

The ReMinder

I Corinthians 11:23-26

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In I Corinthians 11:23 Paul writes:

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 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." In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

What does it mean — “in remembrance of me”? From a man founding the greatest and most powerful movement in history, you would expect something a bit more understandable, practical, and useful . . . like the information at a business management seminar or a church growth workshop . . .

“Organize some committees in a system of ascending courts — a representative form of government ruled by presbyteries where elders serve three-year terms.”

“Systematize my teachings into a two-week course which includes pamphlets with fill-in-the-blank spaces.”

But . . . “This bread is my body. Eat it. This wine is my blood. Drink it.” How strange and irrelevant! . . . like poetry . . . very disturbing poetry.

I thought about showing a clip from the movie Survivor, where the stranded soccer players eat their dead friends . . . but I thought it would be too disturbing. Because here in church, we only eat the body of Jesus, who we crucified.

The Romans persecuted the early church, for they accused them of cannibalism. *Disturbing*, and far more disturbing for the Jews than for you. From ancient times they were commanded not to touch a corpse, and never, ever to drink blood — any blood. “The life is in the blood.”

Just look: blood runs down this cross into this cup, and we’re to drink it. That’s disturbing . . . insulting to our pride . . . offensive to our reason . . . a *mystery*. But Jesus did say, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Remembrance was big in the Old Testament. The Old Testament scholar J. Pedersen wrote, “The peculiarity about the Israelite is that he cannot at all imagine memory, unless at the same time an effect on the totality and [the memory’s] direction of the will is taken for granted.”

That is, a “Rememberance” was a “ReMinderance.”

That is, they saw all reality through what they chose to remember.

That is, a remembrance was what gave meaning to all reality.

Even in English and Latin the word carries this meaning. To remember is to “remind,” to have a “different mind,” to be “mindful.”

For the Israelites, Passover was a perpetual remembrance. They remembered how God liberated them from bondage at the price of a first-born lamb and its blood. The Passover told them who God was and who they were. It gave meaning to all their reality. The memory wasn’t just a thought, but what they *did*.

They tasted roast lamb,
 smelled bitter herbs,
 saw the blood run,
 and ingested the wine.

Psychologists say we remember with our whole body. The Last Supper was a Passover and a sacrifice. Every day in the temple a lamb was sacrificed. Hebrews 10:3: “In those sacrifices there is a remembrance of sin year after year.” They remembered: “There is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood,” and that so far no sacrifice was sufficient to wash away guilt.

Passover, sacrifice, and covenant.

At the supper He said, “This is the New Covenant in my blood.” A covenant was an agreement ratified by the broken body of an animal and its shed blood. It was the testator that bore testimony to the testament—the covenant. Time and time again in the Old Testament God “remembers His covenant.” That doesn’t mean God forgot; it means God behaved a certain way because He was mindful of covenant.

At Passover Jesus took the bread and said, “This is my body broken for you, the blood of the covenant poured out for the forgiveness of many. Do this in remembrance [remindment] of me.” “Have my mind,” that an ugly mind would be a beautiful mind; that a darkened mind would be an enlightened mind. “Have this mind which is yours in Christ Jesus.”

 This mystery,
 this poetry,
 this body and blood.

In one of my favorite books G. K. Chesterton writes:

Now, if we are to glance at the philosophy of sanity, the first thing to do in the matter is to blot out one big and common mistake. There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man’s mental balance.

Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable Facts and history utterly contradict this view. . . . Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination.

Sanctified imagination is called faith.

In the movie A Beautiful Mind, the mathematician John Nash possesses an incredibly powerful mind for logic and reason. At one point in the movie he looks into the night sky and picks out of the stars whatever shape is suggested to him. He finds patterns in the stars; he ascribes meaning to the stars, like God.

Psychologists say we all do that from the moment we're born. That's what "word" is and what "logic" is: applying meaning to our reality, naming the patterns in our experience.

Well, John Nash is so good at it, he alone gives meaning to all his reality. At Princeton he lives alone. He refuses to be taught by another. Nobody doubts his brilliance, but soon everyone doubts his sanity. It's not that he's unreasonable; it's just that nobody else lives in his world of reason—a world where he is vitally important to national security; a world in which he himself is the savior of all; a world of pride, then loneliness, then terror.

Chesterton writes:

The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason. . . . Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. . . . A pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern.

Perhaps a lonely, fearful, hellish, dead pattern.

According to Scripture our whole world is in darkness—blindness. The whole world is in the power of the evil one. (We've all gone mad—insane.) And that is because in the beginning, although man had God who is love, man ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He ate because the evil one tempted man to be God.

So we ate and became like God, gods of our own realities giving our own meanings to our own world—saviors of our own world; proud, lonely, afraid, and insane; imprisoned to shadows and lies.

Like we've been preaching recently, we stole knowledge to become God and so crucified God on the tree of knowledge . . . crucified Love, who is the Word—the Logos—the meaning.

Love is the meaning of all knowledge.

We have come to know a billion things and none are worth knowing. None have meaning. We killed God and went insane . . . like Nietzsche . . . like John Nash . . .

But amazing grace: John Nash had somebody who loved him. She loved him at great cost and extreme sacrifice. She loved him with covenant love. She was his bride bound to him in a covenant of body and blood.

This is a scene in the movie where Nash has realized he's trapped in the solitude of his own mind. He can no longer tell who's real and who's not real. His bride comes to him.

Movie Clip — Nash's wife: "Do you want to know what's real? This [she has him touch her face] is real. Maybe the part that knows the waking from the dream isn't here [his head] but maybe it's here [his heart]. I need to believe that something extraordinary is possible."

"Do you want to know what's real?" And Nash touches body and blood.

Do you want to know what's real? "And they wrapped Him in swaddling clothes and laid Him in a manger."

Do you want to know what's real? "This is my body which is broken for you; this is my blood. Take, eat, and drink. [Be ReMinded.]"

This summer on vacation and study leave I visited four other churches. In doing so, I covered all of church history in chronological order. I worshipped at an Orthodox church, a Roman Catholic church, a Lutheran church, and then an Evangelical Presbyterian church (like ours).

At the Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran churches I found things that confused me. And central in each service was this great mystery: "Body broken and blood shed."

Then I went to the church in our denomination in another state. They sang some songs, had a prayer, said a lesson, and it was over. I totally understood it . . . yet it lacked meaning, that is, *life*.

Driving home from vacation I said to Susan, "Man, I wish we could have communion every weekend at our church!" Being a wife she said, "Why don't we?"

I think I knew the correct answer: Because of Medieval abuses by the Roman Catholic church in which the elements were treated as magical substance that clergy employed to exercise power over the laity. So reformers from Geneva began serving it once a month in a service where it could be the topic of the sermon with the mystery seemingly explained.

Well, unless Aram or Gary starts charging you for communion, those old abuses probably aren't a problem. I know I can't explain the mystery in a sermon, yet the mystery should be the topic of every sermon. Every sermon should end up at this table somehow, or it has no meaning.

So I said to Susan, “Yeah, maybe we *should*.”

When we got back to LMCC, three or four people, out of the blue, said in effect, “Why can’t we have communion every week?” I suggested it at the end of staff meeting, and they all said, “Yeah, we should have communion every week.” I brought it up at Session, and they voted unanimously, “Yes, we should have communion every week.” So every week, at the heart of each service will be this mystery. I hope you’re not offended.

Jesus said to the Jews, “My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.” The Jews were terribly offended and left. It was an offense to their own autonomy—their own God-like propensity to give their own meaning to their own reality.

That’s what mysteries are:

Offenses to our reason;
Places where our logic patterns don’t fit;
Places where we can’t fully comprehend,
Yet we must believe or die . . . like food . . .

Modern man is terribly offended by food, yet we must eat it. We can’t comprehend exactly how it works . . . carbohydrates, proteins, fats, Dr. Atkins, Dr. Ornish . . . food is a mystery to us. Dead animals and plant matter? Have you ever really watched someone eat? It’s offensive! But unless you eat and drink, you have no life in you.

As a Church we’ve fought and argued for 2000 years over exactly how it could be bread yet body, wine yet blood, Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, Spiritual Presence . . . We have been offended and have withheld the sacrament. But Jesus didn’t say, “Take and understand,” but “Take and eat.”

Perhaps the question isn’t “Do you understand what’s being served?” but “Do you *want* what’s being served?” — roast lamb and red wine—Jesus.

Jesus is the slaughtered Lamb who opens the great scroll;
Jesus is the Word that gives meaning to all reality;
Jesus is the logos—the pattern—of all that is;
Jesus is the looking glass that takes you to wonderland;
Jesus is the blood-red pill that wakes the New Man from the Matrix;
Jesus is “the way, the truth, and the life.” He is body broken and blood shed for you.

This table is the mystery which gives you meaning.

- It tells you who God is: “God is love.” “And in this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice [payment] for our sins.”

- It tells us who we are: “Destined and appointed to live to the praise of His glory in grace”; to eat and say thank you forever.
- It gives meaning to us and makes us who we are.

We argue transubstantiation, consubstantiation . . . I believe in “digestation.” It’s the *Lord’s* supper; maybe He digests us even as we digest His body and blood, and it becomes *our* body and blood. And we *are* His body.

People worry about dropping the bread or spilling the wine . . .
because it’s His body and blood. Then they *bite* it and *swallow* it! Surely Jesus wouldn’t mind a little dust when He has us chew Him and swallow Him . . . and even crucify Him.

People worry about dropping the bread or spilling the wine . . .
but don’t they see we *are* bread and wine—His body? It only makes sense to venerate the bread and wine if you also venerate the people who eat it. And when you realize you are it, it gives meaning to all your reality.

If you struggle with 9-11, spend time at this table. Commune with your Lord on His cross.

It’s where you meet Him, where you become like Him;
It’s where love is exhibited and refined;
It’s the doorway—the painful doorway—to life, for it’s here that life conquered death.

“If we are joined with Him in a death like His, we’ll surely be joined with Him in a resurrection like His.” September 11 isn’t an argument against God as much as it’s an argument *for* the God who hangs on a cross. Look at Him. There is only one God standing at Ground Zero. And I understand there’s a cross standing at Ground Zero.

Paul wrote, “. . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:10-11). He was sacrificed once and for all, but at this table my sufferings become His, and I am His broken body of sacrificial love to a fallen world. I am His body.

Cannibals eat their victims to become like them.

This table is the mystery that gives meaning to us and all reality and all eternity. All creation must pass through this table for meaning: “This is the body and blood of Jesus the Christ.” “In him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:19).

All things must pass through this table: your marriage, your kids, your work, your joys, your sorrows, your thoughts, your opinions, your dreams, your delusions, your gods, your idols, your sins.

This table gives meaning to all reality, exposing what’s real and burning away all that’s false. This table is the judgment. “Now is the judgment of this world,” said Jesus. And Paul wrote,

“Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment” (I Corinthians 11:29).

People worry about protecting this table from sinners. If anything, it seems Paul worried about protecting *sinner*s from this *table*. If you don't come surrendering your sin, this table will burn it out of you. This table is judgment. I think it is the lake of fire.

Judgment, but grace;
Blood, but wine;
Fire, but love of God;
Lion, but Lamb.

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one.” Our God is a “consuming fire,” *and* our God is love, *and* our God is one. Love is a consuming fire, and in this is love: body and blood.

I have independent, empirical evidence that communion wine burns the evil one like fire. Yet the very same substance tastes like sweet wine to me, to us—His Bride. I believe I've seen Satan temporarily in the body of another, cowering in abject terror in the corner of my office as I threatened to put communion wine upon his head — cowering because the wine burned him like fire. In my office we “overcame by the blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony.”

You know, Satan will be thrown into the “lake of fire and brimstone.” The “lake of fire and brimstone” can also be translated “lake of fire and divinity” or “fire that is divinity.” Satan will be thrown in, and I believe consumed, but I suspect we swim in that same lake and are purified like gold. By the time we stand on the far bank, the lake will taste like the sweetest wine.

It is the very love of God which burns away all that will not surrender to Him, and nourishes all that will.

The fire,
 the love,
 the blood,
 the wine,
 the bread,
 the life,
 the *mystery* . . .

. . . is Jesus. And He is the meaning of all things. Whatever will not surrender to *Him* will not surrender to *meaning* and has no meaning (in and of itself) and has no substance (in and of itself) and, therefore, will not make it past this table into life.

Perhaps Satan has no meaning in and of himself, like a lie that will be burned away by truth.

Perhaps Satan has no substance in and of himself, like a shadow that will be burned away by light.

But you, my friend, contain the fire, the blood, the wine, the love, the life; for He has made His home in you, and you are His body—His Bride. For in the garden we crucified Him on the tree of knowledge. We crucified Love, lost all meaning, and went insane. But amazing grace! Someone loved us . . . the Someone we crucified. Something extraordinary did happen: Love rose from the dead.

We turn back to the tree, and the One we crucified hands us body broken and blood shed, saying, “Take and eat.”

He Himself—Love crucified—is the true knowledge of good and evil, the meaning of all things. He is all your reasons.

Well, G. K. Chesterton goes on to ask:

If [our own self-centered reason is] what drives men mad, what is it that keeps them sane? . . . Mysticism keeps men sane. . . . The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand.

We have not understood the love of God. He will not fit in the small patterns of our insanity. Yet He has entered this world of shadows and lies. Only the greatest can become small enough to enter our insane, little world. Only He can be the Savior.

And so “the Word [the Meaning—the Logos] became flesh and dwelt among us full of grace and truth.” For “the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not comprehended it.”
Hallelujah!

Well, John Nash gave meaning to all his own reality. Yet one reality snuck in which he could not comprehend, a mystery that would not be integrated: his bride. He was liberated by the one thing he could not comprehend. He surrendered all his meanings to her. He put his faith in her, and she told him what was real and what was shadow and lie. She gave meaning to all his reality. She was his new mind.

In the end, he received everything back and more . . . but by **grace through faith**. This is his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize:

I’ve always believed in numbers and the equations and logics of inner reason. But after a lifetime of such pursuit, I ask, What truly is logic? Who decides reason? My quest has taken me to the physical, the metaphysical, the delusional, and back. And I have made the most important discovery of my career, the most important discovery of my life. It is only in the mysterious equations of love that any logical reasons can be found.

[To his wife] I’m only here tonight because of you. You are the reason I am. You are all my reasons. Thank you.

One day you’ll give a speech like that. But you won’t look at your bride, you’ll look at your Groom.

He is all your reasons;
He is *the* reason;
He is love . . .
who delivers us from bondage
to the prince of shadows and the father of lies.

So the question is not, “What does this mean?” for this is *the meaning* of all things. The question is, “What does everything else mean now?”

For on the night He was betrayed, our Lord took bread, and when He had given thanks He broke it and said, “This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also He took the cup saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.”

So we invite you to come to His table, take His body, and drink His blood. We invite you to come if you *want* to; not if you understand everything, not if you’ve figured it all out, not if you’ve read all the books and you’ve come to a final conclusion. Come to this table if you *want* Him. I think that’s what faith is about. He’ll give you all the reasons. He *is* the reason. Amen.

Before you leave I need to say: I don’t know if G. K. Chesterton was right about whether poets go nuts or mathematicians go nuts . . . I know there are a lot of things that contribute to mental illness.

But spiritually speaking, I think it’s true: There are mathematicians of the spirit, who are called legalists and Pharisees and sinners and devils. There is a spiritual host of wicked mathematicians in the heavenly places. The evil one is a mathematician. He lurks in the shadows and counts your sins. But then you come to this table and *mess up* all his calculations!

God looks at you and sees His Son. He does a DNA check and says, “That’s my body . . . my blood!” You’re covered in the blood of the Lamb, and you belong to Him. Don’t let the evil one lie to you about that.

Amen.

Further Reading

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

-Romans 12:2

"They shall take some of the blood [of the lamb] and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. . . . This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance."

-Exodus 12:7-8, 11-14

And when the hour came, he sat at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after supper, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

-Luke 22:14-20

When the soul remembers something, it does not mean that it has an objective memory image of some thing or event, but that this image is called forth in the soul and assists in determining its direction, its action. When man remembers God, he lets his being and his actions be determined by him. . . . The peculiarity about the Israelite is that he cannot at all imagine memory, unless at the same time an effect on the totality and its direction of the will is taken for granted.

-J. Pedersen, Israel: Its Life and Culture

So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him, saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them. When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. . . . Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

-Luke 24:28-31, 35

And I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals; and I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it, and I wept much that no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look into it. Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not; lo, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders, I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth; and he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and with golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints; and they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy art thou to take the scroll and to open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on earth."

-Revelation 5:1-10

"I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh." The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever."

-John 6:51-58

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die." . . . But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

-Genesis 2:16-17, 3:4-5

Now, if we are to glance at the philosophy of sanity, the first thing to do in the matter is to blot out one big and common mistake. There is a notion adrift everywhere that imagination, especially mystical imagination, is dangerous to man's mental balance. Poets are commonly spoken of as psychologically unreliable; and generally there is a vague association between wreathing laurels in your hair and sticking straws in it. Facts and history utterly contradict this view. . . . Imagination does not breed insanity. Exactly what does breed insanity is reason. Poets do not go mad; but chess-players do. Mathematicians go mad, and cashiers; but creative artists very seldom. I am not, as will be seen, in any sense attacking logic: I only say that this danger does lie in logic, not in imagination. . . . The poet only desires exaltation and expansion, a world to stretch himself in. The poet only asks to get his head into the heavens. It is the logician who seeks to get the heavens into his head. And it is his head that splits. . . . The madman is not the man who has lost his reason. The madman is the man who has lost everything except his reason. . . . Perhaps the nearest we can get to expressing it is to say this: that his mind moves in a perfect but narrow circle. A small circle is quite as infinite as a large circle; but, though it is quite as infinite, it is not so large. . . . They are universal only in the sense that they take one thin explanation and carry it very far. But a pattern can stretch for ever and still be a small pattern. . . . But we may ask in conclusion, if this be what drives men mad, what is it that keeps them sane? By the end of this book I hope to give a definite, some will think a far too definite, answer. But for the moment it is possible in the same solely practical manner to give a general answer touching what in actual human history keeps men sane. Mysticism keeps men sane. As long as you have mystery you have health; when you destroy mystery you create morbidity. . . . The whole secret of mysticism is this: that man can understand everything by the help of what he does not understand. . . . Like the sun at noonday, mysticism explains everything else by the blaze of its own victorious invisibility.

-G. K. Chesterton, Orthodoxy

And the Word [logos, logic, reason] became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.

-John 1:14a