

In Paul's account of the institution of the supper as given in I Cor. xi., 23-27, at precisely the same point in the proceedings, viz., after the distribution of the cup, we have a remark introduced which is commonly regarded as wholly peculiar to Paul. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." In form this certainly is found nowhere else, and many take it as not intended to be a report of anything said by Christ, but rather as the reflection of an after time in explanation of the rite. "Not the words of Christ," says Meyer. "That these are not the words of Christ is certain," says Edwards. "St. Luke has them not." But assuming that it is the ideas, and not the words, which are important, may we not find here simply Paul's version of the saying given by the three evangelists? It contains precisely the same suggestion as to His own death on the one hand and precisely the same assurance as to His coming again on the other. In addition to these, Paul's form of it further suggests the perpetuation of the rite in the church with reference to both His death and His return. But part of that at least is already implied in the previous command to observe it as His memorial, and not unnaturally colours this. It includes likewise a reference to both eating and drinking, but this is merely the condensation of Luke's two sayings of the same import into one. Paul's form of the saying is probably that which had become traditional among Christians as most appropriate for use in the administration of the rite. The others approach more nearly to the historical words as they were actually uttered.

The variation in form may perhaps, however, find its chief explanation in the fact that all the forms are severe condensations. As is well known, John's gospel contains no account of the institution of the supper, and therefore we would not expect to find this saying reported in any form. Nor is there anything that bears any close resemblance to it. But instead, we have a discourse of over three chapters on precisely the same themes—His approaching death and His subsequent return—represented as spoken at the passover, immediately after the departure of Judas from the company. (John xiii. 31, to xvi. 33.) Even if, as many think, this is a free expansion of what was really said, it indicates that something more than a single oracular sentence lies behind all the records of the occasion.

This comparison of the different reported forms of the words of Christ during the institution of the supper makes it very clear that too much stress should not be laid on the absolute accuracy of the language attributed to Him here or elsewhere. The memory of the reporters was not like a phonograph which gives out the identical words and tones that have been spoken into it. They remembered as other people remember—rather ideas or impressions than exact words, and in giving them forth clothed them in their