

Church Basics



Understanding The Lord's Supper

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Understanding the Lord's Supper

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“Biblical and historical truths meet real life today. Bobby Jamison has served us well once again.”

—Mark Dever

CHURCH BASICS SERIES PREFACE

The Christian life is the church life. This basic biblical conviction informs every book in the Church Basics series.

That conviction in turn affects how each author treats his topic. For instance, the Lord's Supper is not a private, mystical act between you and Jesus. It is a meal around the family table in which you commune with Christ and Christ's people. The Great Commission is not a license to head into the nations as Jesus' witness all by oneself. It is a charge given to the whole church to be fulfilled by the whole church. The authority of the church rests not only with the leaders, but with the entire assembly. Every member has a job to do, including you.

Every book is written *for* the average church member, and this is a crucial point. If the Christian life is a church life, then you, a baptized believer and church member, have a responsibility to understand these basic topics. Just as Jesus charges you with promoting and protecting his gospel message, so he charges you with promoting and protecting his gospel people, the church. These books will explain how.

You are like a shareholder in Christ's gospel ministry corporation. And what do good shareholders do? They study their company, study the market, and study the competition. They want the most out of their investment. You, Christian, have invested your whole life in the gospel. The purpose of the series, then, is to help you maximize the health and kingdom profitability of your local congregation for God's glorious gospel ends.

Are you ready to get to work?

Jonathan Leeman

Series Editor

Books in the Church Basics series:

Understanding the Great Commission, Mark Dever

Understanding Baptism, Bobby Jamieson

Understanding the Lord's Supper, Bobby Jamieson

Understanding the Congregation's Authority, Jonathan Leeman

Understanding Church Discipline, Jonathan Leeman

Understanding Church Leadership, Mark Dever

Introduction

There is something about a meal that can make you feel right at home—or just the opposite. Few things are more comforting than home-cooked food with loving family or friends. And few things make you feel like more of a stranger than eating food you’ve never heard of, with people you’ve never met, in a place whose customs are a mystery. I recently moved with my family to England, where a culinary task as miniscule as eating peas is loaded with social significance. Peas!? I know. Tell me about it.

If you asked most Christians whether they ate a meal in church, they would probably say something like, “Well, no, we don’t eat a meal in church, but once in a while we have a potluck afterward.” And on one level that’s true enough.

But what about the Lord’s Supper? Sure, it’s probably not enough to fill your stomach, but you’re still eating and drinking, still seated together. What does this meal say about Jesus and his people? What does this meal have to do with belonging to Jesus’ family?

This little book is a biblical primer on the Lord’s Supper. It’s aimed at all Christians, anyone who is interested in learning more about this meal Jesus gave us. A few sections will be most relevant to church leaders, yet even these were written with the whole church in mind.

I have three goals in this book, and they all overlap:

1. **Consider the Bible.** The first is to survey, summarize, and synthesize the Bible’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper. This is the primary task of chapters 1–7. The first five chapters are snapshots of the Bible’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper: the Passover which foreshadows it (chap. 1), Jesus’ institution of it (chap. 2), Paul’s instructions regarding it (chaps. 3–4), and the coming wedding feast of the Lamb that it anticipates (chap. 5). Chapter 6 ties all this material together by unpacking a definition of the Lord’s Supper.

2. **Connect the Supper and the church.** Chapter 7 is where my second goal steps into the foreground, though it’s never far from view: to show how the Lord’s Supper relates to the local church. The Lord’s Supper

actually plays a role in making the church a church, binding many into one. Too few Christians—even too few pastors—have thought carefully about how tightly the Lord’s Supper is tied to the local church. So I want to train the spotlight on the Lord’s Supper’s church-shaping significance.

3. **Provide practical counsel.** My third goal is to provide biblical, practical counsel about how churches and individual Christians should celebrate the Lord’s Supper. So in chapters 8–12 I ask a series of questions and answer them based on the biblical picture sketched in chapters 1–7: What gathering may celebrate the Lord’s Supper? Who may participate in the Lord’s Supper? Who should lead the Lord’s Supper? How should churches practice the Lord’s Supper? And, finally, how should individuals approach the Lord’s Supper?

This little book has a sibling called *Understanding Baptism* (B&H, 2016). The two complement each other; some issues briefly touched on here are treated in more depth there. Also, before writing these bite-sized books, I wrote a heartier one called *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (B&H Academic, 2015). Chapters 6 and 7 in this book summarize some of the arguments of chapter 6 in that one, and I borrow a few other bits where the two overlap. My thanks to the publisher for letting me carve off some of the roast so that I can serve it up here.

You can see it coming but I just can’t resist: I hope that this introduction has whetted your appetite for the rest of the book. We’ll start where the biblical roots of the Lord’s Supper start, with a meal on the go.

CHAPTER 1

Takeout

When God took his people out of the land of Egypt, he told them to get takeout. Or at least to get some fast food. And that meal on the go defined a nation. It told them who they were, where they came from, and what God did to save them.

Jacob's descendants were being crushed under Pharaoh's heel, and God had had enough. He remembered the promise he made to Abraham, to bring his offspring into the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:12–17; Exod. 2:23–25). So he sent Moses and Aaron to demand that Pharaoh release the people. But Pharaoh wouldn't let his precious slaves go. So God hurled plague after plague on the Egyptians (Exod. 4–10). Finally, God declared that he would kill all the firstborn sons of Egypt, because Pharaoh refused to let Israel, God's firstborn, go (Exod. 4:22–23; 11:1–10).

The stage is set for Israel's flight. And on the eve of their deliverance, God tells the people to slaughter a year-old sheep or goat, smear its blood over their front doors, roast the animal, and eat the meat—all of it—that night (Exod. 12:1–8). They're to roast it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (v. 8). The Lord even tells them how they are to eat it: “you must be dressed for travel, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. You are to eat it in a hurry; it is the LORD's Passover” (v. 11). This is no languid feast; it's food for the road.

But this is more than a meal. The blood on their doors is the people's salvation:

“I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night and strike every firstborn male in the land of Egypt, both man and beast. I am Yahweh; I will execute judgments against all the gods of Egypt. The blood on the houses where you are staying will be a distinguishing mark for you; when I see the blood, I will pass over you. No plague will be among you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.”
(vv. 12–13)

Why did God spare his people? Not because they deserved to live while the Egyptians didn't. The reason God passed over his people was that they were covered by the blood of a sacrifice.

God commanded his people to celebrate this Passover meal as a yearly memorial (vv. 14–20, 24–27). This same time every year the Israelites were to clear yeast out of their homes, slaughter the Passover animal, and eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

Every year this festival would celebrate how God delivered them from Egypt. Children would learn from this meal how God saved and spared his people (vv. 26–27). Every year the Israelites would celebrate the day when God freed them, delivered them, made good on his promise to make them his people.

This meal marked the birth of their nation. Who is Israel? The people rescued by God from Egypt. And the Passover reminded them year by year that they were a people—the only people—whom God freed from slavery and made his own.

This is why only Israelites, not foreigners, could eat the Passover (v. 43). If a foreigner wanted to celebrate the Passover, he and the males in his household had to be circumcised first, becoming “like a native of the land” (v. 48). The Passover defined the identity of Israel and therefore the membership of Israel: “The whole community of Israel must celebrate it” (v. 47), and only the community of Israel may celebrate it.

So, year by year, generation by generation, the people of Israel were to celebrate the Passover. God told that first generation, “On that day explain to your son, ‘This is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt’” (Exod. 13:8). But of course, not just the first generation of Israelite fathers were to say this. At another yearly festival, later generations of Israel were commanded to see themselves in the exodus from Egypt, saying: “The Egyptians mistreated and afflicted us . . . and the LORD heard our cry” (Deut. 26:5–8). Similarly, every generation of Israel was to say, “This Passover is because of what the Lord did for *me* when *I* came out of Egypt. This redemption wasn't just for them, then; it is for us, now.”

In the exodus, God saved a people for himself through the blood of a sacrifice. He freed them from slavery and made them his own. And on the night before that great act of deliverance, he gave them a meal to celebrate ever after. This meal defined the people. They all celebrated it, and no one

else could. By retelling the story of their salvation, this meal brought God's past act of deliverance into the present. It told every Israelite that they had been a slave, and that their God is a God who rescues.

CHAPTER 2

Sealed in Blood

What's the most serious promise you've ever made? How did you confirm or attest that promise?

When you purchase a home, your promise to pay the owner takes the form of a signed contract that legally binds you to your word. When you get married, husband and wife pronounce vows before witnesses, and often exchange rings as a sign of their promise.

When Jesus made good on God's greatest promise to his people, he sealed it in his blood. The night before he was crucified, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples (Luke 22:14–15). But he turned that Passover into something new, something that looks not to deliverance from Egypt, but to the deliverance God achieved on the cross (Matt. 26:17–28; Mark 14:12–26; Luke 22:7–22).

Luke tells us that Jesus longed for this meal with his disciples: “When the hour came, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘I have fervently desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer’” (Luke 22:14–15). The biblical teaching on the Passover assumes that families will celebrate the meal together. That's why fathers are told to explain its meaning to their sons (Exod. 13:14). But this Passover is different. By celebrating the Passover with his disciples, Jesus turns friends into family. Jesus is saying that his family are those who receive his sacrifice.

In the midst of this Passover meal, Jesus “took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, ‘This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me’” (Luke 22:19). After this, “In the same way He also took the cup after supper and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant established by My blood; it is shed for you’” (Luke 22:20). Jesus is re-making the Passover in order to tell his disciples how to understand the death he's about to die. It's no accident, no mistake. It's not taking Jesus by surprise or happening against his will. Instead, Jesus is going to *give* his

body for his disciples (Luke 22:19). He is going to shed his blood “for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Jesus’ death will, at long last, bring God’s promised new covenant to life: “This cup is the new covenant established by My blood; it is shed for you” (Luke 22:20). Centuries before, God had promised to make a new covenant with his people (Jer. 31:31–34). In this new covenant, God would write his law on the people’s hearts, transforming them from the inside out so that they love what he loves and do what he commands. They would all know him, from the least to the greatest. He would forgive their sins fully and finally, remembering them no more.

All this, Jesus is saying, is now going to happen through his death. God is going to seal his new covenant promise in Jesus’ blood.

Jesus took the bread and said, “This is My body.” He took the cup and said, “This is My blood” (Matt. 26:26–28). How can he identify the elements of this meal with himself like this? He is making the bread and wine a sign of the new covenant. He is tying them to God’s new covenant promise like we tie a ring to a wedding vow. I could say to my wife, “This ring is my promise to love you and cherish you, to care for you and provide for you. When you see it on your finger, remember my commitment to you.”

Jesus isn’t saying that the bread and wine transform into something they’re not. Instead, he is naming the sign by what it points to. And because Jesus makes the bread and wine a sign of God’s new covenant promise, he commands his disciples to repeat this meal in remembrance of him: “This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). Just as the Passover was a memorial to be regularly repeated (Exod. 12:14), Jesus turned this Last Supper with his disciples into a new memorial, a new meal that defines the identity and community of those saved by Jesus’ death.

On the cross, God saved a people for himself through the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice. He freed them from sin and made them his own. And on the night before that great act of deliverance, Jesus gave them a meal to celebrate ever after. As we’ll see in coming chapters, this meal defines God’s new people in Christ. They all celebrate it, and no one else should. By retelling the story of our salvation, this meal brings God’s past act of deliverance

into the present. It tells every Christian that we were lost in sin, and that our Lord Jesus is the God who saves.

CHAPTER 3

The Right Company

High on most parents' list of concerns for their children is that they not fall in with the wrong crowd. Sometimes this leads to overprotective paranoia. More often it reflects basic insight into human nature: we become like those we spend time with. Like a loving father, the apostle Paul was concerned about the company the church in Corinth was keeping. But the stakes were much higher than the decision to hang out with jocks, preppies, or stoners.

In 1 Corinthians 10:14–22, the apostle Paul warns these believers not to participate in sacrificial meals honoring pagan gods. Instead, he pleads with them, “Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry” (v. 14). To support his argument, Paul first refers to the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing that we give thanks for, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread” (vv. 16–17).

Paul’s main point is that when we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we share together in the benefits of Christ’s death. And because we have fellowship with Christ, we have fellowship with each other. In the Lord’s Supper we keep company with Christ and the church.

Paul then refers to how, under the old covenant, those Israelites who offered sacrifices “participated in” what was offered on the altar (v. 18). They identified with the sacrifice and received its benefits. And Paul doesn’t want the Corinthians to identify with and seek benefit from false gods!

Next, Paul wards off misunderstanding: “What am I saying then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but I do say that what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to participate with demons!” (vv. 19–20). On the one hand, the gods that pagans worship simply do not exist: there is only one God (1 Cor. 8:4). On the other hand, when idols are worshiped as if they exist, that

both reflects and invites demonic influence. And the Corinthian believers should have nothing whatsoever to do with such evil powers.

Allegiance to Christ and allegiance to idols are mutually exclusive: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot share in the Lord’s table and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10:21). Jesus is Lord; idols are not. If we have fellowship with idols, we have no fellowship with Christ. If we try to play both sides, we play with fire: “Or are we provoking the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?” (v. 22). God will have our exclusive, wholehearted, undivided allegiance.

What’s the problem here? Paul has no issue with Christians keeping company with non-Christians (v. 27). The problem is keeping company with their gods.

While the Lord’s Supper isn’t the main focus of this passage, Paul’s teaching on the Lord’s Supper here is both rich and neglected. First, this passage shows us that early Christians did in fact do what Jesus commanded; they shared the bread and wine together to commemorate his death for them. And they did this as a local church. Paul assumes that the whole church to which he’s writing shared the bread and wine together, as one (v. 17).

Paul also describes what’s happening in the Lord’s Supper: we are “sharing in” the blood and body of Christ (v. 16). What does this “sharing in” mean? It means that when believers in Jesus participate in the Lord’s Supper, we experience the benefits of his death for us. The bread and wine are visible words of promise, drawing our hearts to the new covenant realities of forgiveness and reconciliation that Jesus purchased by his blood. In the Lord’s Supper, we have fellowship with Christ. We keep company with him.

And because we keep company with Christ in the Lord’s Supper, we also keep company with each other. As Paul says in verse 17, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread.” Our fellowship with Christ creates fellowship with each other. As a local church, we are one body *because* we share in the one bread and all it represents. Because we are united to Christ, we are united to each other in him.

The Lord’s Supper defines the company we keep as Christians: Christ, and in Christ, the church. Paul defines Christian identity over against pagan

identity in terms of mutually exclusive meals. If you belong to Christ, you eat his meal with his people. You don't eat the meal of demons. Just like the Passover did for Israel, the Lord's Supper defines the identity of the church and therefore the membership of the church. Those who eat it form one body. And only those in Christ should eat it.

The Lord's Supper beautifully pictures what it means to be a Christian. Through Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross, we have fellowship with him and also with his people. In the meal Jesus gave us, we taste the goodness of this twofold fellowship. In the Lord's Supper, the gospel becomes not just something we hear, or even something we see, but something we eat.

CHAPTER 4

Come Together

What's a surefire way to ruin a dinner party? How about this: show up before everyone else, eat all the food, and get drunk. That should do the trick.

Sadly, that's exactly what some in the Corinthian church were doing when the church gathered for the Lord's Supper! Paul tells the Corinthians he has nothing to commend in their celebration of the Lord's Supper, "since you come together not for the better but for the worse" (1 Cor. 11:17). The divisions that fracture their life as a church are making a mockery of the Lord's Supper: "Therefore, when you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper" (v. 20; cf. vv. 18–19). How so?

For at the meal, each one eats his own supper ahead of others. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk! Don't you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you look down on the church of God and embarrass those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you for this! (vv. 21–22)

The richer church members are treating the Lord's Supper like their own private party. They're indulging themselves and excluding the poor, living it up and leaving nothing for others.

In an effort to explode their self-indulgence, Paul reminds these believers of what Jesus said and did at the Last Supper. Jesus told us that the bread is his body and the cup is the new covenant in his blood (vv. 23–25). Paul draws the conclusion, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (v. 26). To participate in the Lord's Supper is to proclaim the saving death of Christ. The Supper announces the gospel.

Because the Lord's Supper announces the gospel, it also carries the demands of the gospel: "Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy way will be guilty of sin against the body

and blood of the Lord” (v. 27). This is why we should examine ourselves before partaking (v. 28). Again, “For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself” (v. 29).

What does it mean to “recognize the body”? It’s a difficult expression, but I think it basically means perceiving and living out the connection between love for Christ and love for his people. If you’re proclaiming Christ’s death in the Lord’s Supper, and claiming its benefits as your own, then you’re putting yourself in the same place as everyone else who confesses and receives Christ. You’re setting yourself in the midst of Christ’s people at the foot of the cross.

And you can’t declare the Lord’s death while despising his people. The Lord’s death redeems and unites the Lord’s people. If your actions scorn and despise Christ’s people, you’re scorning and despising Christ’s death. If you celebrate the Lord’s Supper in a way that excludes and shames the church’s poorer members, it’s as if you’re saying Christ only died for you, not them.

So Paul’s point about examining ourselves and discerning the body is not that we can only come to the Lord’s Supper if there is no sin in our life, or no sin that we have not yet confessed to the Lord. None of us is perfect, and none of us can perfectly perceive and confess our own sins. Instead, Paul’s point is that we are to examine ourselves to make sure we haven’t severed the nerve between love for Christ and love for his people. This also implies that those whose lives boldly contradict their claim to follow Christ should not participate in the Supper (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–11). But the Lord’s Supper should strengthen rather than scare off those of us who genuinely trust in Christ and struggle against sin.

In response to this shockingly self-centered celebration of the Supper, God judged the Corinthians by giving some of them over to sickness and even death (11:30). So Paul reminds us that we need to judge ourselves rightly now, so that we will not be judged by the Lord in the end (vv. 31–32). And Paul concludes his instructions by reminding the Corinthians, “Therefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment” (vv. 33–34).

The Lord’s Supper is about the whole body of Christ coming together to declare and delight in the saving death of Christ. It’s about proclaiming the

death of Christ by embracing the body of Christ. It's about coming together to cherish Christ and care for each other.

CHAPTER 5

Best for Last

What do fireworks shows and God’s plan of redemption have in common? They save the best for last.

The apostle Paul reminds us that we were saved in hope, and “hope that is seen is not hope, because who hopes for what he sees?” (Rom. 8:24). Throughout our lives, we hope for what we do not see, and we wait for it patiently (v. 25).

But what exactly are we waiting for? The Bible, especially the book of Revelation, presents dazzling pictures of what life will be like when God brings all his saving purposes to pass. There will be a new creation, a place where God dwells face-to-face with his people, a place where there is only healing and happiness and holiness.

And on the day when God finally joins his people to himself in an endless, unshakable marriage, there will be a feast. This feast will far surpass any party anyone has ever thrown. God is saving the best for last.

Jesus hinted at this feast when he instituted the Lord’s Supper. After telling his disciples to drink the cup of the new covenant in his blood, he added, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matt. 26:29 ESV). The Lord’s Supper doesn’t just look back to the cross; it also looks forward to the coming of God’s kingdom. It looks forward to a time when Jesus himself will feast with his people. That’s why Paul reminds us, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). When we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we’re not just remembering the past; we’re tasting the future.

Scripture calls the church the bride of Christ (Eph. 5:22–33), but in this age we’re engaged, not yet married. The wedding is coming soon:

Then I heard something like the voice of a vast multitude, like the sound of cascading waters, and like the rumbling of loud thunder, saying:

Hallelujah, because our Lord God, the Almighty,
has begun to reign!

Let us be glad, rejoice, and give Him glory,
because the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and His wife has prepared herself.

She was given fine linen to wear, bright and pure.

For the fine linen represents the righteous acts of the saints.

Then he said to me, “Write: Those invited to the marriage feast of the
Lamb are fortunate!” He also said to me, “These words of God are
true.” (Rev. 19:6–9)

The day of Christ’s marriage to his people is coming (v. 7), and those
invited to that wedding feast are forever blessed (v. 9). This is when Jesus
will again drink of the fruit of the vine, with us, in his Father’s kingdom.
This is when our faith will become sight. This is when those who have
hungered and thirsted for righteousness will finally be satisfied. This is
when every good desire you’ve ever had will be lavishly fulfilled.

Long before the coming of Christ, God promised through the prophet
Isaiah that this day would come:

The LORD of Hosts will prepare a feast
for all the peoples on this mountain—
a feast of aged wine, choice meat, finely aged wine.

On this mountain

He will destroy the burial shroud,
the shroud over all the peoples,
the sheet covering all the nations;

He will destroy death forever.

The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears
from every face

and remove His people’s disgrace
from the whole earth,
for the LORD has spoken.

On that day it will be said,

“Look, this is our God;

we have waited for Him, and He has saved us.

This is the LORD; we have waited for Him.

Let us rejoice and be glad in His salvation.”

For the LORD’s power will rest on this mountain. (Isa. 25:6–10)

God will deal death a deathblow, and sorrow and shame will vanish. And on that day when God destroys death, he will deal out delicious food to his people, a people gathered from all peoples. On that day, God’s people will be satisfied not just by him but in him, when his salvation makes our hearts burst for joy.

On that day our weary waiting will be rewarded. The God we waited for, the God we staked our lives on, the God we clung to when everything caved in will prove to everyone forever that he alone is worthy. On that day nothing will be left for us to do but rejoice and be glad in his salvation.

But now we trust, we hope, we wait. And when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we look back to the cross and forward to the coming kingdom. In the bread and the wine is not only the brokenness and bitterness of Jesus’ death, but also a foretaste of the feast God will throw for his Son when he joins him to his bride forever. Like the wine Jesus made from water at the wedding in Cana (John 2:10), God is saving his best for last.

CHAPTER 6

What Is the Lord's Supper?

We've just taken five biblical snapshots of the Lord's Supper: the Passover it is based on and transforms, Jesus' institution of it, Paul's teaching on it in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, and the marriage supper of the Lamb which it anticipates. Now it's time to put together the big picture.

In this chapter I'll simply offer a definition of the Lord's Supper and then walk through it phrase by phrase, showing how each element arises from the passages we've just studied.

Defining the Lord's Supper

What is the Lord's Supper? *The Lord's Supper is a church's act of communing with Christ and each other and of commemorating Christ's death by partaking of bread and wine, and a believer's act of receiving Christ's benefits and renewing his or her commitment to Christ and his people, thereby making the church one body and marking it off from the world.*

Let's unpack each part of this definition.

The Lord's Supper Is a Church's Act

First, the Lord's Supper is a church's act. It's something an entire local church does, and does as one. Consider what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11, in each case referring to the Corinthians gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper:

- “You come together not for the better but for the worse” (v. 17);
- “I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you” (v. 18);
- “Therefore, when you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper” (v. 20);

- “When you come together to eat, wait for one another . . . so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment” (vv. 33–34).

It’s clear that in Corinth, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated by the entire local church in one gathering. It wasn’t something individuals or families or small groups did—it was something the whole church did. And there’s no solid evidence that any other New Testament church did otherwise.

The Lord’s Supper is celebrated by the church, as a church. The Lord’s Supper is not a private meal among friends, but the church’s public celebration of fellowship with Christ and each other. The Lord’s Supper is not detachable from the church. Take away the gathering of the church and you take away the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is a church’s act.

Of Communing with Christ and Each Other

As we saw in chapter 3, when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper we “share in” the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16). When we partake of the bread and wine by faith, we participate in what Christ’s broken body and shed blood obtained for us: forgiveness, reconciliation, adoption, and all the other blessings of the new covenant.

This is why the Lord’s Supper is often called “Communion”: in it we commune with Christ. We have fellowship with him. We enjoy and experience anew the salvation he won for us on the cross. As we feed on the bread and wine with our mouths, so we feed on Christ in our hearts by faith.

And the “we” is crucial. As we’ve seen, the Lord’s Supper is a church’s act. And it’s not as if we’re simply a few dozen or few hundred people having particularly meaningful private devotions, and we happen to be in the same room together. Remember Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:17: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread.” In the Lord’s Supper, because we have fellowship with Christ, we also have fellowship with each other. The Lord’s Supper gives expression to our union with Christ and therefore our unity in Christ. In the Lord’s Supper, we commune with Christ together, and therefore have communion with each other.

And Commemorating Christ’s Death

In the Lord's Supper we also commemorate Jesus' death: "And He took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them, and said, 'This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me'" (Luke 22:19). This act of commemorating certainly involves reminding ourselves of Jesus' death and its meaning. The acts of breaking and eating bread, of pouring out and drinking the wine, dramatically present the events of the gospel to our sight and taste.

But the Lord's Supper involves more than a mere reminder: it also, in a sense, brings the past into the present. Remember what God told the host of the Passover: "On that day explain to your son, 'This is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exod. 13:8). Each generation was to say, "I celebrate this meal because of how the Lord brought *me* out of Egypt." Because later generations belonged to the same covenant God made with his people, they were included, by means of that covenant, in the same saving event that inaugurated the covenant.

Like the Passover which it takes up and transforms, the Lord's Supper is also a meal of covenantal remembrance. It brings the past into the present, plotting our lives within the saving story of Jesus. In the Lord's Supper each of us says, "I eat this bread and drink this cup because of what the Lord did for me on the cross when he freed me from my sin."

And, as we saw in chapter 5, the Lord's Supper also brings the future into the present. Even as we look back to the cross, we look ahead to the coming kingdom. Even as we commemorate his death, we anticipate his return. As Paul put it, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). In the Lord's Supper we commemorate and proclaim the saving significance of Christ's death on the cross.

By Partaking of Bread and Wine

At the Last Supper, Jesus took two elements from the Passover meal—bread and wine—and appointed them as signs of his body given for us and blood poured out for us (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–20). In the Lord's Supper, the whole church partakes of the bread and wine and so proclaims and participates in the benefits of Christ's death.

It seems that in the New Testament the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a meal (1 Cor. 11:20–22; possibly Acts 2:42; 20:7; Jude 12).

I'd love to see more churches recover that practice, but I don't think it's essential to the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. What Jesus commanded us to do is eat the bread and drink the wine.

And note that Jesus commanded us to do this. The Lord's Supper isn't something the church invented; it's something Jesus instituted. And the Lord's Supper is something in which every Christian should regularly participate, in obedience to Jesus and in expectation of renewed fellowship with him.

And a Believer's Act

Just as much as the Lord's Supper is a church's act, it is also a believer's act. In the Lord's Supper, you eat the bread. You drink the wine. You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

And the Lord's Supper is something in which only a believer in Jesus should participate. Only those who trust in Jesus' death to save them should commemorate Jesus' death with the church. Only those whose hope is in Jesus' death should proclaim Jesus' death. Further, recall Paul's warning that to participate in the Lord's Supper "in an unworthy way" is to "be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). While the specific "unworthy way" Paul has in mind is sinning against fellow believers like the Corinthians were doing, the principle includes anyone who partakes without trusting Christ. The Lord's Supper should bring blessing, but it can bring judgment (1 Cor. 11:29).

Those in church who aren't Christians should be reminded that they need to trust in Christ by the fact that they are not invited to participate in the Lord's Supper. They are to let the elements pass them by. The Lord's Supper is an evangelistic ordinance not in the sense that it helps convert people, but in that it highlights their need to be converted.

Of Receiving Christ's Benefits

In the Lord's Supper, a believer receives Christ's benefits. This is the individual side of "sharing in" the body and blood of Christ together (1 Cor. 10:16). Does that mean you don't possess those benefits before and apart from the Lord's Supper? Not at all.

Think about what happens in preaching. You show up on Sunday morning already trusting Christ. But when the pastor proclaims Christ from Scripture, the gospel comes to you again in power. In that moment you

embrace Christ anew. You trust him more fully. You submit to him more earnestly. You experience forgiveness and peace with God more intensely.

Something analogous happens in the Lord's Supper. Christ is already yours by faith, but when you receive the bread and wine you receive him all over again. The physical signs of bread and wine support and strengthen your faith. In the Lord's Supper, a believer receives Christ's benefits anew.

And Renewing His or Her Commitment to Christ and His People

So the Lord's Supper is, first, a receiving. Christ died to inaugurate the new covenant and win forgiveness for us; in the Lord's Supper we re-receive all that Christ has done for us. The Lord's Supper is first and foremost a celebration of the finished work of Christ.

But it also repeatedly reenacts our response to the gospel. When you take the Lord's Supper, you effectively say, "Jesus' body was given for me. Jesus' blood was shed to forgive my sins." By partaking of the elements you confess: "This is true, and true *for me*. This Jesus is my Savior."

And to receive Jesus as Savior is also, always, to submit to him as Lord. Jesus rescues from sin and all its effects; you can't say Jesus is your rescuer if you refuse to be rescued. So to receive Christ's benefits in the Lord's Supper is also to renew our commitment to Christ and submission to Christ.

Remember that the Lord's Supper is a sign of the new covenant. A covenant is a freely chosen relationship confirmed by oath. And when God swore covenant oaths to his people throughout the Old Testament, he often added a sign to that oath. One of those signs, the rainbow, simply confirmed God's promise to Noah never to flood the world again (Gen. 9:13–15). By contrast, the sign of circumcision that God gave to Abraham was a sign that obligated its recipient to keep the covenant (Gen. 17:10–14).

But a closer parallel to the Lord's Supper is found in the covenant meal of Exodus 24. In Mark 14:24, when Jesus refers to the cup as "my blood of the covenant" (ESV), he echoes words Moses spoke when God covenanted with Israel at Mount Sinai: "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you" (Exod. 24:8). And have you ever noticed what happens right after that? Moses and Aaron and the elders of Israel went up into the presence of God on Sinai, where "they saw Him, and they ate and drank" (vv. 9–11). The old covenant was ratified not just by sacrificial blood, but by a meal that God himself hosted.

In a similar way, the new covenant was inaugurated by the blood of Jesus' sacrifice, and is repeatedly ratified in a meal that Jesus hosts. In the Lord's Supper, both parties of the new covenant—God and his people—attest their commitment to the covenant. God attests the covenant by presenting the signs of Jesus' body and blood to us. In the elements, God visibly extends to us his promise that if we trust in Christ we are saved. And as we receive the elements, we solemnly attest that we receive Christ as ours, and we give ourselves wholly to him. In the Lord's Supper we profess our faith in Christ by partaking of the signs of his body and blood. We thereby convey our commitment to his new covenant as surely as if we spoke a verbal oath.

As a seal ratifies a legal document, the Lord's Supper repeatedly re-ratifies the new covenant. To use some dense shorthand, we can call the Lord's Supper the renewing oath-sign of the new covenant. It is an act ("sign") that expresses a vow-like commitment ("oath") to Christ, his covenant, and his people. As we will see shortly, baptism is the new covenant's initiating oath-sign, the formal, public act by which we commit ourselves to Christ's new covenant. In the Lord's Supper, we repeat and reaffirm this initial commitment.

But the Lord's Supper also renews our commitment to Christ's people. Remember the straight line Paul draws between proclaiming the Lord's death and loving the Lord's people (1 Cor. 11:17–34). In the Lord's Supper, because we have fellowship with Christ, we also have fellowship with each other. And the Lord's Supper entails responsibility for the church. If you partake of the bread and cup, you obligate yourself to care for Christ's body. If you claim Christ as your Savior in the Lord's Supper, you necessarily claim his people as your brothers and sisters. Paul's argument here finds an echo in 1 John 4:20: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For the person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen."

To bind ourselves to Christ is to be bound to one another. You can't commit to the covenant without committing to the covenant community. So, in the same act by which we commit ourselves to Christ, we commit ourselves to one another. To receive Christ at his table is to receive all those seated next to you as brothers and sisters. In the Lord's Supper, we renew our commitment to Christ and his people.

Thereby Making the Church One Body and Marking It Off from the World

This last phrase of the definition indicates what happens as a result of the church and the believer's act. When the church communes and commemorates, and when the believer receives and renews, the church becomes one body. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:17, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread."

And precisely because the Lord's Supper unites many into one, it marks that unified body off from the world. When a church celebrates the Lord's Supper, Christ's people on earth show up. We'll unpack this point in the next chapter.

A Brief Break for Baptism

As we conclude this chapter, it's worth pausing to consider how the Lord's Supper compares to baptism. As we've just seen, the Lord's Supper is a church's act of communing with Christ and each other and commemorating Christ's death by partaking of bread and wine, and a believer's act of receiving Christ's benefits and renewing his or her commitment to Christ and his people, thereby making the church one body and marking it off from the world. On the other hand, we can define baptism as follows: *baptism is a church's act of affirming and portraying a believer's union with Christ by immersing him or her in water, and a believer's act of publicly committing him or herself to Christ and his people, thereby uniting a believer to the church and marking him or her off from the world.*¹

Let's briefly unpack some similarities and differences between baptism and the Lord's Supper, not all of which are explicit in these definitions. First, the similarities. Both ordinances are commanded by Jesus himself (Matt. 28:19; Luke 22:19). Both of them are acts of both the church as a whole and an individual believer: in baptism, the church acts through the one baptizing. Further, each is a sign of the gospel. Baptism and the Lord's Supper visibly, tangibly express our union with Christ and salvation in Christ.

More specifically, we can say that each is an oath-sign of the new covenant. Baptism is the new covenant's initiating oath-sign: it is the

formal, public means by which we commit ourselves to Christ. Baptism is the solemn, symbolic vow that publicly ratifies a person's entrance into the new covenant. We enter the new covenant by faith, and that faith goes public and becomes visible to all when we sign on the dotted line in baptism.

As to differences, the biggest is that baptism is one-time only, whereas the Lord's Supper is regularly repeated. Also, baptism is something that the church, acting through a representative, does to an individual, whereas the Lord's Supper is something that the whole church does as one. As such, baptism expresses an individual's union with Christ and entrance into the church, and the Lord's Supper highlights the whole church's union with Christ and therefore with each other. Baptism unites a believer to the church, whereas the Lord's Supper unites the church as one body. As we'll consider more fully in the next chapter, while baptism binds one to many, the Lord's Supper binds many into one.

CHAPTER 7

What Does the Lord's Supper Make Us?

When does a couple actually get married? Is it when they say “I do”? When the minister pronounces them husband and wife? When they consummate the marriage?

There's a sense in which each of those moments is essential to the formation of a marriage. But each also depends on the others. That's why, for example, if a marriage is never consummated, there's a sense in which the couple is not yet fully married. And this distinction carries legal weight; severing such a bond is an annulment, not a divorce.

What on earth does all this have to do with the Lord's Supper? It seems to me that many Christians think of the Lord's Supper as an intensified private devotion. I go to church, I hear the Word, I eat the bread and drink the wine, I'm reminded of Christ's death and the forgiveness of my sins, I go home. Of course, we also associate the Lord's Supper with the church, at least in the sense that it's something we do when we “go to church.” For most Christians, though, that's as far as they go when it comes to putting together the Lord's Supper and the local church.

But in this chapter I want to argue that the Lord's Supper actually plays a crucial role in putting the church together. Celebrating the Lord's Supper together is an essential step in making a church a church. In a very significant sense, the Lord's Supper is the moment when a group of Christians become one body. The Lord's Supper makes many one.

I'm giving this idea its own chapter for two reasons. First, it's widely neglected among evangelical Christians. I think Paul clearly teaches that the Lord's Supper binds many into one, as we'll see in a moment. But too few pastors and churches seem to pick up Paul's point and let it shape their views of the Lord's Supper and the church. Second, this point about how the Lord's Supper constitutes a local church is crucial to many of the practical questions we'll consider in the next few chapters. In order to think

wisely about how to celebrate the Lord's Supper, we need this biblical lens fixed firmly in front of our eyes.

How the Lord's Supper Makes Many One

Recall Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17, which we've considered in chapters 3 and 6. First, "The cup of blessing that we give thanks for, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" Paul reminds the Corinthians that to eat the bread and drink the cup is to enjoy fellowship with Christ, to experience the benefits of his death.

From this "vertical" fellowship between Christ and believers, Paul draws a "horizontal" conclusion in verse 17: "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread." Paul's central claim in this verse is that we who are many are one body. And he twice grounds or supports this assertion by referring to our joint participation in the Lord's Supper: "Because there is one bread . . . for all of us share that one bread." The fact that Paul repeats his reason twice weighs against seeing the bread as merely representing or picturing the church's unity. Instead, Paul roots the church's unity in its celebration of the Lord's Supper. There is one body *because* there is one bread.

Paul is saying that the Lord's Supper actually *makes* many one. The Lord's Supper gathers up the "we who are many" and makes us into one body. In other words, the Lord's Supper constitutes a local church. Of course, Paul's point is not about the mechanics of bread and eating, as if a larger church that needed more than one loaf to celebrate the Lord's Supper was no longer one church but many. Instead, Paul uses "one bread" as shorthand for the church's corporate, all-together celebration of the Lord's Supper. Paul's point is that, in the Lord's Supper, because we all share in fellowship with Christ together, our unity in Christ creates the unified body of the church.²

Remember that the Lord's Supper is the renewing oath-sign of the new covenant. In the Lord's Supper, we renew our commitment to Christ and each other. And it is this twofold commitment that makes a church a church.

God creates a local church in two steps. In the first step, he creates Christians. How? He sends preachers who proclaim Christ (Rom. 10:14–

17). He sends his Spirit to enable some who hear to receive and confess Christ (1 Cor. 12:3). He causes his Word to become effective in their lives, granting them new life in Christ (James 1:18). God creates his church by sending his Word and sending his Spirit to make his Word effective. God creates gospel people, people who have been saved through trusting Christ. That's step one.

When people come to Christ, they become members of his universal body. They are spiritually one with him. But in order to create a church, people have to come not only to Christ but also to each other. They have to come together, and that coming together requires commitment. A local church doesn't automatically spring into existence whenever two or more Christians are in the same town, or same room. Otherwise, whenever you bumped into a Christian at the grocery store a new church would emerge, and it would dissolve as soon as one walked down another aisle. A church is more than simply "Christians" in the plural. It's more than the sum of its parts. There has to be something binding people together.

Therefore, in order to create a church, gospel people have to form a gospel polity. A church is born when Christians commit to be a church together. That's step two. Think back to the example of marriage. A marriage is born when a man and woman commit to be husband and wife. The vow creates the marriage. Similarly, a church is born when a group of Christians commit to one another, to do all that Jesus commanded his churches do together: gather for worship, build up each other in love, bear each other's burdens, and celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper together.

And this is still God's work, since it is his saving and empowering work that enables our right response to the gospel, including the right response of committing to one another. God's work and our work aren't in competition. We can only come together as Christians because God has first made us Christians. God creates a church by creating Christians, and by enabling those Christians to commit to each other.

But how exactly does a group of Christians enact this commitment? The ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper play crucial roles. In baptism, you publicly commit to Christ and his people. Baptism is where faith goes public. It's how a new believer shows up on the world and the church's radar as a believer. In other words, baptism marks off a believer from the

world. In baptism, the church says to the world, “This one belongs to Jesus!”

In the Lord’s Supper, we renew our commitment to Christ and his people. But, distinct from baptism, the Lord’s Supper is something we all do together. The Lord’s Supper marks off an entire group of Christians as one body, drawing a line between them and the world around them. And by drawing a line between the church and the world, baptism and the Lord’s Supper draw a line around the church. The ordinances make it possible to point to something and say “church” rather than only pointing to many somethings and saying “Christians.”

Imagine one Christian goes to a new city, preaches the gospel, and a handful of people all come to Christ around the same time. This new Christian baptizes each of them. How and when will this handful of baptized Christians become a church? I’d suggest the most basic, most essential answer is: when they celebrate the Lord’s Supper together. Remember that celebrating the Lord’s Supper expresses our commitment to Christ and to each other. To receive Christ’s benefits in the Lord’s Supper is to receive Christ’s people as brothers and sisters. In the Lord’s Supper itself we make the commitment to each other that takes us across the line between “handful of Christians” and “local church.” In the Lord’s Supper itself we come together as one body. As Paul says, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17).

As a matter of prudence, I think it is generally wise for churches to clarify what they’re doing when they first constitute as a church through a verbal pledge the members make to each other. In the Congregationalist and Baptist traditions, this is often called a “church covenant,” and is sometimes recited by the whole church each time they celebrate the Lord’s Supper. I think that’s a great practice. But it’s not that our verbal commitment creates the church *apart from* our joint participation in the Lord’s Supper. Instead, the explicit verbal commitment of a church covenant simply makes explicit what is implicit in the Lord’s Supper. A verbal church covenant aids our understanding, reminding us of exactly what we’re doing when we partake of the bread and wine together.

Again, I think the beginning of a church is a bit like the beginning of a marriage. The analogy is imperfect, as all are, but it gets us pretty far. A

marriage is born when a man and woman pronounce vows, a minister or other legal official pronounces them married, and the couple consummates their marriage. The vow “I do” initiates the new relationship, but that new relationship is not confirmed until the husband and wife seal their union physically.

Similarly, a gathering of believers are not a local church until they seal their union with each other through the Lord’s Supper. If a group of believers who meant to be a church never celebrated the Lord’s Supper together, not only would they be disobeying Jesus, but there’s a real sense in which they would not yet be a church. The Lord’s Supper consummates the commitment by which Christians become a church.

How does the Lord’s Supper make a local church? Together with baptism, the Lord’s Supper is how a gospel people form a gospel polity. The Lord’s Supper is how Christians come together, commit to each other, and cross the line from “many” to “one.” In the Lord’s Supper, our fellowship with Christ creates fellowship with each other. The Lord’s Supper makes many one.

Gorgeous Simplicity

There’s a gorgeous simplicity to God’s design for the church. What does it take to make a church? Gospel preaching that creates gospel people who participate in gospel ordinances. The church is the shape into which the gospel and its ordinances form God’s people. Baptism binds one to many, and the Lord’s Supper binds many into one.

Baptism and the Lord’s Supper inscribe the gospel into the very shape and structure of the church. What makes many one are the signs of the gospel. When Christians come together to form a church, they aren’t moving beyond the gospel but deeper into it.

CHAPTER 8

What Gathering May Celebrate the Lord's Supper?

Now that we've seen something of what the Lord's Supper is and does, the question that naturally follows is, "Who should celebrate the Lord's Supper?" And there are actually three questions that all fit inside this one. Each is important, so each gets its own chapter. In the next two chapters we'll ask: Who may participate in the Lord's Supper? and, Who should lead the Lord's Supper?

But the first question to consider is, "What gathering may celebrate the Lord's Supper?" Can individuals celebrate it alone? What about families? Campus ministries? Church small groups?

In this chapter I will argue that only a local church, gathered as a church, is authorized to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper effects the unity of the church. It binds many into one. That is why the Lord's Supper belongs to the church and should only be celebrated by the church, as a church.

Before I unpack this, I want to acknowledge that many Christians who celebrate the Lord's Supper in other contexts do so with no other intent than to honor Christ and obey his Word. Some people's practice may be informed by different theological convictions about the nature of the church. Others might simply have not yet considered how tightly Scripture ties the celebration of the Lord's Supper to the local church. With that in mind, let's turn to Scripture.

The only detailed description of the celebration of the Lord's Supper that we have in the New Testament is found in 1 Corinthians 10—11, which is why we've already spent so much time with these chapters. But let's consider again how Paul describes the context in which the Corinthians celebrated the Lord's Supper:

- “You come together not for the better but for the worse” (11:17);
- “I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you” (11:18);
- “Therefore, when you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s Supper” (11:20);
- “When you come together to eat, wait for one another . . . so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment” (11:33–34).

Paul addresses this letter to “God’s church at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus and called as saints” (1 Cor. 1:2). He is not writing to one slice of the church, one select sub-group. Instead, he’s writing to the whole church of Corinth. And these five times in chapter 11 he describes the Corinthians coming together as one, all of them, in the same place at the same time. In verse 18 Paul explicitly says that in this meeting they “come together as a church.” When the whole church gathers for worship, the *church* is present in a special way.

You could say a group of people “come together as a team” on the night of the basketball game. Everyone belongs to the team throughout the rest of the week. And that shows itself in all sorts of practical ways: their schedule, their training, and so on. But there’s a special sense in which the team *exists*, as a team, when everyone comes together to play. They come together to do that unique thing that makes them a team. And they can only do it all together, as a team.

So Paul assumes that there is a time when the church comes together *as a church*, and it’s in this gathering that the church celebrates the Lord’s Supper. This fits perfectly with 1 Corinthians 10:17: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all of us share that one bread.” As we saw in the last chapter, in this verse Paul teaches that the Lord’s Supper actually plays a role in making a church a church. The Lord’s Supper consummates the church’s unity, not entirely unlike how a couple’s physical union consummates their marriage. The Lord’s Supper is celebrated by the church, as a church, because it enacts the unity of the church.

This means that only a local church should celebrate the Lord’s Supper, and they should celebrate it in a gathering of the whole church. The Lord’s

Supper shouldn't be celebrated by a group other than a church, like a family or campus ministry or retreat center or college class. And it shouldn't be celebrated by only a portion of the church apart from the whole, like a youth group or mission team or the bride and groom at a wedding. It shouldn't be celebrated by a military chaplain—unless, of course, the soldiers he is ministering to have constituted a church together. And, despite the commendable compassion behind this practice, it shouldn't be “taken” to those who are homebound or in the hospital.

This also means that the Lord's Supper shouldn't be celebrated by small groups or missional communities or whatever you want to call them, if those groups are a subset of a church. The Lord's Supper makes the body one—the whole body. So if you have multiple groups celebrating the Lord's Supper apart from each other, you actually have multiple churches. And those churches should have their own leaders, their own authority over matters of membership and discipline, and so on.

The Lord's Supper is the meal where the whole family sits down together. To make the Lord's Supper something other than a meal the whole church celebrates is to make it something other than the Lord's Supper.

To celebrate the Lord's Supper only in a gathering of the church as a whole doesn't downplay the Lord's Supper. Instead, it puts the Lord's Supper on the pedestal Jesus gave us: the time when the whole body comes together. By keeping the Lord's Supper a meal *of the church*, we preserve the Lord's Supper's biblical role of ratifying the unity of the church. The Lord's Supper defines our identity as a church and expresses our unity as a church precisely because we do it together.

By celebrating the Lord's Supper as a church, we remember that in the body of Christ, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. We remember that belonging to Christ means belonging to each other—to *all* the other members of the body. We remember that though we are many in Christ, we are one, because we all share that one bread, and we all drink of one cup.

CHAPTER 9

Who May Participate in the Lord's Supper?

The next question we need to address is, “Who may participate in the Lord's Supper?” Is everyone welcome to the table, Christian or non-Christian, baptized or unbaptized? In this chapter I'll argue that the Lord's Supper is for baptized believers who belong to a church.

This is an important and contested issue. Many Christians have strongly-held opinions and convictions that differ from what I'll argue here. And there's no single passage of Scripture that addresses this issue directly and in detail. So in order to arrive at a biblical answer to our question, we're going to have to draw together, and draw out the implications of, Scripture's teaching on the Lord's Supper, baptism, and the local church.

The Lord's Supper Is for Believers

First, the Lord's Supper is for believers. It is for those who trust in Jesus to save them from their sins. This is not terribly controversial. Some Christians have held that the Lord's Supper should be offered to all who wish to partake, and that it can help convert people to Christ. But we saw in chapter 6 that to participate in the Lord's Supper is to renew your profession of faith in Christ, and your commitment to Christ and his people. Only believers should participate because the very act proclaims, “I believe in this Jesus who gave his body and shed his blood to save me.”

Further, only believers should participate in the Lord's Supper because wrongly participating in the Supper carries the threat of judgment. Paul says that those who eat without discerning the connection between trusting Christ and loving his people are “guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor. 11:27). By definition, a non-Christian does not discern this connection or live in light of it. A non-Christian neither trusts Christ nor love's Christ's people.

So the most loving thing for a church to do is instruct non-Christians that they are not to participate in this family meal of the church. Instead, the

Lord's Supper should pique non-Christians' interest in Christ. It should serve as a reminder to them that until they trust in Christ, they do not belong to Christ or his church. Until they trust in Christ, the blessings the Lord's Supper holds before us—forgiveness, reconciliation, assurance, hope—are not yet theirs.

Non-Christians who attend your church should feel both welcomed and excluded. They should be welcome to participate in worship, welcome to attend all public services. The members should welcome them, befriend them, love them, serve them. If they've thought of Christians as standoffish or self-righteous, your church's warm welcome should drive away those perceptions.

But at the same time, non-Christians attending your church should also feel excluded. They should long for the kind of intimacy and unity you have with Christ and each other. And they should become increasingly aware that unless they repent and trust in Christ, they simply will not experience that intimate unity. That the Lord's Supper is only for believers actually clarifies the gospel and reminds non-Christians of their need for Christ. The plate passes them by because they are passing Christ by. And that passing plate should also serve as an invitation: "Come to Christ! Turn from sin and trust in him!"

The Lord's Supper Is for Baptized Believers

Second, the Lord's Supper is for baptized believers.³ Baptism is where faith goes public (Acts 2:38–41). It's how we publicly commit ourselves to Christ and his people. It's how the church affirms a believer's profession of faith and identifies him or her with the Lord Jesus. That's what it means to be baptized "into the name" of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

Baptism is how a believer shows up on the church and the world's radar as a Christian. It is *how* we publicly profess faith in Christ. And the Lord's Supper, as we've seen, is how we regularly renew our profession of faith in Christ. It is how we repeatedly reaffirm our commitment to Christ and his people. And the point is, you have to make a profession before you can renew that profession. The Lord's Supper isn't a private meal among friends, but the church's public celebration of fellowship with Christ and

each other. That's why only those who have been baptized, only those who have gone public as Christians, may celebrate.

Remember, we've seen that baptism is the initiating oath-sign of the new covenant and the Lord's Supper is its renewing oath-sign. Both are acts that convey commitment. And you have to make the commitment before you can renew it.

What about believers who were "baptized" as infants? Should churches admit them to the Lord's Supper? Certainly churches that baptize infants will! But I would argue that churches that teach and practice credobaptism—that only believers in Jesus should be baptized—should only admit to the Lord's Supper those who have been baptized as believers. And I'm convinced that because of everything baptism is and does according to Scripture, only believers should be baptized.

In fact, I'd argue that infant baptism simply is not baptism. Baptism, as we've seen, is a church's act of affirming and portraying a believer's union with Christ by immersing him or her in water, and a believer's act of publicly committing him or herself to Christ and his people. No profession of faith, no baptism. It's not that infant baptism is somewhat faulty, like a sprained ankle is still an ankle. Instead, infant baptism isn't baptism at all. Those who were "baptized" as infants haven't actually been baptized, so they still need to be.

So churches should admit only baptized believers—that is, those baptized as believers—to the Lord's Supper. Professing faith comes before renewing one's profession. Committing to Christ and his people comes before reaffirming that commitment. Going public as a believer comes before celebrating the church's public fellowship meal.

The Lord's Supper Is for Baptized Believers Who Belong to a Church

Third, the Lord's Supper is for baptized believers who belong to a church. In the New Testament, to come to Christ was to come into the church. At Pentecost, those who believed and were baptized were added to the church that very day (Acts 2:38–41). Wherever the gospel went and people came to Christ, churches sprang up (Acts 14:23; 15:41; 16:5; 18:22). To become a Christian is to become a member in Christ's body, a brother or sister in his family, a living stone in his holy temple (1 Cor. 12:12–26; Matt. 12:46–50;

Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–5). According to the New Testament, there should be no churchless Christians. Every Christian should belong to a church.

We get a snapshot of this in 1 Corinthians 5. Paul is urging the Corinthians not to have fellowship with people who claim to be Christians but who live like pagans. His point is *not* that they shouldn't associate with non-Christians, "otherwise you would have to leave the world" (v. 10). Instead,

But now I am writing you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a believer who is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. For what business is it of mine to judge outsiders? Don't you judge those who are inside? But God judges outsiders. Put away the evil person from among yourselves. (vv. 11–13)

Christians are to have no fellowship with those who claim Christ but contradict that claim by their unrepentant sin. They're not to exercise this judgment regarding outsiders, non-Christians, but regarding "anyone who claims to be a believer" and is "inside" the church (vv. 11–12). Paul assumes that someone can be either inside the church of Corinth or outside of it. Inside are those who profess faith in Christ, and outside are those who don't. And, in sad but sometimes necessary circumstances, the church must remove those who claim faith in Christ but whose lives say the opposite.

So local churches should have a clearly defined inside and outside, and all those who profess faith in Christ should be on the inside. That's where they belong. Anyone who claims to believe in Christ but doesn't belong to a church is radically distorting the Christian life. They're contradicting their basic identity as a Christian. They're failing to take the first steps—belonging, submitting, showing up every week—on the path toward fulfilling all of the biblical "one anothers." A Christian who doesn't belong to a local church is like a brick that jumped out of the wall, a hand that cut itself off from the body, a self-made orphan.

And, as we've seen, the Lord's Supper is a meal for the church. It makes the many members of the church into one body. If a professing Christian doesn't belong to a church, his life is out of line with this reality. He needs to come into the body before he can celebrate the fellowship of the body. He needs to join the family before he sits down at the family table. He

needs to commit to the church before he can renew that commitment in the Lord's Supper.

Where the Church Shows Up

In chapter 7 we saw that the Lord's Supper makes many one (1 Cor. 10:17). It constitutes the local church as a distinct, unified body. In other words, the Lord's Supper is where the church shows up. To put it a bit technical, the Lord's Supper is an effective sign of the church's existence as a church and an individual's membership in the church.

Therefore the Lord's Supper is the place where inclusion in and exclusion from the church happens. To be admitted to church membership is to be admitted to regular participation in the Lord's Supper. Church membership simply *is* regular admission to the Table. Church members are those who are authorized by the church to regularly partake, and who in fact do.

The flip side of this is that exclusion from the church happens at the Lord's Supper as well. What's required for church membership is not perfection, but sincere, ongoing repentance. Christians are those who have turned from sin and trusted in Christ, and who continually turn from sin and trust in Christ. What happens if a Christian stops repenting of sin? Jesus instructs us to plead with that person to repent—first privately, then increasingly publicly. If the person persists in unrepentance, eventually the church is to exclude the individual, treating him or her as an outsider (Matt. 18:15–17). The goal throughout, even in this final step, is that the individual would repent and be restored (2 Cor. 2:6–8).

What does it mean for a church to exclude someone from their fellowship? First and foremost, it means that the person is no longer welcome to participate in the Lord's Supper. The person is no longer welcome at the family meal. So, until he or she repents, the church should not treat him or her as a brother or sister.

The Lord's Supper makes the church visible: *these* people sharing fellowship with Christ and each other *are* the church. To be regularly admitted to the Lord's Supper is to be in the church; to be excluded from the Lord's Supper is to be out. The Lord's Supper is where the church shows up.

Only a Church's Members?

Does this mean that only a church's members should participate in the Lord's Supper? That even a baptized believer who belongs to another church should be excluded? Some Christians I respect hold that position, but I disagree. Here are two reasons why.

First, in Acts 20, we read of how Paul, Luke, and several other disciples traveled to Troas and met with the church there. Verse 7 says, "On the first day of the week, we assembled to break bread." I'm not absolutely positive, but I think it's more likely than not that this refers to the church's gathering to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And Luke includes himself and his traveling companions in the "we" who gathered for this purpose. In other words, this appears to be a biblical instance of "visiting Communion." Christians who were not members of a particular local church—in this case, because they didn't live in that city—seemingly joined in that church's celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Second, even if this biblical example is not conclusive, I don't think churches should treat long-term residence in a given place as a prerequisite for the Lord's Supper. Think about a house church with eight members. If one of those members brought a Christian friend from another city to the church's gathering, the church could easily learn who the person is, how he became a Christian, whether he's been baptized, and so on, in the course of their gathering. And I would argue that the church would have no reason to exclude that individual from the Lord's Supper.

If that friend from another city actually moved to town, there's no reason in principle why he couldn't become a member of the church his first week there. And if he could be added to the church on his first Sunday, I don't see a reason to exclude him from fellowship if he's only there for one Sunday. In principle, anyone qualified to join the church is qualified to participate in the Lord's Supper.

"Church membership" is a name we give to the relationship between a church and a Christian, which regular participation in the Lord's Supper both implies and, in a sense, creates. Individuals only visiting a church for a week don't become a member of the church, because they're not going to be living out their discipleship to Jesus in that local body. But if they would be welcomed into membership if they were staying longer, and if they are already a member elsewhere, then I'd argue they should be welcome to the Lord's Supper as a visitor.

Putting It All Together

Putting all this together, I think that churches should welcome to the Lord's Supper, and therefore welcome into church membership, baptized believers in Jesus who belong to a church. By definition, a church's members are welcome to the Table. In addition, I think a church should welcome to the Table other baptized believers who belong to a gospel church.

How should a church actually communicate the requirements for participation? It will vary depending on the context and size of the church. But it's important to note that the church's authority is declarative, not coercive. Whoever leads the Lord's Supper should verbally clarify who should participate in the Lord's Supper, and individuals should respect the church's declaration. If someone seems to be participating who shouldn't be, a quiet word may be in order at some point, but not a physical act of coercion or restraint.

Exactly what a church will need to say publicly in order to clarify who should participate in the Supper will vary depending on what can be taken for granted and where there's likely to be confusion or misunderstanding. Speaking to an urbanized Western context, I'd recommend the one leading say something like: "If you're a member of this church, or if you're a member of another evangelical church, and you've been baptized as a believer in Jesus, you're welcome to partake."

The Lord's Supper is for baptized believers who belong to a church. It renews our commitment to Christ, so it is for those who are committed to Christ. It makes the church visible, so it is for those who have visibly identified themselves as Christians in baptism. It is the church's meal, so it is for those who belong to a church.

CHAPTER 10

Who Should Lead the Lord's Supper?

Two chapters back I raised the question, “Who should celebrate the Lord’s Supper?” And the last two chapters unpacked two different elements of that question: What gathering may celebrate the Lord’s Supper? And, who should participate in the Lord’s Supper? Now we come to the last question in this series: Who should lead the Lord’s Supper?

My basic answer is, if a church has a pastor or pastors, one of the pastors should lead the Lord’s Supper. If a church doesn’t have a pastor, they should decide together which of their members is most qualified—likely whoever regularly teaches the Bible.

Why should a pastor lead the Lord’s Supper? Two reasons. First, the Lord’s Supper is an act of the church, and pastors are those who have been appointed to lead the church. The whole church is accountable to hear and heed the Word, and pastors are those specially charged to preach and teach the Word (1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:9). In a similar way, I would suggest that while the whole church is accountable to rightly celebrate the Lord’s Supper, pastors’ overall leadership role makes it fitting for them to lead the celebration of it.

Second, the Lord’s Supper is a “visible Word.” It dramatizes the gospel. It presents the events of the gospel to our eyes, and hands, and mouths. And, as we’ve seen, pastors are those set aside to proclaim the word. Since there is a tight link between the word preached and the word made visible and tangible in the Lord’s Supper, the same men set aside for the one should also lead the other.

But I do think there are exceptional circumstances. Not every church has a pastor or pastors. Occasionally, a church plant might be a team effort. They may have already come together as a church, but not yet have a formally recognized pastor or pastors. Or, perhaps more commonly, a long-standing church may lose their pastor and not be able to find another for a

season. Can the church plant not yet celebrate the Lord's Supper, and the established church celebrate it no longer?

I think they can celebrate it, and here's why. The Bible teaches that pastors are a gift from Christ to his church. Every church should have a pastor. Actually, every church should seek to have multiple pastors, since a plurality of church leaders—interchangeably called pastors, elders, and overseers—is the clear New Testament pattern (Acts 14:23; 20:17, 28; Eph. 4:11–12; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; James 5:14).⁴ But while pastors are an element in a well-ordered church (Titus 1:5), and are necessary for the long-term health and well-being of a church (Eph. 4:11–16), they're not essential to the existence of a church. You can have a church before you appoint a pastor and after you lose or remove a pastor.

Consider, for example, that when Paul and Barnabas traveled through Lystra and Iconium and Antioch, they appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23; cf. Titus 1:5). The churches needed elders, so Paul and Barnabas led the process of appointing them. But the churches existed before they had elders. The text doesn't say, "Paul and Barnabas appointed elders so that there would be a church." The church came first.

Since the Lord's Supper is the church's meal, the church has the authority to celebrate it, even in those exceptional circumstances in which a church lacks pastors to lead it. In such a situation, the church should come to a consensus about who is best able to lead. Such an individual should be a member of the church. He should be godly and reliable. And ideally this should be a person who is serving in at least some pastor-like ways in the absence of a formal pastor, especially teaching the Bible. Beyond that, if you ever find yourself in a situation like this, all I can say is, pray that God would give your church wisdom and unity, and that he would quickly provide faithful pastors to lead and strengthen the body.

CHAPTER 11

How Should Churches Celebrate the Lord's Supper?

How should churches celebrate the Lord's Supper? Once you get into the "how," like we do in this chapter, there will inevitably be more questions than there is room to answer. Churches of different sizes, in different cultural contexts, with different histories, will face different challenges and opportunities when it comes to celebrating the Lord's Supper.

So in this chapter I'm not going to answer every question you might have, or try to lay out an exact script churches need to follow. Instead, I'm going to sketch a few basic points that are either clearly commanded in Scripture or are clear implications of Scripture's teaching. We'll briefly discuss six issues. The first four are things I think the Bible clearly instructs churches to do; the last two, in my view, are matters of liberty.

Whole-Church Gathering

First, a church should celebrate the Lord's Supper in the context of a whole-church gathering. This is a clear implication of 1 Corinthians 10:17, as we've already considered. The Lord's Supper is the church's meal. So the church should celebrate it in its regular gathering for worship, which everyone in the church is expected to attend. This doesn't mean that a church can only celebrate the Lord's Supper if every single member is present—"Uh-oh, Aunt Bess is sick again, I guess we can't have the Lord's Supper this week." Instead, it simply means that the church should celebrate the Lord's Supper as a church.

Make the Meaning Clear

Second, the church should make the meaning of the Lord's Supper clear each time it is celebrated. As we saw last chapter, normally this task will fall to the pastor who is leading the service. In most Protestant churches, the minister leads the Lord's Supper by reciting and explaining Jesus' words from the Last Supper as they are preserved in Paul's teaching in 1

Corinthians 11. I think that's a wise and healthy practice. The basic point to get across is that the Lord's Supper presents the gospel to us in tangible, edible form. The body and bread represent Christ's body given for us and blood shed for us.

A pastor shouldn't assume that the message of these signs is self-evident to his hearers. So, whether in the sermon before the Supper, or in the celebration of the Supper, the pastor leading should be sure to proclaim the gospel each and every time the church celebrates the meal Jesus gave us. He should make the Supper's meaning clear to all present.

Make Clear Who Should and Shouldn't Participate

Third, the church should clarify who should participate, and who shouldn't. As we saw in chapter 9, the Lord's Supper is a meal for baptized believers who belong to a church. So the one leading in the Lord's Supper should clarify who should be taking the Lord's Supper. This should happen through a simple, verbal explanation.

A church shouldn't simply leave some bread and wine up front and say, "The Table is open." That invites unwary, uninitiated unbelievers to eat and drink judgment on themselves. The far more loving thing to do is to explain that the Lord's Supper is for those who have trusted in Jesus to save them, and have publicly committed themselves to Jesus and his people in baptism.

Eat the Bread, Drink the Cup

Fourth, everyone who participates should eat the bread and drink the cup. Some church traditions practice intinction, where the bread is dipped into the wine and then eaten. But Jesus commanded his disciples to eat the bread and to drink the cup (Matt. 26:26–28). These two acts preserve the distinct, complementary symbolism of Jesus' body given for us and his blood poured out for us. So churches should celebrate the Lord's Supper by inviting all those participating to both eat the bread and drink the cup.

How Often?

Fifth, how often should churches celebrate the Lord's Supper? I'm not entirely sure. On the one hand, Jesus said, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Cor. 11:25). This seems to suggest that churches should celebrate the Lord's Supper often, but without specifying how often. On the other hand, Paul's references to the Corinthians celebrating the

Lord's Supper when they "come together" as a church seem to imply that they celebrated it at each gathering of the church (1 Cor. 11:17–18, 20, 33–34). And, as we've seen, Acts 20:7 says that on the first day of the week the believers in Troas "assembled to break bread." If they gathered "to break bread," that may suggest that the Lord's Supper was an essential part of their weekly gathering.

For reasons like these, some churches are convinced that the weekly observation of the Lord's Supper is a normative practice for us to follow. There are good reasons to view it that way, but I'm not yet convinced. The phrase "as often as you drink it" (1 Cor. 11:25) seems to imply a degree of flexibility. So I think that the frequency with which a church celebrates the Lord's Supper is a matter of prudence. It certainly can be celebrated weekly. Whether weekly or not, it must be celebrated often.

With a Meal?

Finally, as we've seen in our study of 1 Corinthians 10—11, the church in Corinth clearly celebrated the Lord's Supper in the context of a whole meal. Recall that the phrase "the breaking of bread" may well refer to the Lord's Supper in Acts 20:7. The use of a similar phrase in Acts 2:46 to describe a normal meal seems to suggest that "the breaking of bread" was a meal in which the Lord's Supper was celebrated (cf. Acts 2:42). Does that mean the New Testament requires churches to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal?

I don't think so. What Jesus commanded us to do is eat the bread and drink the cup. The ordinance of the Lord's Supper is the corporate performance of those acts. So I don't think that eating a full meal together is of the essence of the Lord's Supper. It's not a necessary element.

However, celebrating the Lord's Supper in the context of a whole-church meal is a practice I'd love to see more churches recover. It highlights the fellowship we share with one another in the Lord's Supper. It underscores that we go to church in order to be the church. Sitting down for a meal together is a way to show our acceptance of each other in Christ. And having a communal meal as an element in a church's "worship service," rather than merely as an optional potluck afterward, sends the message that fellowship with one another is an essential part of what it means to be a church.

Like I said, I don't think a church has to celebrate the Lord's Supper in the context of a whole meal. But I'd love to see more churches do it.

More to Say

Of course there's more to say than I've said here, but I hope these brief points provide a few biblical directions for practicing the Lord's Supper in a way that honors Christ and builds up the body. If you're a pastor, I pray God would give you wisdom as you lead your church in its celebration of the Lord's Supper. If you're a church member, I hope you'll keep reading, since the next and final chapter addresses how individuals should approach the Lord's Supper.

CHAPTER 12

How Should Individuals Approach the Lord's Supper?

The final practical matter to consider is, how should you, an individual believer, approach the Lord's Supper? I've got four brief encouragements for you.

Look to the Cross

First, look to the cross. The bread you eat and the cup you drink are signs of Jesus giving himself for you. When Jesus gave up his body and let his blood be shed, he did it for you. Jesus endured the shame and agony of the cross, and most of all the wrath of God against sin, for you. The Lord's Supper proclaims to us the salvation Christ accomplished, finished, completed on the cross. It proclaims to us a salvation that is ours not to earn but to receive.

So when you celebrate the Lord's Supper with your church, look to the cross. Look to the cross with joy and wonder, with awe and thanks. If you're tempted to believe that your sins are too big or bad for God to forgive, look to the cross. Jesus' sacrifice is enough.

Look Around

Second, look around. As we've seen throughout this little book, the Lord's Supper is the church's meal. It seals our fellowship with Christ and each other. It draws the church together, making many one.

The Lord's Supper is not a private devotional experience that just happens to involve a bunch of other people doing the same thing at the same time. So revel in the togetherness of the Lord's Supper. Don't just close your eyes and confess your sins; look around and marvel at those he's redeemed. Use the regular occurrence of the Lord's Supper to consider whether you have any sins against others to confess to them, any breaches

in the body you need to heal. And if you discover any, then make amends as soon as you can, even if it means a quick, hushed conversation in the middle of church.

And rejoice in the unity-in-diversity that the Lord's Supper signs and seals. We are many yet one. All the differences that threaten to divide us are nothing compared to the blood Christ shed to save us and unite us. We all partake of the one bread; we all receive the same Savior. As one modern hymn-writer put it, "Now the strong ones and the weak are the same under his blood. For empty-handed all must come to receive his endless love."⁵ At the Lord's Supper, divisions disappear. That's why the Lord's Supper should plant a passionate pursuit of unity in the heart of every Christian.

So at the Lord's Supper, look around. Remember that the same Christ who saved you has saved all the brothers and sisters seated with you. Rejoice that in gaining Christ as your Savior, you gained his people as your family.

Look Ahead

Third, look ahead. As we saw in chapter 5, the Lord's Supper doesn't just look back to the cross; it also looks forward to the coming kingdom. A day is coming when Christ himself will spread a feast for us and celebrate with us (Matt. 26:29). A day is coming when God will throw the greatest wedding party ever for Christ and his bride (Rev. 19:7, 9).

For all the riches of fellowship with Christ and his people that we enjoy in the Lord's Supper, that fellowship is only a foretaste. It's not the main dish, but an appetizer for the coming feast. So look ahead. In the death and resurrection of Christ, God made good on his promise to forgive his people: to reconcile us to himself, to liberate us from slavery to sin. And he will make good on his promise to remake the world, destroy death, and unite his people to himself forever. So as you eat the bread and drink the cup, look ahead in hope and eager expectation. God is saving his best for last.

Look Inward, and Back to the Cross

Finally, look inward, and back to the cross. The Lord's Supper is an appropriate time to examine yourself and confess your sins to God. The gospel offers forgiveness because we need it. Christ shed his blood for us

because only his death could redeem us from sin. So at the Lord's Supper we should be reminded anew of our need for forgiveness, and we should confess to God the ways in which we have fallen short of his glory.

But don't stop there. If the Lord's Supper becomes an occasion for compounding your guilt, then you're missing the point entirely. The Lord's Supper proclaims to us that our guilt is gone, our debt is paid, our punishment has been taken, our sins are forgiven and forgotten. So look inward, and then look right back to the cross.

All Over Again

The point of the Lord's Supper is the gospel. The gospel frees us from sin. The gospel reconciles us to God. The gospel gives us God for our Father, Jesus for our elder brother, and all the saints as brothers and sisters. The gospel unites us to Christ and to each other.

And the Lord's Supper pictures and presents all this to us: to our sight, our touch, our taste. In the Lord's Supper we commune with Christ and therefore with his people. When we eat the bread and drink the cup, we reaffirm our trust in Christ and our commitment to his people. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we embrace Christ all over again, and we also embrace all who are his.

NOTES

1. See my *Understanding Baptism* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), especially chapter 1.
2. On this point, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 767.
3. For more on all the issues discussed in this section, see my *Going Public: Why Baptism Is Required for Church Membership* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2015), and *Understanding Baptism* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016).
4. For further discussion, see Mark Dever's *Understanding Church Leadership* in this series.
5. Wesley Randolph Eader, "Victory in the Lamb," available at <http://noisetrade.com/wesleyrandolphheader>.

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