the Supper of the Lord?,” *The Lutheran Witness*, (May 1993), p. 14: “Moreover, St. Paul specifically says that taking part in this sacramental meal is a proclamation of our Lord’s death until he returns. Participation in the sacrament is itself an act of *confession*. We *therefore* should not commune with those with whom we disagree in the confession of the Gospel, lest we say one thing with our words and another with our actions” (my emphases).

I do not deny the logic of this. It is, however, relatively far removed from the actual concerns of this text. In my view, this kind of logic, based on 1 Corinthians 11:26, should be only a secondary support for our doctrine and practice. It is more profitable to work directly from texts that speak of “separation” from false teachers, and then to deduce from that general principle that one should “separate” from such also in the fellowship at the altar. Cf. Pieper, 3.385, whose Biblical support for this point is Romans 16:17.

doing, but in *this* way let him eat from the bread and drink from the cup. Then, verse 29 repeats the message of verse 27. For the person who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not discern the body. This is the content of “unworthily.” To fail to discern the body is to eat unworthily.<sup>23</sup> To “examine oneself,” then, is to “discern the body.”

At this point in the argument, two questions inevitably surface for the readers. First, and more obviously, to what does “body” refer in verse 29, “if he does not discern the body.” This is important, because it stands parallel to and explicates the meaning of “unworthily.” The second, but less obvious question, is this: *Why* does the sinning against one another, the despising and shaming of one another, make them guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of Christ?<sup>24</sup> For the overt “location” of their sin is on the horizontal plane. Paul has not accused them of anything, any sin, other than that on the horizontal plane. In fact, his final exhortation to them in verse 33, returns to the horizontal plane—again, ὡστε, “So then, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you may not come together resulting in judgment.” Why, then, in response to this sin against one another, does

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<sup>23</sup>Lenski, p. 477, is probably right when he says, “The nature of the unworthiness in the case of the Corinthians the context has already made plain and will continue to make still plainer. Paul’s statement is general and applies to all forms and all types of unworthiness and therefore should not be restricted to the peculiar type of unworthiness found in Corinth.”

Thus, my conclusion that the Corinthians’ specific form of “unworthy” communing does not and is not intended to contradict the Catechisms of Luther. In the Catechisms, Luther is intent on addressing the problem of *infrequent* communing, especially infrequent communing caused by guilt-ridden consciences. In this context, his rightful focus is on the Gospel words, “given and shed for you.” But infrequent communing was not the problem at Corinth.

<sup>24</sup>Note that Fee, p. 533, says that this is the *function* of the words of institution: “By their abuse of one another, they were also abusing the One through whose death and resurrection they had been brought to life and formed into this new eschatological fellowship, his body the church. Thus Paul’s need to take them all the way back—to the actual words of institution—so that they will restore the meaning of the food to its rightful place in their meal” (my emphasis).

Thus, we can agree with Fee (a charismatic Protestant) on the *function* of the words of institution in Paul’s argument here, and disagree with him on the meaning of the words of institution themselves. Lenski, p. 462, “The first and most important corrective, then, is that the Corinthians remember what Paul had delivered to them from the Lord concerning the Sacrament.” Similarly, Lampe, p. 8, calls the words of institution “the starting point of Paul’s theological argumentation,” and Engberg-Pedersen, p. 599, calls the logical connection between the problem in Corinth and the citation of the words of institution “the textual issue.”

Paul bring in the words of institution, and then accuse them of being guilty of sinning against the very body and blood of Christ?

The first question first. What is the “body” that they must discern, make a distinction concerning, judge correctly? In context,<sup>25</sup> “the body” has to be a reference to the body of Christ, that is, to the bread of the Lord’s Supper. The whole emphasis at this point in the argument is on “eating and drinking,” and upon the exhortation not to do so “unworthily.” Paul warns them that a judgment from God will follow, should they continue to eat and drink the Sacrament without discerning Christ’s very body present in it, and the benefits and purposes of that sacramental body.<sup>26</sup>

Why does he not say, “discerning the body and the blood”? Perhaps it is in order to reinforce the answer to the second question. That question, restated, is, “Why is sin on the horizontal plane really, most deeply, sin against the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament?” Once again, this is a bit of a guess. But it is plausible, indeed likely, that Paul is content to refer to “the body,” because of the logical

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<sup>25</sup>Note that “church” is never the referent of “body,” σώμα, in chapter 11. Rather, in 11:24 and 11:27, it refers to the body of Christ truly present in the Eucharist. There is no textual marker to indicate a shift at 11:29, away from “body” as “sacramental body.” The parallel occurrence of διακρίνειν (v. 29, “because he does not discern the body”; and v. 31, “if we examined ourselves...”) is not sufficient cause to overturn the view that “body” in 11:29 refers to the sacramental body of Christ. Rather, context shows that διακρίνειν has a slightly different nuance of meaning in verse 29 and verse 31. The sense of verse 31 (“If we examined ourselves”) it is directly parallel in meaning to verse 28, δοκιμάζω, “Let a person examine himself...,” and not to verse 29.

This is not to deny the closest possible connection between the body of Christ in the Sacrament and the body of Christ, the church. Indeed, that connection is the very reason why Paul adduces the words of institution, as the solution to the problems with the “body” of the church. The participation in the blood and body of Christ in the Eucharist has (as one of its effects) the purpose of maintaining the members of the church was “one body,” 10:17.

However, recall that Paul’s analysis of the root problem in the Corinthian situation has caused him to remind them of the words of institution. The issue revolves around the question, “What is the Lord’s Supper, and what are its implications for your relationships with one another?”

<sup>26</sup>Elert, *The Lord’s Supper Today*, p. 25, writes, “The danger of becoming guilty is explained by the fact that the unworthy communicant fails to ‘discern the body,’ that is, that he eats the bread as though he were thereby not receiving the body of Christ. The point is that he becomes guilty by eating and drinking (verse 29).”

Engberg-Pedersen, pp. 604-605, somewhat reluctantly comes to a similar understanding. He first denies that “this is my body” locates “an infusion of power” in the elements themselves, “*independently of the whole ritualized setting to which the bread and the cup belong.*” He goes on to say, though, that “*When the whole ritualized setting is introduced, however, one may well locate ‘in’ the ‘elements’ (or the acts performed in relation to them) the power that is being activated....*”

connection he has already made between sin against the brother, and sin against the Sacrament. Unfortunately, here in this text Paul does not explicitly explain the connection. He simply joins the words of institution to the issue and problem of their sinning against one another with the inferential γάρ, “For, I received from the Lord...” (v. 23). So the readers are left to infer the precise connection implicit in his argument. What is it?

Reasonably enough, the answer lies in the only other place that Paul uses the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper to support an argument, 10:16-17.<sup>27</sup> There, it is the participation in the blood, and in the body, that keeps and sustains the Christians as members of one body, the church. “Because there is one bread, we the many are one body, for we all share from the one bread.” The body of Christ was given for you, for you *all*. It is the true body that makes them and keeps them as one body. Here in this text, in chapter 11, to participate in the blood and body of Christ, while tolerating and even *causing* divisions by sinning against one another is not just sinning against one another. It is becoming guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of Christ. Why? Because that sacramental food has as one of its purposes and effects the uniting of the many members into one body.

This means that it is the very nature of the Sacrament itself that should prevent us from speaking of “the individual” communing with his or her Lord. It can’t be done. For the body and blood are not only “for me.” They are “for us.” The personal pronouns are plural—for you all. This the Corinthians were effectively denying, by their shaming and despising of one another. They were not discerning the true nature of the Sacrament. The result was God’s judgment against them. To avoid such judgment, and, most crucially, to avoid being condemned along with the world, the Corinthians are to examine themselves. They

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<sup>27</sup>My matrixing of 10:16-17 with 11:27-29 is the “bridge” to explain Paul’s logical connection between sinning against fellow Christians and sinning against the Sacrament. Other writers recognize the need to “matrix” other Pauline material to make sense of the argument, but they tend to go somewhat far afield in their question. Cf. Lampe, pp. 9-11.

The reasons why I think 10:16-17 serves to explain the mind of Paul in connecting sin against the fellow Christian in worship, and sin against the Sacrament itself, are the following. First, the passage in 1 Corinthians 10 is also addressing the same two “dimensions,” the vertical (the Eucharist is “participation” in the blood and body of Christ) and horizontal (the Eucharist is the cause for the unity of the Christians in one body). Second, in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul “plays” with the meaning of “body.” In verse 16, it refers to the bread of the Eucharist. In verse 17, it refers to the church, of which the many are all members. Third, as stated above, this is the only other passage, also in relatively close context, where Paul reveals his mind concerning the Lord’s Supper. These three reasons make the use of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 as explanation for the implicit Pauline logic at 1 Corinthians 11:23 an eminently reasonable choice.

must by faith grasp again the deepest nature of the Sacrament. They must repent of their sinning against one another. They are to welcome one another, and put an end to their shaming of the poor.<sup>28</sup>

We will now summarize these observations of the text and its argument. The overt sinning in the congregation was on the horizontal plane; they were causing divisions, despising the church, as the rich shamed the poor.<sup>29</sup> Paul's refusal to praise them is explained by the words of institution. In Paul's mind, the deepest offense is against the body and the blood of the Lord, because they are not discerning the body. Why is this so? Because the Sacrament which they eat together is the very blood and body of Christ. That eating and drinking is for the purpose of sustaining the church as the one body of Christ,<sup>30</sup> and they are causing divisions in that very body. They are *not* to continue eating and drinking, in the hope that that will cause their divisions to go away. They must examine themselves, and discern the true nature of the Sacrament. They must examine themselves, and repent of their sins on the horizontal plane, and welcome each other at their meals, and cease to sin against one another, and against the Sacrament.

What deductions for the present situation, and with reference to the practice of close communion, can we draw from this exegesis? At least the following are valid:

1. The attitude and actions of the individual communicants in no way invalidates the Sacrament. The reality remains; the body and blood are present.

2. In this text, Paul teaches that to commune unworthily means three things. First, unworthy communing takes place when Christians commune while abusing the horizontal relationship between Christians, or when that abuse is ignored and tolerated. Second, unworthy communing takes place when the Sacrament's very purpose—to sustain the unity of the members of the one body—is also ignored. Third, unworthy communing occurs when the reality of Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament are overtly or implicitly denied. There are other ways to commune "unworthily." But these emerge from this text.

3. The text does not speak of anyone "excluding" anyone else from the Sacrament. Rather, Paul simply commands them to change. It is, however, a permissible logical step to move from "before you continue

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<sup>28</sup>That the explicit, "surface" problem in worship was an ungodly fracturing of the fellowship fits well, of course, into the entire context of 1 Corinthians, where divisions and fragmentation of the church were rife.

<sup>29</sup>A similar problem, of course, is addressed by James 2:1-7.

<sup>30</sup>Sasse, p. 318, wonders, "Maybe the Pauline idea of the Church as the Body of Christ was first conceived by the apostle at the Table of the Lord."

communing change these sinful divisions among you” to “don’t commune if these divisions still exist.”<sup>31</sup>

4. The concrete application that comes first to mind is not that of our relationship as Missouri Synod Lutherans with Christians of different and/or erring confessions. Rather, it is our relationship with one another, especially in the setting of the local Missouri Synod congregation. There are periods in the life of a congregation which are free from marked conflict between members. My own decade of parish ministry was mercifully free from major conflict. But sadly, this is not always so. When bitter church fights are taking place, when resentful words and deeds are being hurled throughout a congregation and echoing round a sanctuary, what shall the believers and their pastor do? Shall they continue blissfully to commune together, leaving the divisions among them to wreak their spiritual havoc, and thus invite the judgment of God? Should the pastor not rather, in deep love and sorrow, propose that the factions refrain from participating in the Sacrament, until the differences and divisions be removed through repentance and mutual forgiveness?

5. However, it is the question of our relationships with Christians of other confessions which is the one at hand for us. Let it be said that the text does not directly address this issue. But the text does say this. Examine yourselves, and do not let divisions among you, whereby you sin against one another, remain. Remove the division before you commune together. Quickly, then, this question presents itself: Do the divisions between church bodies really matter? Are they the occasion of sin against one another? Does it matter that ELCA seems to have (or, at least, to allow) a doctrine of Scripture, or church fellowship, of the office of the ministry, to mention only some of the most obvious differences between us? Does it matter when another church body denies the saving power of Baptism? Do they matter, these divisions among us? Should they prevent us from communing with one another, until the divisions be removed? The answer seems relatively clear. They mattered to Paul. They must matter to us.

The task of implementing the practice of close communion is accompanied by an intimidating array of nightmarish problems and complexities. For every easy scenario, there are two difficult ones. What of inactive members, who suddenly appear, perhaps on a whim, after an absence from the Lord’s Supper of several years? What of those extraordinary circumstances, to which recent synodical resolu-

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<sup>31</sup>As Engberg-Pedersen, p. 608, rightly paraphrases the words of 11:28, “Let everyone test himself...and then (only then!) eat from the bread and drink from the cup.”

tions make reference? The church gatherings in Corinth were probably small, perhaps a maximum of sixty persons, spread throughout two rooms. How can one draw precise analogies to gatherings of five hundred or one thousand worshippers? What of the doctrinal divisions between our churches and other Christians? If these divisions are serious cause for sin, is our church urgently putting forth its best efforts in dialogue with other traditions, to communicate our understandings of the Gospel, and of the implications of the Gospel? And what of American individualism, which views with hostility and incomprehension the classic insistence that a Christian joins a church because of the church's confession, and is viewed by us in that way? Every reader of these words knows full well that people join congregations, switch denominations, for many reasons other than faithful allegiance to the official doctrine of that church. Does this individualism render our position incomprehensible to the majority of American Christians? What must be done to overcome these obstacles, and to communicate?

In light of these and so many factors, it is apparent to all that the situation is not always an easy one to address. During my own years as a parish pastor, I was often not sure, in specific situations, what the God-pleasing choice was. I know that I erred on both sides of this issue. At the very least, we must work much, much harder at making sure we are being heard, and understood as we intend to be. At the very least, we must learn to be more eloquent, more winsome, more patient and compassionate in speaking to "outsiders," as well as to one another. The goal, of course, is not to avoid something that the world finds offensive; it is in this epistle that Paul names the Gospel itself as foolishness, and a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). Rather, the goal is to avoid what will *unnecessarily* confuse or offend others. It is an intimidating task to carry out the practice of closed communion.

But it must be done. That conviction flows from way that the apostle Paul reasons here in 1 Corinthians. For the mind of Paul is the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16). The bread and wine in the Lord's Supper really are the body and the blood of Christ. Through the opening door of the forgiveness of sins, God's power and blessing are really there, to sustain the many members in the one body of Christ. But it cannot be that sinful divisions be ignored among us, for in so doing, we would effectively deny, and thus sin against, the very Sacrament itself.





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