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SUMMARY

One Gospel cannot stand for all four since each Gospel writer has his own reasons for writing, his particular theology, and the interests of a particular audience in mind. Therefore all four Gospels will be looked at in each session. The study begins with Paul, however, since Paul was the first to write about Christ, and Paul's theology concerning the Eucharist and the death and resurrection of Jesus is crucial in Christian theology.

Basic Bible References

Jeremiah 31:31-34

John 13:31-35

Romans 1:3-5

Romans 6:3-6

1 Corinthians 11:17-29

1 Corinthians 15:1-20

Word List

Eucharist

Body of Christ

Maundy

HOSANNA

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FROM PAUL'S PERSPECTIVE

Do We Really Need Everybody?

This study intends to look at the main texts in all four Gospels and in Paul's writings that deal specifically with the last week of Jesus' life and with the resurrection. One might ask why not simply choose one of the Gospels to stand for them all. After all, from ancient times people have tried to "harmonize" all four into one story, one book. But this way of treating the Gospels makes an assumption: that all four Gospels are written simply to tell, in newspaper fashion, the objective story of Jesus—where he went; what he said. This is a disservice to the Gospels. Nothing in the Bible, Old Testament or New, is intended to be "objective" "newspaper-style" reporting. In the first place, no writing is "objective." All writers come at their subject with a point of view and with a reason for writing. They pick and choose what to include and what to leave out—much as the evening news anchors and editors do. There is a lot more going on in the world on any one day than shows up on a newscast! St. John acknowledges specifically that not everything can be included: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book" (John 20:30). And again, "But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:24). One must pick and choose.

Also, writers have a particular audience in mind when they write. They know whether the audience is well-versed in the subject matter or is reading these ideas for the first time;

they know if the audience is open to the ideas or hostile. They know the culture of the people for whom and to whom they write. They know the political situation in which the readers live. Finally, writers usually want something specific to happen as a result of what they write. John tells his audience exactly what his reason for writing is: “. . . these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John then all have points of view, specific audiences with specific needs and interests, as well as having varying sources, materials and information to draw from. Luke mentions this last: “Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus . . .” (Luke 1:1-3).

Every one of the four Gospel writers has a reason for writing. Each of them is not primarily concerned with historical accuracy, but with theology—each wants his audience to come to see who Jesus Christ is and what God is doing in and through him. This may explain, for example, why John has moved the cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem from the last week of Jesus’ life (as depicted in the other three Gospels) to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry (see John 3:13-22). John uses the event to show dramatically who Jesus is—the incarnation of the God who promised to “suddenly come to his temple.” Historical accuracy, in this case, is not his first concern. Each author has selected and arranged his material in order to show Christ to his audience in a particular way.

The question remains, “Why include Paul? He does not tell any stories of the earthly Jesus; he quotes virtually nothing of all that Jesus said.” For our study, Paul is crucial. He is the first of the New Testament writers to mention the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. All of his work predates any of the four Gospels. Paul writes his theology straightforwardly as theology—without the stories and sayings of Jesus. His major concern is to discuss who Jesus Christ is in view of the crucifixion/resurrection. Paul is the only writer that we know for certain was a witness of the resurrected Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:8). Paul has a special place in the discussion of Holy Week and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since Paul is chronologically first, we will begin our discussion of the events of Holy Week with the ideas of Paul.

Maundy Thursday

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. Here is a rare instance in the epistles of the description of an actual event in Jesus' life—the institution of the Eucharist “on the night when he was betrayed.” (The word “Eucharist” comes from the Greek meaning “thanks”). This epistle was written before the four Gospels, yet Paul clearly assumes that his audience of Gentile Christians knows the story of the Last Supper, the betrayal, the crucifixion and the resurrection. All these events have been “received” and “handed on.” “Received” and “handed on” are technical terms for the transmission of an accepted tradition (see also 1 Corinthians 15:1-3). Paul, who contends that he is as much an apostle as any of the Twelve (“Am I not an apostle; have I not seen the Lord?”) [1 Corinthians 9:1], sees his reception of the tradition as coming from “the Lord.” As an apostle, he has the right to “hand on” the tradition as a part of the Church's faith.

The Greek in **verse 24** actually reads, “This my body.” We can envision Jesus holding up the bread, breaking it and saying: “This: my body,” or the word “is” may be assumed. Obviously, there are many ways that such a statement could be rephrased. As Orr and Walther have written, “Jesus' words, ‘This is my body for you’ have been exhaustively analyzed from earliest times. The greatest stress has been laid on the word *is* It has been disputed whether *is* should be interpreted ‘is like,’ ‘symbolizes,’ ‘stands for,’ ‘conveys,’ or means ‘the same as’” Perhaps that lack of clarity is for the best. It may be better to continually wrestle with what exactly Jesus does mean instead of deciding on one meaning and thereby to stop thinking about what it is that Jesus is saying to us.

Paul refers to the cup, the wine, as sealing a new covenant in Jesus' blood. Matthew, Mark, and Luke also use this terminology. Covenants in the Old Testament were sometimes sealed with the blood of animals. The term “new covenant” would call to memory **Jeremiah 31:31-34**. Read that now.

The word “remembrance” is “a way of recalling that includes the participants in the old story.” The story of the institution of the Lord's Supper becomes a story in which all Christians participate. As the participants (the “you” of verse 26 is addressed to the Corinthians) eat and drink, the action testifies to the belief in the self-sacrifice of Jesus.

Not Like That!

These verses in 1 Corinthians are part of a complaint that Paul has against the church in Corinth. **Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22.** By ignoring members of the church and centering on themselves, the Corinthians have not celebrated the Lord's Supper. In **11:29** Paul accuses the church of not "discerning the body." In light of his complaint that this cannot be an authentic Lord's Supper because the church members are ignoring each other, it is not too much of a stretch to say that "the body" which they have failed to discern is the "body of Christ"—the Church, the Christian community. Clearly the Lord's Supper is central to the Church's life, but not in some automatic or magical way. The act of worship using the bread and the wine makes visible the "body of Christ," the community of the Lord. It is the self-giving of the members of the community for each other that re-creates the "body of Christ."

Jesus says something much like this in John's Gospel on Maundy Thursday when he gives the new commandment (the word "Maundy" comes from the Latin "mandamus" meaning command). **Read John 13:31-35.** That commandment—the last one Jesus gives before his death—commands the disciples to "love one another" (**John 13:34a**). "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." It is the love that is made visible in the Christian community that witnesses to the love of Christ. In just the same way, church members in Corinth who ignore each other and each other's needs, make no witness to the love of Christ. The Lord's Supper is not to be a selfish action where "I get mine." The Eucharist makes visible the self-giving love of Christ in the love which the community shows for its members as they worship. If there is no self-giving love in the community, there is no Lord's Supper (see **1 Corinthians 11:20**).

Paul also writes about the bread of the Eucharist as being tied to the concept of the body of Christ as the members of the Christian community, in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." The sacrifice of Christ, which is made visible in the celebration of the Eucharist, creates a community of love that reaches out into the world so that, ". . . everyone will know that you are my disciples."

Death and Resurrection

Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-20. Paul here seems to be responding to a statement made by one or more persons in the Corinthian church that, while they believe in the resurrection of Christ, they do not believe in the general raising of the dead at the last day (**verse 12**). Corinth, a seaport city in southern Greece, had a pagan population where most worshiped one or more of the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon. Belief in the raising of the dead was not necessarily part of their beliefs. Paul, on the other hand, was a Jew and a Pharisee. As such he believed in the raising of the dead (Acts 23:6-8) as did many Jews at the time of Jesus (see John 11:24). In preparation for his rebuttal of the Corinthians' argument, Paul reminds them of the foundational beliefs of the Christian faith. In doing so, he cites what must have been one of the earliest creeds of the church:

That Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles (see **verses 3b-7**).

Paul does not present these ideas as his own. He has “received” them from others, in the sense of having had them passed on as a matter of faith. Part of this belief is an understanding that the purpose of Christ's death was somehow to overcome the power of “our sins.” In Romans 3:24-25a, Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as a “sacrifice of atonement” made by God, a sacrifice that redeems humanity from the grip of sin. **Read Romans 6:3-6.** Here Paul sees baptism as the symbol that faith in Christ destroys the power of sin to destroy us; we become something new—we are raised with Christ. Having a living faith in the resurrected Christ, what Paul refers to numerous times as being “in Christ,” releases one from being defined by one's sins. A person is rather redefined as being one who is raised with Christ. “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Resurrection for Paul is the announcement of God's forgiveness of sin; that is, the destruction of the wall that we had erected between God and ourselves. The resurrection is the re-definition of the faithful as people who are free from their sins. “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (**verse 17**). The resurrection is the work of God. Paul uses the passive voice “has been raised” (**verse 20**) to indicate that this is

the work of God; this is God's own proclamation of humanity's freedom from all that tries to destroy a person's life and meaning. The resurrection of Christ is the announcement of what God has in store for all. The term "first fruits" means that Christ is only the first of many to be raised from the dead. In Judaism the first fruits represented all the produce. Everything was consecrated. The human race now shares in the resurrection announced by the raising of Christ.

The Facts, Just the Facts

Paul recites a creed of the early church in **1 Corinthians 15:3-7** and includes his own witness to the resurrection in order to remind the Corinthians of the truth of the resurrection. These creedal statements of the early church refer to some of the resurrection appearances that may be some of those mentioned in the Gospels, but it is hard to be sure. ". . . he appeared first to Cephas, then to the twelve." "Cephas" is Simon Peter's Aramaic name. Peter is mentioned separately in Mark's version of the angel's instructions to the women (Mark 16:7). In Luke, Peter is mentioned as having run to the tomb, apparently alone, and seeing the grave cloths (Luke 24:12); and in John's Gospel Peter and John run to the tomb together (John 20:3-6). In Luke 24:34 the gathered disciples tell Cleopas and his companion that the risen Christ had appeared "to Simon"—that is, Peter. It may be that Peter, usually recognized as the prime disciple, is given this honor by the Church. The women, who in all the Gospels are the first to see Christ, are not mentioned by Paul. This may be because women could not testify in Jewish courts, so their testimony might not carry the same weight as a man's. Paul is probably using the phrase "the twelve" as a group name, not as an accurate number, since Judas was dead by then. The appearance to 500 believers at once is unique to Paul, as is the appearance to James, probably Jesus' brother, although there are other "Jameses" among the disciples.

The record of these appearances here in 1 Corinthians is one of the few places where Paul recounts historical events concerning Jesus Christ. Luke states that the resurrection appearances continued for "forty days" (Acts 1:3), a symbolic number in the Scriptures signifying a significant period of time. Paul is not primarily concerned with recording the various post-resurrection appearances, but rather with the meaning of the crucifixion/resurrection, and what it says about humanity and about the nature of Christ. "For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2).

What the Resurrection Says About Christ

In addition to speaking of the resurrected Christ as the “first fruits,” Paul sees Christ as the agent of God who “undoes” the death that came to all of creation through humanity’s sin as pictured in the Genesis stories of the Fall. Humanity’s desire to “be like God” (Genesis 3:5), that is to be the center, the one in control, brought only death. The coming of Jesus Christ has brought life that destroys the death that Adam brought (see Romans 5:12-18). In Christ’s self-giving love and total obedience, God is destroying death itself (1 Corinthians 15:26).

Read Romans 1:3-5. When Paul says that Jesus was “descended from David according to the flesh” Paul is describing Jesus Christ as the culmination and fulfillment of the Hebrew Scriptures and as a human being. The resurrection from the dead has declared him to be “Son of God with power.” It is through the resurrected Christ that grace has come. For Paul, then, the death and resurrection of Christ give us everything that God can give—forgiveness, grace, life, a new birth (as signified in baptism). Paul’s writing and ministry are complete in the proclamation of the crucifixion/resurrection and in living “in Christ.” “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me” (Galatians 2:20).

FOR FURTHER STUDY AND REFLECTION

Memory Bank

1. Memorize Romans 6:3-6.
2. Memorize Galatians 2:20.

Research

1. In a Bible dictionary, research the Synoptic Problem or the Four-Source Hypothesis in order to learn more about the way in which the Gospels most likely were written.
2. In a Bible dictionary or on the web, learn more about the ancient and modern Celebration of Passover.
3. Speak with your pastor about your Church’s understanding of Holy Communion. Then talk with a friend from another Christian faith about his or her understanding.

Reflection

1. Obtain a copy of your church's hymnal. Read through the verses of several Easter hymns such as "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" or "The Strife is O'er." What does the resurrection mean for you?
2. How does your participation in Holy Communion include you in God's loving actions?