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Communion (Part 2)



Individual Topics - Steve Gregg

In "Communion (Part 2)", Steve Gregg explores the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, which claims that the bread and wine consumed during communion become the actual body and blood of Christ. Gregg argues that this idea is not supported by scripture and can restrict one's relationship with God if it leads to superstitious beliefs. He also discusses the original purpose and meaning of the communion meal, which was intended as a family expression of love and fellowship among believers.

Transcript

...more about the script, typically by the Roman Catholics to prove that the food that we eat at supper in certain circumstances, if it's been consecrated by a priest or whatever, that it's really not regular food anymore, and it's something that something supernatural has happened to it. We were just talking before the break about the so-called words of institution that Jesus gave at the Last Supper. He said, this is my body, this is my blood.

I don't think we need to discuss that very much more. I do want to look, however, at John 6 again. We mentioned it.

That's where, in John 6, that's where Jesus said, you have to eat my flesh and drink my blood. And while I've already made some comments about it, I do want to observe with you something of importance here. Remember I said that John's gospel, like one of the repeated themes, is that Jesus would say things that he didn't mean literally, and people react to them as if it was literal.

And in most cases, we're told later, either by the author, John, or by Jesus telling his disciples, that I didn't intend that literally. That's not really... He was talking about his body, not the temple. He was talking about spiritual rebirth, not another physical rebirth.

He was not talking about real food. He was talking about doing the will of his Father as his food. And he wasn't talking about drinking real water.

He said, I'll give you living water to drink. Now there's an interesting thing about that one, too. That's in John 4, because he specifically talks about drinking, imbibing

something that people drink, in this case water.

And he said, I'll give you living water. And she thought he meant really, literally drinking some kind of water. But he wasn't talking about drinking anything.

He was talking about the Spirit of God as the living water that's given to us. And we're told that specifically in John 7, when Jesus again mentions the living water and drinking it, in John 7, 37 through 39, says, he said, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. And he that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his bowels will flow rivers of living water.

And then John makes this comment in John 7, 39, this he spoke concerning the Holy Spirit, which was not yet given, because Christ was not yet glorified. So the living water of which Jesus spoke on that occasion at the Feast of Tabernacles in John 7, John tells us, he's talking about the Holy Spirit. But he'd used the same term three chapters earlier, talking to the one who knows, I can give you living water and you won't thirst again.

So we know, we know he wasn't talking about real water. And in both cases, he used the same expression. One time we're told it means the Holy Spirit.

So obviously we can see it that way in both cases. But both of those statements talk about drinking. If anyone's thirsty, let him come around to me, drink, I'll give you living water.

And yet nobody believes he's talking about drinking real water. He's talking about some spiritual transaction, some receptivity to something spiritual. But he uses the ordinary language of putting a cup up to your mouth and putting liquid into your mouth and down your throat.

Just like when he said, you have to drink my blood. You know, it's the same kind of imagery, it's different substance, but it's a different imagery. And when he said, eat my flesh.

I mean, remember earlier in John, he said, I have food to eat that you don't know about. His disciples thought he meant real food. He said, no, my food is to do the will of my Father and finish his work.

So he's already, before it comes to John 6, where he has to eat my flesh, drink my blood, he's already used both the image of eating food and of drinking, in that case water, figuratively. So it shouldn't be a surprise that he uses it figuratively when it comes to John 6. But in John 6, the first part of the chapter is when he feeds the 5,000, which by the way, apart from the resurrection of Christ, the feeding of the 5,000 is the only miracle of Jesus that's recorded in all the Gospels. John's Gospel only mentions seven miracles prior to the resurrection.

Six of them are unique to the book of John. The other Gospels don't mention those miracles. I take that back, there's the walk in on the water too.

That's not in all four. That's in John and in some of the synoptics, but all the miracles of Jesus besides the resurrection, that's the feeding of the 5,000. And that's in John chapter 6 at the beginning, but it was the next day after he did that, that the same people came to him asking, well they're looking for more food.

And he responded to them and says, do not labor for the food that perishes, but labor for the food that endures to eternal life, which my father will give you, he says, or which I'll give you. And they said, well what must we do to do the works of God? You said labor to get this eternal life food. What do we have to do? What is it that we have to do to do the works of the labor you're talking about? He said, this is the work of God that you believe on him whom he has sent.

Now he begins to mix it up with them because they're talking about food and they said, well Moses gave us manatee, what will you do? And he said, Moses didn't give you manatee, I'm the true bread that comes down from heaven. Whoever eats me will live forever. Now he hasn't talked about flesh and blood yet, but he starts out by talking about, I'm the true food that comes down and you have to eat me to have eternal life.

He said, your fathers ate the man in the desert and they died, they didn't get eternal life from it, but I'm the food that if you eat, you'll have eternal life. And then, you know, they kept arguing with him about that, so he got a little more graphic. You need to eat my flesh and drink my blood, which is a strange image, obviously.

If he didn't mean it literally, it's still a very offensive kind of concept, picturing it. You know, take one of Jesus' arms and take a bite out of it, like out of a drumstick or something. It's weird, it's freaky, horrible actually, and that's how they took it.

He was kind of deliberately trying to alienate those who could possibly be alienated. Jesus had a mentality that we don't really share in many times in the church, and that is, he didn't want a lot of people following him unless they were the right stuff. And so, there were a lot of people who followed him who didn't have the right motivation, so he would, he'd become deliberately offensive to drive off anyone who could be driven off.

Now, most pastors, they want to attract anyone who can be attracted to the church by any means. Jesus only wanted one means by which people would come to him. He said, the ones that my father has given me, they'll come to me.

I'm not worried about them. They'll come to me. But he said to his disciples, after most of the people left, because they were offended by what he said, he said to his disciples, will you go away also? And Peter and the disciples, they were the right stuff.

He said, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life. Now, it's

interesting, Peter didn't say, you alone have the flesh that we have to eat for eternal life. How can we give up eternal life? We have to stay around so we can eat your bones or your flesh and drink your blood.

No, he said, you have the words of eternal life. And it's very clear that eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood has to do with his words of life. And that's why he himself said near the end of that discourse, just before the disciples responded that way, in John 6.63, he says, the words I speak to you are spirit and they are life.

The flesh profits nothing. It's the spirit that gives life. The flesh isn't worth anything.

But the words I speak to you, they are spirit life. Clearly eating him has more to do with receiving his words and believing them than it has to do with any kind of physical action of putting anything in your mouth. No more than drinking living water or eating the meat that Jesus said he had that no one had given him.

These images, they're strange to our ears. They were even strange to his hearer's ears, but we have another, they're not literal. So that being so, I just want to show you something important here.

If you look in John chapter six, at verse 40, John six and verse 40, it says, this is the will of him who sent me, that everyone who sees the son and believes in him may have everlasting life. And I will raise him up at the last day. Now keep your finger on that verse and look over at verse 54.

On some Bibles that would just cross the page. He says, whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. And I will raise him up at the last day.

Now, if you could put those two verses next to each other, clause by clause, you'll see the first line is whoever, fill in the blank, whoever does this has eternal life and I'll raise him up at the last day. In the first instance, there's whoever sees the son and believes in him has everlasting life and I'll raise him up at the last day. The second case is whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I'll raise him up at the last day.

So it's clear he's talking about believing in him. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood is a weird image, but it's referring to believing in him. But that didn't prevent people from being offended.

It's very hard to keep some people from getting offended no matter what you say. But Jesus really gave him some warrant for being offended by his speech, but he knew that those who are really his own would not be put off. Like Peter, where should we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

So this is the passage, probably more than any other, that is said to promote transubstantiation, that the bread becomes the body of Christ. But he says nothing

about natural bread at all. He doesn't say you need to eat my flesh by eating this bread that has supernaturally and secretly become my flesh.

You see, my friend Mark over here was telling me during the break, something interesting, I pointed out that John doesn't even contain this story of the Last Supper. But it does contain this business about eating his flesh, drinking his blood. Those are basically the only two passages that really stand behind this particular doctrine.

We've seen that the words of the Last Supper, there's no reason to take them literally. And in this case, there's no reason to take them literally. How clear does it have to be? The words I speak to your spirit and their life, the flesh doesn't profit.

It's not the flesh, it's not the blood, literally. So I mean, I don't know how Jesus could have been more careful about making sure people didn't take him literally, and yet the whole of church history can be called an adventure in missing the point, which is a great line I wish I'd made up. There's actually a book called that, Adventures in Missing the Point.

And that's kind of what the gospels are in church history, people missing the point, and to their great danger. Because frankly, if someone is brought up thinking this is how you get eternal life, you have to eat his flesh literally and drink his blood. And you can only do that by going to a priest who's consecrated this bread.

If you don't go to the Catholic church where they have a consecrated priest, then you can't have the bread and wine consecrated, because that takes a priest to do that. And therefore you can't have eternal life. That's why many of the Catholics in the Middle Ages said there's no salvation outside the Catholic church.

You can't have eternal life unless you have the consecrated bread and wine. And yet, there's nothing in the Bible that makes any suggestion that this is true. It's strictly a man-made doctrine, and a dangerous one, because many people who have been raised Catholic have been taking the Eucharist every Sunday, some more often than that, and they don't have a clue who Jesus is today.

They don't have any concept of a relationship with Jesus. I don't say that's true of all Catholics. I believe lots of Catholics have a relationship with Jesus.

But it's so easy to substitute something when you don't have it. Frankly, a relationship with Jesus is kind of a costly thing. You might have to leave father, mother, wife, children, and your own life also, Jesus said, to follow him.

Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Unless you forsake all you have, you can't be my disciple, Jesus said. So obviously it's a costly thing.

You exchange your agenda in life for the rest of your life, for his agenda. It's his will, not yours from now on. That's a simple transaction, but not an easy one.

And many people find it harder than they want to make. But to tell you the truth, if I didn't want to make that sacrifice, and didn't want to really walk with Jesus on his terms, if someone said, no worries, here's a cracker you can eat, and that'll do it for you. You'll have eternal life from that.

People can often neglect the reality of a relationship with Jesus Christ and feel like they've got the bases covered, because they take that way from him. And their priest tells them that's where eternal life comes from, is that piece of bread there. And so that's kind of a dangerous heresy.

It doesn't keep all Catholics from coming to Christ, because some do come to Christ. Certainly throughout church history, there was a time when virtually all the godly Christians in Western Europe were Roman Catholic, and they were nonetheless godly. Saint Francis of Assisi would be an example that most of us know about.

Mother Teresa, in more recent times, another, I think, good example. I think very highly of both of them. I've read their stories, and I have no doubt that they were Christians who loved and knew Christ.

And they devoted their whole lives to him. But they also believed in the Catholic view of the Eucharist, which I think they were making a mistake. But it's not a mistake that sends you to hell, if you also are following Jesus.

You can have all kinds of mistaken notions and still be saved, thankfully, if you love Jesus. But again, how this came to be the belief, and what does the Bible actually say about these things? We read in 1 Corinthians 10, in our last session, that Paul talked about the cup that we bless, it's the communion of, or the fellowship of, the blood of Jesus. The bread we bless, it's the fellowship of the body of Christ.

But then he doesn't say anything like, because it becomes the body of Christ. He says, because we're the body of Christ. We, being many members, are one bread, one loaf.

We're the body. So, although certainly that's not the whole meaning of Jesus' words, this is my body, it's the part that Paul wanted to bring out. And he never brings out a transubstantiation idea of it.

But some think he might, in a way. If you look at the next chapter of 1 Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 11, I'm trying to think if there's any other place. I don't think there's any other places in Paul's writings that even talks about the Lord's Supper, or communion, or anything like that.

But he does mention there in 1 Corinthians 10 that he does, again, one of the most

lengthy passages outside the Gospels on this subject is, in fact, even including the Gospels, this is the lengthiest passage on the communion supper, 1 Corinthians 11. In fact, it's so common you probably, if you're raised in church like I am, they always read this passage at communion. And Paul says in verse 23, actually, I need to read before that.

The part that begins verse 23 is what they read at communion all the time, but before that we need to get the picture of what he's been talking about in verse 17. Now, in giving these instructions, I do not praise you, since you come together, not for the better, but for the worse. Imagine that.

When you come together as church, can it actually be for the worse rather than for the better? Can it be better if you hadn't come? Can it be better for Christians not even to meet, than to meet in a certain way that's for the worse? It's interesting, I used to think when I was younger, better to go to any church than no church at all. I think, well, there might be some cases where that would seem true, but frankly, apparently if you went to the Corinthian church, it was worse than if you hadn't gone. They didn't come together for the better, they came together for the worse.

But, of course, it would be better to have a church that isn't that way. He said this, for first of all, when you come together as a church, well, this is one of those rare places where we get an insight into what Christians did when they came together. First Corinthians has more of this kind of stuff than most books.

When you come together as a church, I hear that there's divisions among you, and in part I believe it, for there must also be some factions among you so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. In other words, some people have to go wrong so you can find out who's real. The church has got wheat and tares in it, you know, sheep and goats or whatever, and it's these divisions and these controversies that kind of weed out the goats and leave the approved ones, the sheep, behind.

It says, therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. Now, there's the Lord's supper. He doesn't mean that they're not meeting to keep the Lord's supper.

That's exactly what they're meeting to do. He says, but what you're doing cannot really rightly be called the Lord's supper, because the way you're doing it is unworthy of that name, the Lord's supper. That's what he means there, because he says, for in eating, each of you takes his own supper ahead of others, and one is hungry and the other is drunk.

What, do you not have houses to eat and drink in, or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you, for I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the

Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same manner, he also took the cup after the supper and said, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is a little different than the words, this cup is my blood, but it's the new covenant in my blood.

Do this as often as you do it, and drink it in remembrance of me, for as often as you eat the bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Now we need to keep reading. Therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself, so let him eat of the bread and drink the cup, for he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason, many of you are sick and weak, and some of you sleep, or that means they've died. Now what's interesting here, he says they're having a problem when they come to do the Lord's supper.

Their problem is so severe that they shouldn't even call it the Lord's supper. It's so contrary to the Lord's behavior at his own supper. Notice he says, here's what happened when Jesus came together.

He took the bread broken and he gave it to the others and said take and eat it. What were the Corinthians doing? They're taking it to themselves. They're not giving it to each other like Jesus did.

They're taking it out of the mouths of each other. Now the first thing that's obvious here is he's talking about a meal. He's not talking about a wafer.

He's talking about a meal where people are not supposed to go away hungry. Some are going away hungry because some are taking too much for themselves. The wine is sufficient that if a person drinks too much of it, they'll be drunk, by the way, which proves they weren't using non-alcoholic wine, as some people like to say.

You can drink a ton of grape juice without ever getting drunk. In fact, you'll never get drunk drinking grape juice. They drink alcoholic wine.

That's a different controversy in the church, but let's just observe what the Bible says. But the thing is, it wasn't just that it was alcoholic wine. There was enough of it that if someone hoarded more than their share, they could get drunk and did.

People who should have gone home with a full belly went home hungry because some people took more than their share. Obviously, this was a meal. This was not a little ritual with a little figurative piece of bread and a little figurative cup.

That's not how they took communion. Now, it was connected to a meal. That's obvious.

What connection it had to the meal is not so obvious, and we have some church fathers who say some things about this that might help us understand how they did it, too, because they did it for a long time. For some centuries after the time of Christ, the church still had their church around a meal. Very different than our churches.

Now, a lot of churches, by the way, we go to, they do have a meal after. Some churches, I know, they have a potluck every Sunday at the church, and they have a fellowship meal. That is getting very close to what the early church did, I believe.

But the point here is that their communion, their Lord's Supper, was a regular supper with enough for everyone to have a full meal, and that's what they called the Lord's Supper. That's the cup and the bread that they blessed. So, it would appear that eating communion, as we might call it, or Eucharist, as some of the church fathers called it, and the Catholics do, too, and others, it was something that was somehow involved in a whole meal.

It wasn't just, you know, we have a church service, and at the end or at the beginning, we take a special time out, eat a wafer, and put our thoughts on Jesus for a few seconds. That's not what they did. Their communion meal, the Lord's Supper, was wrapped up in what they called the agape feast.

It's also mentioned elsewhere. But I also want to observe this. When the Roman Catholics think they have some support for their doctrine, when Paul says that if you eat of this bread and drink of this cup unworthily, you drink judgment on yourself because you're not discerning the body of Christ.

Now, the Catholic doctrine is, when I was talking to a Catholic once, I said, suppose I don't believe in transubstantiation, but I eat bread and wine anyway, after it's been consecrated. Does it save me, even if I don't hold your doctrine? They say, no, you have to have faith in the doctrine. You have to believe that it's the literal body of Jesus.

So I thought, okay, I can't get out of it that way. But the thing is, they say the bread becomes something special because it becomes defiled if you eat it unworthily. The King James says, whoever eats and drinks of this meal unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

Now, when I was raised, I didn't really quite understand what Paul meant. I thought it meant that if I'm an unworthy person, that's why in the church I was raised in, in fact, several churches I've been in, before communion, they say, now examine your hearts and see if you've got unrepentant sin, see if there's issues there, see if you're worthy, because whoever is unworthy, whoever drinks this unworthily, they're bringing condemnation on themselves. So it's almost like you have to really see if you were really a worthy Christian every time you took it.

But Paul's not talking about that. He says, whoever eats and drinks in an unworthy manner. Now, he's talking about a situation where some of them were doing that, getting drunk, taking food more than their share so others were getting hungry.

That's an unworthy manner to take the Lord's Supper. You do that, and God's going to be unhappy with you. You're bringing condemnation on yourself because you're not acting like Christ.

You're not acting like a Christian. When Christ came together with them, he took the bread and said, take it, eat it. He didn't say, give it all to me, I want to eat it all and drink it all.

He gave it. He was there, considerate of the others at the table. He says, you need to be considerate of others at the table too.

Because why? Otherwise you're not discerning the body of Christ. Well, what does it mean by the body of Christ there? I was raised, and I think Catholics and other, many churches teach, I was raised to think that if you're not a worthy person, you're not, and you eat this meal wrong, you could be under condemnation because you're not discerning that the bread is the body of Christ. That's how the Catholics, you're not discerning the body of Christ.

But as I grew up and read it in context, I realized, oh wait, no, the problem here is that they're not discerning that the people at the table are the body of Christ. That Jesus said, in as much as you do it to the least of my brethren, you're doing it to me. You cannot injure a Christian without injuring Christ, his body.

And when you are saying, me getting enough food is more important than you getting enough food, I'm not looking at you as the body of Christ. Would I do that to him? If he was at the table, I'd say, here Jesus, let me take that last piece of bread there. I know you haven't had it yet, but I'm kind of attracted to it.

I want it, you know. I mean, you wouldn't do that to Jesus. And you're not discerning that the people at the table, they're Jesus.

They are the body of Christ. What you do to them, you're doing to Jesus. He's not saying you're not, you're failing to discern that this cracker or this piece of bread is literally the body of Christ.

That's how some want us to understand it. That's in the context, not what he's saying. By the way, he didn't say you're failing to discern the blood of Christ.

If he said you're not discerning the body of Christ or the blood of Christ, then he might be referring to the elements, but he doesn't mention the blood of Christ. What you're not discerning is the body of Christ. And in the previous chapter, we already saw that Paul

regarded the Christians to be the bread.

Remember he said, we're all, we're many, but we're one loaf, we're one bread. So Paul is thinking about this as a fellowship meal, where we recognize each other as brothers and sisters in the same body, and we treat each other that way. And if you're not, if you're just being selfish at the table and allowing someone else not to have enough, well then obviously you're not recognizing them as the body of Christ.

You're not recognizing that the Lord is gathered together in his body, or two or more are gathered. There is he in the midst, not in the bread, not in the wine, but in the people. He's there in their midst.

And so some think that this, you're defiling the body and the blood when you do this wrong. Well, I think it is true that we are supposed to, if we're trying to commemorate Jesus, we should take that seriously. We should take that as a sacred thing.

Our whole life should be a commemoration of Jesus and should be considered sacred. We're holy people, supposedly we're supposed to be. So anyway, this passage gives the impression that Paul is talking about a meal where they also had consecrated bread and wine, but it was mostly about fellowship.

And this is what was called the agape feast. In the book of Jude, Jude talks about false teachers who've come into the church. Jude only has one chapter, but in verse 12, it talks about these false teachers.

It says, these are spots in your agape feasts while they feast with you without fear, serving only themselves. Now notice the agape feast was really a feast. The false teachers, they're feasting there, a lot of food there.

It's not a ritual with a fragment of cracker and a little tiny bit of wine. These love feasts were fellowship meals. We have something similar maybe when we have a Christian potluck.

And you know, when churches have potlucks, that's probably pretty close to what the early church did. The difference is we think of the church meeting that we attend before the potluck as going to church. The potluck we just think of as extracurricular.

You can stay for that or not stay for that. It's just extra. It's just, it's not really part of a worship.

But in the early church, it seems to me like the agape feast was the primary part of the worship. I've kind of, I've described the home church we have. And I think last night I was talking about this.

We don't have a perfect church and there's no perfect people in it. But we are doing

things a little more the way that we think is closer to the way the early church did things. And you know, people arrive at our house around 10 o'clock and start eating.

They bring food. Other people bring food. So they arrive and start eating about 10 o'clock.

About a half hour later we break up the fellowship and the meeting and sit and gather in a room and we worship and we sing and we have that extended time of prayer together. Then we take a break and then go back to the kitchen and eat some more. Yeah, about 10-15 minutes later we say, let's come over here and we have a Bible study that maybe goes about an hour.

And when that's done, what do you do? You eat some more. The Bible study usually ends by one o'clock and the people usually leave the eating around four o'clock. In other words, from 10 to four, about six hours, it's mostly eating.

We get an hour of Bible study and probably an hour of worship and singing and prayer together. So there's a couple of hours of church stuff. But there's twice as much eating.

Now, I don't say churches have to do that. But that's partly due to the fact that when I read in the Bible of the early gatherings, they had these agape feasts that were the main thing. That was the Lord's Supper that they took together.

And I don't know because the church fathers who describe it don't get into the details as much as I wish they did. But I don't know if they took a break in the meal and said, okay, everyone, ding, ding, ding, ding on the glass. You know, we're going to just remember Jesus' body now by taking this bread and we're going to remember him by drinking this wine.

Kind of just in the midst of a meal, maybe tagged on at the end of the meal, but it's somehow part of the meal. We find that in the early church, there were two concepts that were joined together into one initially. And one was called the agape feast, which was a fellowship meal.

And then there was what they called the Eucharist, which was the Thanksgiving. The word Eucharist means Thanksgiving in Greek. So, and the Thanksgiving probably was set off in some measure of ritual just so they say, okay, let's remember Jesus when we eat this bread, let's remember him when we drink this cup.

But it was like part of the meal. How it was integrated, we are not told. But we can see that they did it all at one time.

Now, as church, you read the centuries of the church fathers' efforts, eventually, although they acknowledge this taking place at the same time, eventually, it becomes two different things. Eventually, the Eucharist is separated from the agape feast, and it

becomes just part of the church service, a small part of the church service. And the agape feast is eventually seemingly abandoned as part of their normal fellowship.

And that would agree with the kind of change that took place in the church mentality. What Jesus established, and what the church was initially, was a family, not a religion. Eventually, the church meetings took on Christianity became a religion.

You know, the Bible never uses the word Christianity. It's not a biblical word. Even the word Christian is only in there three times.

And Christianity, in our mind, is one of the great world religions. But in Jesus' lifetime, he never mentioned a religion. He already had a religion.

He was a Jew. He went to the temple, he went to synagogue. I mean, his disciples were Jews.

They lived under Jewish law. That was their religion. What Jesus called out from that was people to be a family.

The most common word in Jesus' teaching was the word, if it wasn't kingdom, was the word father, your father, your father, which was not a term that was used for God among the Jews, generally speaking. Jesus called out of the Jewish religion, a group of people to be a family, to see themselves as brothers and sisters. And God is their father, they're children of God.

That's the most common terminology for the church in the Bible. There's terminology in the Bible that refers to the church as the temple of the Holy Spirit, or the body of Christ, or even the bride of Christ. But those are more or less rare.

What's not rare at all from beginning to end of the Bible is language of family, your brothers, your sisters, your father, we're children of God. And family is not the same as religion. Family is relationship.

That's why when you hear the old cliché, Christian is not a religion, it's a relationship. I've heard that cliché all my life. It's quite literally true.

Jesus didn't, to our knowledge, start a religious system. True, he appointed the apostles to be the leaders of the rest of the family, but someone's got to be the older brother, someone's got to take charge, someone's got to represent the father's interest to the younger brothers and sisters who don't know which end is up, or which, they don't know the right hand from the left, like the people of Nineveh. But the truth is that a meal, a fellowship meal, is much more like a family expression.

When you eliminate the meal, and you just incorporate this little ritual into a meeting that's mostly ritual, religious ritual, it reflects part of the change in mentality about what

Christianity is. It went from being family to being a religion, very largely with ritual. And this is what gave the church the idea that it's okay to split over differences of doctrine.

You don't split your family over differences of opinion. A Christian might be married to a non-Christian, or have non-Christian kids, but they don't split the family over it. I some people do, but it certainly isn't the right thing to do.

If a family has Democrats and Republicans, and they totally disagree with you, you don't split the family over it. If you do, you're doing the wrong thing. Families are bound together by something other than mere agreement about subjects.

But religions are bound together by agreement about religious subjects and doctrine, things like that. And so, as Christianity became a religion, and ceased to operate like a family of loving people, differences of opinion that wouldn't have split them before, and there were differences of opinion, even in Paul's time in the church. What did he tell them to do? He said, let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

He didn't say break off and start different denominations. He said, listen, you don't have that option. You can't say, some of you, I'm of Paul, and some of Paul's, and some of Cephas, and kind of break into divisive groups.

Families can't do that. But later, when the church was just a religion defined by the right doctrines, and the right rituals, people who didn't agree with those doctrines could be kicked out. In fact, from Augustine taught, they could be burned at the stake.

You don't burn your family members at the stake when they disagree with you. But you see, when you stop thinking of the church as family, and you think of it as an organization where its beliefs are sacred beliefs, and its practices are sacred beliefs, and that anyone who disagrees with them is an offense to God, so much so that, you know, people who are faithful to God should burn those people at the stake. You've got a totally different phenomenon than church, as the early church was formed to be.

And you can see that very largely in their eating in the agape feast, the word agape means love. It was an expression of their family love, of their fellowship as a family. And it was not very religious, except perhaps, I'm not even sure if they call this religious, but certainly at some point when they would say, let's raise a glass to Jesus and remember his blood, and let's eat this bread in remembrance of him.

Assuming they did that during the feast sometime. Well, that might be considered the religious part of it, but I don't think it was the major part. It's when that religious element became the only element.

And the feast was, you know, *passé*. No one was thinking of each other as brothers and sisters or family, or they're thinking of themselves as adherents to a sacred set of doctrines, which is offensive, if anyone disagrees, offensive enough to kill them. I mean,

suddenly Christianity, as Jesus has said, didn't exist anymore.

There were still Christians. The world has always had Christians. A lot of them got burned at the stake.

A lot of them were tortured in the Inquisition. A lot of them were hunted down and killed by the popes and so forth, because they didn't agree with the official sacred doctrines and practices of the church. But they loved Jesus.

And, I mean, a lot of people loved Jesus. The Waldensians, you know, the Paulicians, the Huguenots, and so forth. There were a lot of groups that were persecuted, but they weren't people who didn't love Jesus.

There were people who didn't agree with the doctrines. John Hus burned at the stake by the Catholic Church, just because he disagreed. He had the same doctrines that Luther would teach a century later, but he didn't have the advantage of a German king to hide him from the Catholic authorities, so he got burned.

Luther did get hidden, so he survived it. The point I'm making is Christianity, when it got institutionalized, became a religion instead of a family. All kinds of errors and maladies became part of it, and we still see them when we're told there's 44,000 denominations.

That's just the tail end of 2,000 years of doing it wrong, and something that is very sad. But I want to give you some of the Testaments of the Church Fathers in the earliest centuries about the Eucharist and the agape feast, because it says, I already mentioned, Jude verse 12 says that the false teachers, they come to your agape feasts, and they feast among you, but they're just serving themselves and thinking only of themselves. Justin, or the Didache, which is a Christian document from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century, it's very early, it was well respected in the early church enough that some people would have put it in the canon of the New Testament if they could.

It was widely read and respected, and in it, it actually says, when you have accomplished the memorial which is made of me and the agape love feast, dot, dot, dot. Now, this is apparently Jesus, oh, I'm sorry, that's not from the Didache, I have a Didache quote, but this is from the Epistula Apostolorum, which is an Ethiopic Orthodox document from the early second century, about 150 maybe. It says, it's a conversation, it's an apocryphal book, but it's from very early in Egypt and Ethiopia, what we call the Coptic church.

There's this alleged conversation between Jesus and the disciples, one thing he says, when you have accomplished the memorial which is made of me and the agape love feast, then he goes on. He makes a distinction between the memorial and the agape, but he indicates that they kind of end in their practice together, at the end of the service or at the end of the feast and the memorial. But Didache, which I mentioned earlier, at the

end of the first century said, concerning the thanksgiving, which the word is Eucharist in the Greek, considering the Eucharist, give thanks in this way.

Then after it says, after you are filled, give thanks in this way. Now, notice the Eucharist was something that at the end of it, you'd be filled, your stomach would be filled, you know. You can go to a Catholic church and take Eucharist every week and you'll never get filled on that way.

Nor, I mean, let's not pick on them, basically any Protestant church. I don't know any Protestant churches where when you take the communion there, you go away filled from that particular action. But Didache indicated that when you're eating the Eucharist, give thanks in this way.

And then when your belly is full, when you're filled, give this thanksgiving. So obviously, thanksgiving was given at two different points. One was during the Eucharist, one was when your belly was full, which probably was from the agape feast and it doesn't really indicate that they weren't done together.

Justin Martyr, writing about 138 AD, he said, as we have been taught the food taken with thanksgiving, that is Eucharist, in the words of prayer, he handed down to us is the flesh and blood of that of Christ who became flesh. Our flesh and blood are strengthened by this eating and drinking for our transformation. Now, our physical bodies are strengthened by eating this.

Not by eating a crumb, not by drinking a little thing, but when you eat a meal, your flesh and blood are strengthened. The assumption is, of course, they're taking this Eucharistic thanksgiving feast at the same time as a regular feast, which was the agape. Clement of Alexander, he said, well, let's skip over that because he's hard to understand, Tertullian says, the nature of our meal and its purpose are explained by its very name.

It's called agape, as the Greeks call love in its purest sense. The food brought is used for the benefit of all who are in need, obviously, who are hungry, it's to feed people. To respect the lowly is all important with God.

Notice he doesn't say to take a magic bread crumb, that's all important, no, to respect the lowly, the humble, the poor, to feed them, that's all important to God. That's what Justin Martyr understood Christianity, I think most people did in his day. He said, the participants do not go to the table unless they have first tasted prayer to God.

As much is eaten as is necessary to satisfy the hungry, as much is drunk as is good for those who live a disciplined life. After the hands are washed and the lights are lit, all are asked to stand forth and to praise God as well as each is able, be it from the holy scriptures or from his own heart. The meal is closed with prayer.

After this, we part from one another, always pursuing the same self-control and purity as

befits those who've taken in a truth rather than a meal. This is the way Christians meet. It's a very useful, very early testimonium from a major church leader about how Christians met.

Notice there's no reference to any words of consecration over bread or wine. There's a meal, to be sure, and everyone eats as much as satisfies their hunger. Everyone drinks as much as a self-disciplined person would reasonably drink, and they make sure there's enough for the poor.

It's all important that the care of the needy and the lowly is observed. This is like a family making sure that everyone has enough to eat, but there's no record of a special religious ritual associated with it. He talks very much in detail.

First they do this, then they do this, then they do this, and then they give thanks, and then they leave, and that's how Christians meet. Interesting that there's no mention at all of a Eucharistic aspect, though I think we'd understand as other church fathers that that was incorporated in the agape feast somehow, but it's not treated as something separate or the focal point of the gathering, interestingly enough. So, you know, the mention of the agape feast is in several of the church fathers.

Well, let me just raise a few points in summary, because we're supposed to quit in about seven minutes, so I'll just be just in time. I have about six or seven points, and you know I can make a point in one minute, right? I've said some of this already, but I just would summarize. If the idea is true that in Christian communion rituals, whether you call it the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper, whatever you call it, if it is true that something supernatural happens there associated with the bread and wine, whether you believe the Catholic view that it actually becomes the body and blood of Jesus, literally, whether you take the Eastern Orthodox view that they just say, well, the real presence of Christ's body and blood are in the elements.

They don't go so far as to say, I've got transubstantiation, or they say, well, it's mysterious, but the real presence of Christ, you're actually eating really the body and blood of Jesus, not just a memorial. Or Luther's view that the real body of Christ is above, below, beside, through the bread, and likewise, the blood of Christ with the wine. Or you take some other, maybe more moderate view, Presbyterians and Reformed people, generally speaking.

I didn't know this until I visited a Presbyterian church. I'm not a Presbyterian, and I'm not Reformed in my theology, but I had friends who were, and I went to their church, and when they had communion, I don't know if they always do it this way, I suppose it's, you go up to the front row, and the elders would come up with bread and wine. I think they, as I recall, I think they dip the cracker in the wine and give to you, and they said, the body of Jesus, the blood of Jesus, and as if to say, that's what you're eating now, is the body and blood of Jesus.

Now, they don't believe in transubstantiation, but they do believe there's something different about that bread and wine when you drink it, related to actually it being the body and blood of Jesus somehow. Many groups don't explain what they mean, because frankly, there's no reasonable explanation. I think the Roman Catholics are just about the only ones who believe such a thing, who actually try to explain it.

Others just say, well, it's a mystery, but what if it isn't a mystery? What if there's nothing supernatural that takes place in that moment? What if it's just doing what Jesus said? Do this, when you do this, remember me. Just remember my body, my blood. Remember my sacrifice, whenever you do this.

It's interesting that that's really the best that the evidence of Scripture, or the earliest saints of the Church Fathers, could get out of that statement. All the other stuff, as near as I can tell, wasn't really affirmed in the Church until after the conversion of Constantine, and the mixture of pagan ideas with Christianity, but some of them die hard. I mean, they're still with us.

But if it is, in fact, a miracle, as I said, it's the only miracle God ever did that we know about, that cannot be seen or verified in any way. It can't really be a sign, like Jesus' miracles were called, because a sign is something you can see. It says in Mark chapter 16, verse 20, it says that the apostles, whenever we're preaching the gospel, the Lord working with them, confirming the word with signs following.

The miracles the apostles did were signs to confirm their word, but you can only confirm it to skeptical people if they can see the sign. And if it's an invisible transaction that can't be demonstrated chemically or scientifically at all, and certainly nothing observable changes, it's not really like any of the miracles of God. And one thing it's not like is the other miracles of God are actually stated in Scripture.

This particular alleged miracle is never stated in Scripture. It's a counterintuitive meaning that's imposed on statements of Scripture, and they don't really say that. Remember Jesus said, it's not what goes into a man's mouth that defiles him, it's what comes out of a man's mouth that defiles him.

And basically he went on to say, because whatever goes in the mouth, it just goes right through. Now, by the same principle, if eating defiled food doesn't defile you, why would eating sacred food confer any sacred benefit on you? It's not what you eat that has anything to do with this. It's who you are.

It's what's in your heart. It's not what you put in your mouth that makes you saved or unsaved, or spiritual or unspiritual. Jesus said that in the reverse.

It seems to me like he would agree with it in turning that around too. A third thing, the Jerusalem Council, when they met to decide if the Gentiles who become Christians have

to also become Jews and be circumcised, they decided not to. But they did say, let us give them some instructions.

Let's ask them to abstain from blood and things strangled and meat sacrificed to idols and from fornication. Now, abstain from eating blood, if every Sunday or every day that they took communion, they believed they were eating blood, literally eating blood, which is what Catholics teach, then those instructions would be unintelligible. It would be strange.

Let's just make sure of all the things we can tell them not to eat any blood. Yeah, but every time they get together, supposedly they're eating blood. If transubstantiation is true, which of course, we have no reason to believe that it is, another thing is that Paul said there were some in Rome, in Romans chapter 14, who believed they could eat all things and others were unwilling to eat anything but vegetables.

If you feel a conviction to be a vegetarian in the church, Paul said, well, let everyone be fully persuaded his own mind. That's okay. You can be a vegetarian if you want to, but not if you're supposed to eat human flesh and drink human blood.

Every time you get together for church with people, you're going to eat human flesh. That would kind of go against the grain of those who thought they could only eat vegetables. And yet Paul was okay with them only eating vegetables.

Would that mean he didn't believe they should take communion? It's okay for them not to? Well, there's no evidence that Paul ever believed that taking communion had anything to do with eating flesh or drinking blood, literally, and therefore he didn't see how he had to correct those who were eating only vegetables. In Acts 10.14, I mentioned that Peter, on the housetop, when the unclean animals were loaded, he said, I've never eaten anything unclean, which is something that he really couldn't say if he'd been eating human flesh and drinking blood ever since the day of Pentecost. He'd be eating unclean things all the time.

He might think it justifiable because Christ commanded it, but on this occasion in Joppa, Christ was commanding him to eat these unclean animals, which arguably would be, even though Jews found unclean animals disgusting, I would think they considered considerably less disgusting than eating human flesh and drinking human blood. And Peter didn't object to Jesus' words of institution at the table at the Last Supper, and yet he objected to this, saying, I've never eaten anything unclean. Clearly, he did not see himself as, on a regular basis, eating literally human flesh and drinking human blood.

He would have reacted on a much less offensive, parallel thing. The last point I want to make is that the idea of a magical change or a miraculous change of bread and wine into actual living stuff, human flesh and human blood, is the most bizarre of all the teachings Christianity has ever taught. Now, the Bible doesn't teach it, so as a Christian, you don't

have to teach it, you shouldn't, but Christianity, the religion, has taught it, and it's been very central from about the fourth century on to the present time in certain churches.

And let's face it, it's bizarre. People who are raised with it might have gotten used to it, so it doesn't seem bizarre anymore. But try to step out of that and say, okay, suppose you weren't raised Catholic and you weren't used to this, and this actually turns into human flesh.

That's the most bizarre, counterintuitive thing that any Christian doctrine has ever suggested. And yet, there's not a word in the Bible that actually affirms it. And even if there was, you'd expect a lot of affirmation of it, just to overcome the skepticism that every person would naturally have about a miracle impossible to affirm, impossible to observe, and impossible to find any reference to in the Bible.

You'd think that those who believed that was a very important thing for their salvation would have mentioned it a lot, and would have mentioned it plainly. The verses that are there, that's based on John 6, and then the words of institution at the Last Supper, they don't in any plain sense teach transubstantiation. But they both plainly say that Jesus is speaking figuratively.

Which you would have known anyway, even if they didn't say so. Again, in John 6, he closes his discussion by saying, the words I speak to you are spirit. In the upper room where he had the Last Supper, he finally says, until now I've been speaking to you in figurative terms.

Now, anyone who'd say that those two passages have to be taken literally are going against what Jesus himself said about his words. And that's all they've got. That's all they've got.

So you might say, well, how in the world could they become devoted to this doctrine? I suspect it's this, that in the early days of the church, obviously people were not very literate. They didn't have Bibles to read. The church evolved from being a family that Jesus had put together to being a religious order, a religious system.

And rituals came to replace realities, as usually happens in religion. And their priests, in many cases, were not very scrupulous. The priests and bishops, well, there were no priests in the early church in the first few centuries, but eventually the bishops began to appoint priests.

And this is after the church had changed into a religion. You need priests in a religion. In a family of everyone's a priest.

You don't need special, you know, sacerdotal orders in a family, but, you know, a family of priests, well, they're priests, but they don't have to get together and conduct religious meetings for other people who aren't priests. The church didn't have any of those kinds

of priests in the first centuries. But once a church begins to be a religious power to be regular with, because the emperor has become one of you, and now you've got political power.

You've got the ability to control people forcibly, and you want them to agree to it. So you need to give them a whole bunch of superstitious ideas that make them think if they disobey the church and its structure, they're going to hell. And, you know, and then you begin to make up these things.

What you have to do, you need a priest to consecrate this bread, because if a priest doesn't consecrate it, then you're not eating the body of Christ. And that's what you really need. Jesus said, you don't eat my flesh, you don't eat my blood, you don't have life.

So you need to eat the body and blood of Jesus. If that's not literal, you can do that without a priest. But if it's literal, you need someone who has the magic powers to make the change of bread into body.

And so you begin to have this seemingly as a controlling thing. And that's, it's only after that point that you begin hearing church fathers talk about it really becomes the body and blood of Jesus. The church fathers didn't affirm that before that.

And so what happened is Christianity became not a family, but a religion. And then of course, religions, I think most religions appeal very strongly to superstitious people. I don't consider myself to be a religious person.

I'm a follower of Jesus. I go to church, we have church, I don't consider that a religious meeting, I consider that to be a family meeting. Getting together as a family to worship our father and honor, you know, our Lord and so forth.

But none of those are specifically religious things. They've just been cast in a religious way in the minds of Christians over the centuries. And so it's interesting that such a thing that the Bible never actually plainly says and seems to plainly speak against has become the central thing in so much a percentage of the church.

And I think, I think it's hurtful, though, as I said, I don't think it, I don't think the doctrine itself necessarily prevents people from having a relationship with God. Because many people who believe the Catholic doctrine do walk with God and love God and obey God. And they do appear to have a relation with God, that's a good thing.

And I think they're saved. The problem is that superstitions can give people the idea that they are right with God because they're doing the ritual thing, even though they've never done the real thing. They've never really gotten according with Jesus or God, don't have any relation with him.

And so that's why it's, I think, important enough to talk about. If I meet somebody who believes in transubstantiation, it doesn't bother me. I mean, I believe they're mistaken, but I meet people I think are mistaken all the time on different subjects, but that doesn't have to matter.

Unless I see that that's what they're putting their trust in instead of a relationship with God. And if that's the case, it's really damaging them spiritually. But a person who really has a relationship with God and still believes in that, that's between them and God.

I mean, you can die with many mistakes you're making as long as one of them is not your rejection of Christ.