



WOW: Word Of the Week

MEMORIAL

May 29, 2023

The calendar says “Memorial Day.” I remember when it was called Decoration Day. Memorial Day originally honored fallen soldiers. The expanded modern version decorates the graves of all those who have gone before us.

The word memorial is associated with monuments, remembering those who have died. The OKC Memorial, WW2 Memorial, Korean War Veterans Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, 9/11 Memorial. This reflects the definition, “something, especially a structure, to remind people of a person or event, a monument built as a memorial.” Another definition, “A memorial is an object or place which serves as a focus for the memory of a deceased person or a historical, often tragic, event.”

I often hear the Lord’s Supper described as a memorial. Only one problem. The Bible does not use that exact terminology. The word “memorial” appears only once in the NT (ESV), in Acts 10:4. The Greek word appears two other times (Matt. 26:13 and Mark 14:9), in the story of the woman who anointed Jesus. In these two passages, ESV translates “in memory of her.”

The Greek word anamnesis, remembrance, is used with reference to the Lord’s Supper in Luke 22:19, Jesus told his disciples to eat the Passover meal in remembrance of him. Paul uses the same word in 1 Cor. 11:24,25. In Heb. 10:3, the annual sacrifice in Judaism recalled the sins of the people year after year. Same word. This word means to remember again, perhaps to remember forward.

There are two ways to remember. We can remember backward or we can remember forward. At times, I hear the prayer, “Lord, help our minds go back...” That description of the Supper and its purpose gives me pause. I think that the better goal would be that the crucifixion of Christ would be brought forward into our lives today as a model that calls us to sacrificial living.

Grady King recently wrote about visiting the Alamo. He observed that the Alamo was first established as a MISSION. The frontier mission often became a place of REFUGE. The Alamo then became a BATTLEGROUND and eventually a MONUMENT. Grady drew a parallel to the contemporary church. What began as a mission eventually became a refuge, often turning into a battleground, more and more resembling a monument to the good old days.

Memorial Day with its neatly aligned monuments points us backward. Remember the sacrifices of others. Not so the Supper. Paul wrote that the Supper is declaration of the future: Jesus is coming back! The Supper is discerning the body, perhaps a reference to the physical body on the cross; but considering the context, a reference to the spiritual body of Christ, the church, is also valid.

Not a memorial that looks backward, but a remembering forward that makes Christ’s mission my mission. The Supper should move us forward, not backward. The Supper is challenge. Biblically, the Supper does not primarily call me to reverently, somberly, silently contemplate past events—my own unworthiness and Christ’s payment for my sins. The Supper calls me to proclamation, fellowship, living out God’s purpose for my life, and participating fully in God’s mission in this world.

Where will God’s people find courage? Where will God’s people find power for sacrificial living? Who knows? Perhaps a careful review of what the Bible says about the place and power of the Supper in the life of the church will call us forward to increasing faithfulness and daily involvement in God’s great salvation plan for the world, through Jesus Christ. We simply pray, Amen, May It Be So.