

# Let us keep the feast!

A Biblical and Pastoral Case for the Weekly Celebration of  
the Lord's Supper in the Presbyterian and Reformed  
Churches

by  
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## Preface

Evangelical Christians share a common heritage in the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Whether we are Presbyterian or Lutheran, Baptist or Methodist, Independent Fundamentalist or Pentecostal, if we believe that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, and that the Bible is the unique and only Word of God, the sole rule for what we should believe and how we should live as the church of God, then we are the spiritual children of the such Reformers as Martin Luther and John Calvin. Evangelical Christians recognize one another as the people of God despite our considerable differences because we all share the core beliefs of the Protestant Reformation. Our differences are real and substantial; so is the core of our common faith. As a result, we distinguish ourselves both from Roman Catholicism and mainline or liberal Protestantism. We agree with the Reformers in their critique of medieval Catholicism in general, and of the mass in particular. With the reformers we reject as unbiblical such Roman Catholic doctrines as transubstantiation and the continuation of Christ's sacrifice in the mass.

In contrast to Roman Catholic doctrine, all evangelicals agree with the Reformers that Christ's sacrifice is not continued in the supper, that is to say, the priest does not offer Christ to the Father for the propitiation of the sins of the people. Christ offered himself once for all on the cross. In the supper that sacrifice is not continued but proclaimed and received by faith. The supper is not a propitiatory sacrifice for the pardon of sins, but a memorial of the once for all sacrifice of Christ in which all our sins are pardon. What is offered to the Father in the supper is not the sacrifice of Christ, but the sacrifice of praise, the giving thanks to God the Father for the gift of his son. What the supper call us to believe, is not that Christ is on this table (altar) at this moment offered for us, but that the Christ who once offered himself for us at the cross, now offers himself to us that we might receive and rest upon him alone for salvation, finding in his death the complete forgiveness of our sins, and in his resurrection the fullness of life.

Likewise all evangelicals agree that the bread and wine are not changed into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. With the exception of Lutherans, evangelicals reject the idea that Christ is present in the Supper in a bodily way. Luther taught that Christ in his human nature was present "in, under, and around" the elements of bread and wine. In contrast, Zwingli, Bucer, Calvin, Cramner, Knox, and the others (all of whom we refer to as "Reformed") insisted emphatically that the body of Christ was exclusively in heaven. For these Reformers, the believer's communion with the humanity of Christ was through the unfathomable work of the Spirit, not through some ubiquitous presence of the physical body of risen Christ. Both the clear teaching of holy scripture that Christ bodily ascended into heaven, and catholic conviction that the human nature of Jesus was not absorbed into his divinity kept the Reformed from embracing any theory of a local, physical presence of Christ in the supper. Instead, they insisted that the true communion that believer had with Christ's body and blood was a mystery that could not be explained, but rather only the doer of that mystery could be named - the Spirit of God. In the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, evangelicals have overwhelmingly followed the interpretation of these "Reformed" reformers, rather than Luther. The essential eucharistic

ideas of Presbyterians, Baptists, Pentecostals and Independent Fundamentalists are derived from Zwingli and Calvin, not Luther. For this historical reason, the arguments in this book are addressed, not only to Presbyterians, but broadly to fellow evangelical Christians. Yet at the same time this book is written by a Presbyterian and with special attention to the Reformed heritage in matters sacramental. It is hoped that it will prove useful both to Presbyterians, and others evangelicals who share with us the great insights of the Reformation - *Sola Fide, Sola Scriptura, and Sola Deo Gloria*.

The book is written from the perspective of the classic evangelical conviction that the Scriptures are inspired by God and therefore historically trustworthy. However a considerable literature exists analyzing and interpreting the last supper on the assumption that the gospels and the Pauline letters are to be subjected to the various forms of literary criticism used in the study of historical documents. In much of this literature, the historical accuracy of the last supper accounts is a matter of debate. The four accounts do present a number of intriguing issues. There is a perplexing difference in phraseology between the unquestionable parallel accounts. The time relationship between the last supper and the Jewish Passover is problematic, especially because of the different chronology in John's gospel. Considerable attention has been given to comparing Passover customs from rabbinical sources with the material in the gospels and 1 Corinthians. Questions have been raised whether certain Greek phrases could have been uttered in Aramaic. Within this scholarship we can distinguish two essentially different perspectives. First, there are those critics who argue that the last supper is not historical, but is the invention of the early church to justify its eucharistic practice. Second, there are others who argue that the last supper was a real event, and that we can discern with more or less confidence the actual words and actions of Jesus behind the four accounts that we possess. Common to all this literature is a search for the historical Jesus "in, under, around" the existing texts of the gospels and the epistles of the New Testament. This debate is worthy of being joined, and we believe a compelling case can be made on literary grounds that the last supper accounts are fully historical, and consistent with each other. However, the purpose of this book is to argue with those of evangelical and Reformed convictions that the doing of what the Jesus commanded at the last supper belongs to the weekly Lord's day assembly of believers. This book, therefore, presumes the historicity of the accounts of the last supper. Some interaction with the critical literature will be found in the endnotes, but this is only for illustrative purposes. A serious engagement of the issues raised by historical scholarship would require a very different book and so must await another occasion.

## Introduction

How often should we celebrate the Lord's supper in our Lord's Day services? The diversity of answers given by Presbyterian and Reformed churches mirrors the diversity to be found throughout the evangelical world. There are conservative, Bible-believing Presbyterian congregations that hold the supper at every conceivable frequency from weekly to annual. The most common frequencies are monthly and quarterly, but the decision is left with each local congregation's ruling council (session). Among evangelicals the same diversity exists, except that other evangelicals are less likely to celebrate the supper on weekly and monthly basis than are Presbyterians.

Complicating this situation is the significant change in Roman Catholic practice since the Second Vatican Council. In the medieval era, mass was said, not merely weekly, but daily. However the custom had developed and had been sanctioned that the people partook of the mass only once a year and only of the bread. The priest, of course, ate and drank at every mass, but most of the time he alone communed. The people watched but did not partake. John Calvin deplored this as the doing of Satan. "Plainly this custom which enjoins us to take communion once a year is a veritable invention of the devil."<sup>1</sup> All of the reformers criticized this and sought to establish a more frequent communion for the people of God. In their view, if the people did not eat and drink, then there was no Lord's supper regardless of what the priest said and did. Though there was diversity of opinion about how frequently the supper should be served, all were agreed that an annual communion was unbiblical. However, in recent times the Roman Catholic church has begun to encourage its people to partake of the bread and wine whenever mass is said. It is not uncommon, therefore, for lay Catholics to commune every time they attend mass. The result is that an argument for more frequent communion among evangelicals can be charged with the crime of being "Roman Catholic." This is truly bizarre, but it illustrates the extent to which evangelicals are ignorant of their own heritage.

However, the movement toward a more "Protestant" posture by Rome has not gone unchallenged within that church. Some Roman Catholics regard the changes in the liturgy that resulted from Vatican II to be in reality a concession to the Reformation. For example, in a recent advertisement in a local newspaper, a parish that still uses the Latin mass with permission from its bishop, contrasted the Latin mass to the contemporary English mass used in most parishes. Some of the contrasts were "clearly a sacrifice vs. Clearly a meal; an altar, a priest vs. a table; completely Catholic vs. half Protestant." This advertisement engendered a considerable debate in the letters to the editor. On the one hand, there was a vigorous defense of the Latin mass. On the other, the parish in question was accused of association with the excommunicated Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. It is sad that some evangelicals reject weekly communion because it is too Roman Catholic when, historically considered, the shift to more frequent communion in the Roman Catholic Church came centuries after the Reformation critique of annual communion as an invention of the devil. Centuries before Vatican II, the Protestant Reformers sought to make the supper a frequent, even weekly, part of the renewed Christian assembly. To argue that frequent communion is distinctively Roman Catholic is to reveal a profound ignorance of history. It is also to implicitly reject the foundation of all evangelical belief,

namely, that the Bible is the sole rule of life and faith for the people of God. If the Bible is the only Word of God, then it is irrelevant to us whether the Roman Church encourages its people to partake of its mass annually or weekly. What matters for us is what the Bible requires of us, and whether we will submit to its inspired and infallible rule. And that is the point of this book, to argue that the Lord's supper should be celebrated at the weekly assembly of Christians just at the Word should be read and preached, prayers should be said and sung, and offerings should be received for the work of the Church. In making our case for weekly celebration, we shall have occasion to illustrate our points by quotations from the Reformers and from the Ancient Fathers. We call upon their opinions, not as authorities in themselves, but as witnesses with us to the truth of the Word of God.

For the reader new to this subject, a few definitions of terms may prove helpful. The Lord's supper is the most common term in evangelical circles for the doing what Jesus instituted at the last supper on the night he was betrayed. This terminology along with the Lord's table are taken from the Apostle Paul. In the ancient Church the common way to refer to the Lord's supper (either the meal itself or the complete liturgy in which the meal was celebrated) was Eucharist. The terms Lord's supper and Eucharist will be used interchangeable in this work. Evangelicals also use the term Communion for the Lord's supper. However, the noun, communion, and the verb, commune, can refer narrowly to the act of eating and drinking, and so are to be distinguished from the priest's consecration of the elements. The term Mass will be reserved for historical references to medieval western eucharistic liturgy as well as to the post-Trent<sup>2</sup> Roman Catholic eucharistic liturgy.

Two other terms commonly used in New Testament and liturgical studies, but not necessarily familiar to the average reader are pericope, and synoptic. A pericope is section of text that forms a grammatical and thematic unity (not unlike a paragraph in English). The word pericope is derived from two Greek words meaning to "cut around." The word synoptic comes also from two Greek words and means "with the same sight." The first three Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke are commonly called synoptic Gospels because they are very similar. All three share considerable common material, and all three are different in style from the fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John.

## The Practice of the Ancient Church

Among Evangelical theologians and pastors there is no consensus on how frequently the Lord's supper should be celebrated. This is as true for Presbyterians as it is for other Evangelicals. Both within the Reformed Churches, and more broadly among most Evangelicals, there is a variety of opinion on the frequency with which the Lord's supper should be celebrated. The stands in marked contrast to the practice of the ancient church. The uncertainty about how often to do the supper did not plague the churches in the centuries that followed the age of the Apostles. The Lord's supper was celebrated every Lord's day by the ancient church from the end of the first century through the fourth century. Week after week the ancient Christians broke bread and ate it as Jesus had instructed. The weekly assembly of the saints was invariably a gathering in which the people ate the bread and drank of the cup.

The experience of most Christians since the Medieval period has been very different. Among Protestants, the Lord's supper has normally been celebrated on an occasional basis. However, when it is held the congregation as a whole eats the bread and drinks from the cup. Thus the Protestant pattern has been occasional celebration but always with congregational participation. The Orthodox Churches consecrate the bread and wine every Lord's day gathering, but until recently the people mostly watched and only occasionally ate and drank. The practice in Romanism has been to for the priest to say Mass very often, but again the people only occasionally ate, and until this century, never drank from the cup. In contrast to Protestantism, Orthodoxy and Romanism have frequent celebration but only occasional participation by the congregation as a whole. So then, neither the practice of Protestantism, nor of Romanism and Orthodoxy mirrors the pattern of the ancient church. Since the practice of ancient church was very much different than three major branches of Christianity that descended from the ancient church, it is worth reviewing the extensive evidence of the practice of the ancient church - a weekly doing of the holy supper in which the whole assembly partook. As Hugh Wybrew has noted in his study of liturgy in the East, "It was unthinkable that anyone should be present without communicating."<sup>3</sup>

The evidence of this weekly communion in the ancient church can be found in many of the documents from this period. We will consider a few examples for the sake of those not familiar with the writings of the ancient Christians (customarily called the Church Fathers). As we begin, we need to say a little about terminology. Although in evangelical Protestant circles the most common terms for the holy supper are Lord's supper, Lord's table and communion, the more common designation in the ancient period was Eucharist. The English word "Eucharist" is derived from the Greek word that means thanksgiving. In its verb form, the Greek word from which our word "Eucharist" comes is used to describe the prayer of Jesus at the last supper in Matthew 26:27, Mark 14:23, Luke 22:19 and 1 Corinthians 11:24. Since the church following the example of Jesus took bread and gave thanks (Greek: eucharisto), it was natural for Greek speaking Christians to refer to the whole service as the Eucharist (thanksgiving).

One of the early Christian document outside the New Testament is the *Didache* or *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*<sup>4</sup>. This document is our earliest example of a manual for conducting church ceremonies. It consists of a homily (sermon) on the two

ways of life and death, and various instructions for church life and prayer. The *Didache* was not known at the time of the Reformation. The dating of this document is a matter of considerable dispute. Some scholars date the *Didache* to before the fall of Jerusalem (A.D. 70), thus placing it in the same time frame as the composition of the New Testament documents. Others date it as late as the middle or latter half of the second century. The locale of the *Didache* is also uncertain. Internal evidence has led some to suggest a Syrian origin. However, the textual data suggests an Egyptian setting.<sup>5</sup> The *Didache* gives these instructions for the celebration of the Eucharist:

Now concerning the Eucharist give thanks as follows.<sup>6</sup>

First, concerning the cup:

We give you thanks, our Father, for the holy vine of David your servant, which you have made know to us through Jesus your servant, to you be glory forever.

And concerning the broken bread:

We give thanks to you, our Father, for the life and knowledge which you have made known to us through Jesus, your servant; to you be glory forever. Just as the broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and then was gathered together and became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours in the glory and power through Jesus Christ forever.

But let no one eat or drink of your Eucharist except those who have been baptized into the name of the Lord, for the Lord has also spoken concerning this: “Do not give what is holy to dogs.”

And after you have had enough, give thanks as follows:

We give thanks to you, Holy Father, for your holy name which you have caused to dwell in our hearts, and for the knowledge of and faith and immortality which you have made known to us through Jesus your servant; to you be the glory forever. You, almighty Master, created all things for your names sake, and gave food and drink to men to enjoy, that they might give your thanks; but to us you have graciously given spiritual food and drink, and eternal life through your servant. Above all we give thanks because you are mighty; to you be glory forever. Remember you church, Lord, to deliver it from evil and to make it perfect in your love; and gather it, the one that has been sanctified, from the four winds into your kingdom, which you have prepared for it; For yours is the power and the glory forever.

May grace come and may this world pass away.

Hosanna to the God of David.

If anyone is holy, let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent.

Maranatha! Amen.<sup>7</sup>

In the next section of the *Didache*, we encounter this further instruction: “On the Lord’s own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins



so that your sacrifice may be pure... For this is the sacrifice concerning which the Lord said, 'In every place and time offer me a pure sacrifice, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is marvelous among the nations.'"<sup>8</sup>

While there are a number of interpretive issues in dispute regarding the *Didache*, for our purposes the *Didache* serves as a clear witness to the role of a holy meal in the weekly gathering of Christians. Whether the above material refers narrowly to what we would call a "Lord's supper," or more broadly to an agape feast (that included Lord's supper elements), the *Didache* gives witness to a pattern of weekly gathering for the purpose of breaking bread and giving thanks as Jesus instituted at the last supper. The use of the term "sacrifice" shows that this meal was understood as a worship event, a New Covenant fulfillment of Malachi 1:11. The prayers prescribed for the cup, bread, and the close of the meal show that the meaning of sacrifice in the *Didache* is that of a spiritual sacrifice or a sacrifice of praise. The prayers give no evidence that the sacrifice was understood as a priestly offering of Christ to the Father for the pardon of sins. Such a conception would not arise until considerably later. There is little continuity between these prayers and the latter prayers in the canon of the Roman Mass which the Reformers so strongly criticized. The same is true for the Orthodox divine liturgy. The idea of sacrifice in the *Didache* does not seem to go beyond the concept found in such New Testament passages as 1 Peter 2: 5 and Hebrews 13:15. In a similar way, the injunction to confess sins has much the same force as the command in James 5:16. In the *Didache* the confession was not privately to a presbyter, but took place in the assembly. "In church you shall confess your transgressions."<sup>9</sup> The *Didache*, therefore, instructs Christians to gather together on the Lord's own day, to break bread and to give thanks as spiritual worship, and to begin this common service with a confession of sins. As was said above, the date and locale of the *Didache* are uncertain. If it does date to the first century then we have very early witness to the liturgical practice of a part of the church. But even on a later dating, it still provides a picture of the importance of the sacred supper in the second century.

A second early source of information on the practice of the ancient church is the collection of the letters of Ignatius. The letters of Ignatius give us historical information that is not encumbered with the interpretive difficulties of the *Didache*. Ignatius was bishop<sup>10</sup> of the church at Antioch in Syria. On his way to his martyrdom in Rome he wrote seven letters, six to the churches in Ephesus, Magnesia, Tralles, Philadelphia, Smyrna and Rome, and one to Polycarp, bishop of the church in Smyrna. Ignatius was martyred during the reign of Trajan (98-117) which places his martyrdom and his letters no later than 117. Ignatius repeatedly refers to the Eucharist in his letters which he sent out while on the way to his martyrdom.<sup>11</sup> Ignatius' main concern was to exhort Christians to share in the Eucharist that was conducted under the authority of their local bishop and presbyters. He wrote to warn of the dangers of rebellion and division in the churches. But in the process of issuing his exhortations, he also gives witness that the gathering of the church was a gathering to celebrate the Lord's supper. Ignatius in his letter to the Ephesians writes, "Continue to gather together each and every one of you, collectively and individually by name, in grace, in one faith and one Jesus Christ, who physically was a descendant of David, who is Son of man and Son of God, in order that you may obey

the bishop and the presbytery with an undisturbed mind, breaking one bread which is the medicine of immortality, the antidote we take in order not to die but to live forever in Jesus Christ.”<sup>12</sup> The meeting referred to in this sentence is the weekly gathering of Christians where the bishop and the presbyters preside. It is what we would call the official meeting of the church. The activity that takes place at this official meeting is the breaking of one bread which Ignatius calls “the medicine of immortality.” Ignatius’ concern is that the Christians not forsake this official meeting with its official meal for a schismatic gathering. He writes out of a similar concern to the Smyrnaeans, “Only that Eucharist which is under the authority of the bishop (or whomever he himself designates) is to be considered valid.”<sup>13</sup> In warning against heretics who denied the incarnation of Jesus, Ignatius wrote, “They abstain from the Eucharist and prayer<sup>14</sup>, because they refuse to acknowledge that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ, which suffered for our sins and which the Father by his goodness raised up.”<sup>15</sup> Here Ignatius presumes that the assembly for prayer is also the assembly for the Eucharist. It is clear, therefore, from these two citations that at the beginning of the second century the gathering of Christians included the Lord’s supper.

We find the same pattern of weekly communion in the middle of the second century in the writings of Justin Martyr (about A.D. 150). According to Justin’s account the Lord’s day gathering of believers included both preaching and the the bread and wine of the holy supper.

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.<sup>16</sup>

This is our earliest description of a unified service of preaching, prayer and Lord’s supper that would be the pattern for almost all Lord’s day liturgies until the Reformation. The weekly gathering of believers was both a preaching service and a Lord’s supper service. It would remain so throughout the Ancient period. In fact, the decline of lay participation in the supper that characterized the medieval period would begin to develop before the decline in preaching that also came to characterize the medieval assemblies.

As we move toward the end of the second century and into the third and fourth centuries, the references to the weekly gathering of Christians as a eucharistic or Lord’s supper event are numerous. We have manuals for the celebration of the Eucharist, explanations of the Eucharist for the newly baptized, and theological reflections on the Eucharist. We have sermons explaining the Eucharist and exhorting the people to a proper participation. Only toward the end of this period would the pattern begin to develop in which Christians would attend the celebration of the supper, but would not

partake of the bread and the cup. Roughly parallel to this was the developing practice of delaying baptism until old age. Both tendency were vigorously resisted by leaders in the church. The council of Antioch in 341 expelled from the church anyone who merely listened to the sermon, but did not join in the prayers and the Eucharist.<sup>17</sup> Such a refraining from participation was a crucial development that divided ancient piety from medieval piety. It advanced more quickly in the East than in the West. “St. Ambrose, in his catechetical lectures to the newly baptized in Milan, probably in the 380’s, urged them not to imitate the Greeks, who received the sacrament only once a year.”<sup>18</sup> Yet even in the East we find John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople at the end of the fourth century, exhorting the people to partake.

He feeds with Himself those whom He has begotten, and He does no farm them out to another, and thus He also persuades you again that He has taken your flesh. Let us not, then, be remiss, since we have been counted worthy of so much love, of so much honor. Do you not see the babies, how eagerly they grasp the breast, how impetuously they fix their lips upon the nipple? Let us similarly approach this table, and the nipple of the spiritual cup. Or, rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the grace of the Spirit. Let it be our one sorrow not to partake of this food.<sup>19</sup>

A number of factors seem to have encouraged this movement toward infrequent communion. First, there was the large influx of converts after the Edit of Milan that legalized Christianity, and even more so after Christianity became the official religion of the Empire. Therefore the fourth century church struggled with the need to keep its communion pure and devout in a way it had not faced in the preceding centuries. This concern naturally lead to a heightened emphasis on worthy participation and hence produced a reluctance to commune. The rise of monasticism also played a role in that it set up a contrast between the truly devout (monks) and the less that adequate piety of the masses. Further, Cyril of Jerusalem’s interpretation of the sacrament placed the emphasis on the consecration by which the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, rather than on the communion of the people with Christ.<sup>20</sup> This laid a foundation for the development of a piety which was more concerned with when, how and by whom the bread was changed into the body of Christ than with the New Testament emphasis on the actual eating and drinking of the elements. In the succeeding centuries the frequency of lay participation would decline, not only in the East, but also in the West, until the pattern of annual communion was established both in practice and in church doctrine. In the West, the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 required that the faithful confess their sins to a priest and partake of the bread at least once a year.

All believers of both sexes shall after coming to the age of discretion faithfully confess all their sins at least once a year in private to their own priest, and strive to fulfil to the best of their ability the penance imposed upon them. They shall reverently receive at least at Easter the sacrament of the Eucharist, unless on the advice of their own priest they believe that they should temporarily abstain for some good reason. Otherwise, they are to be prohibited access to the church while alive and be denied Christian burial when they are dead. Therefore, let this

beneficial rule be frequently made public in churches, so that no one in the blindness of his ignorance may find a shadow of excuse.<sup>21</sup>

Given human nature, the minimum required often becomes the maximum performed. So in the end most medieval Christians partook of the bread only once a year at Easter. The Protestant Reformers, in particular Martin Bucer and John Calvin, tried to return the church to the practice of the ancient church where the holy supper was both served to and eaten by the people each Lord's day. For the Reformed, the communion of the people, not the consecration of the elements, was the main concern. In this effort they did not succeed in large part due to the reluctance of the people to eat and drink.

So then, the celebration of the Lord's supper was a central and weekly part of the experience of ancient Christians. The return to such a practice was the express intention of the Reformers John Calvin and Martin Bucer. This historical survey should give us pause to consider our tradition of infrequent communion. Are we biblically justified in celebrating the supper only monthly, quarterly or yearly? The tradition of the church in the second through the fourth centuries cannot be the authoritative rule of our practice. But it should demand our attention. It should cause us to evaluate our later tradition of infrequent communion. The pressing question for those who hold to *Sola Scriptura* is whether this ancient practice of weekly communion was apostolic in its origins. If the apostles established such a tradition, then it has authoritative weight for us today. If such a tradition is a part of the inscripturated Word, then it a rule for our churches today.

John Calvin was convinced that there was such an apostolic tradition of frequent communion recorded in the New Testament. He wrote in 1555 in a letter to the Senate of Berne: "There is another matter, though not a new one [to which I would call your attention, namely, that we celebrate the Lord's supper four times a year, and you three times]. Please God, gentlemen, that both you and we may be able to establish a more frequent usage. For it is evident from St. Luke in the Book of Acts that communion was much more frequently celebrated in the primitive church; and that continued for a long time in the ancient church, until this abomination of the mass was set up by Satan, who so caused it that people received communion only once or twice a year. Wherefore, we must acknowledge that it is a defect in that we do not follow the example of the Apostles."<sup>22</sup> Calvin saw evidence in Acts of a more frequent celebration than was the practice in his day. Though he had always advocated a celebration that was at least weekly, he was not able to implement this in Geneva. Was he correct? Had he read the book of Luke accurately? Should we follow Calvin in desiring a more frequent administration of the holy supper because of the example of the Apostolic church?

### To Break Bread in Luke-Acts

Calvin believed that in the Acts of the Apostles and in Paul's first letter the Corinthians there was evidence that the supper was to be frequently celebrated, at least every Lord's day. He believed this was both the teaching of the Apostles and the practice they established in the infant church. In his letter to the city of Berne, quoted above, Calvin alluded to Acts as showing the duty of frequent communion. From his other writings it is clear that he had in mind two passages, Acts 2:42ff and Acts 20:7ff. In his commentary on Acts he interpreted the phrase "to break bread" in both 2:42 and 20:7 as referring to the Lord's supper. He, therefore, saw Acts 20:7 as a witness to weekly communion in which the purpose of the weekly gathering was to eat the holy supper. Calvin regarded Acts 2:42-46 as describing the essential nature and activities of the Christian assembly. He believed that this passage taught the essential aspects of a Christian worship: the Word, prayers, alms, and the supper. As Calvin understood it, the supper was as much a part of the properly conducted Christian assembly as were preaching, prayers and alms. In his *Institutes* Calvin writes concerning Acts 2:42:

Luke relates in The Acts that this was the practice of the apostolic church, when he says that believers "...continued in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers" [Acts 2:42, cf. Vg.]. Thus it became the unvarying rule that no meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving. That this was the established order among the Corinthians also, we can safely infer from Paul [cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20]. And it remained in use for many centuries after.<sup>23</sup>

Weekly communion for Calvin was not just a matter of preserving the tradition of the ancient church. He saw it as matter of faithfulness to Scripture. Those who have read Calvin are aware of this biblically rooted conviction regarding the importance of the Lord's supper. But such readers are also aware that Calvin more or less took it for granted that references to breaking bread in Acts 2 and 20 refer to the Lord's supper. He mentioned the possibility that they may refer to a meal for ordinary sustenance, but passed over the issue without discussion. His treatment of the material in 1 Corinthians is much the same. It is left for us, therefore, to consider the proper interpretation of these texts in a fuller way. In this chapter we shall consider the passages in Acts that Calvin took to be references to the Lord's supper and also 1 Corinthians 11:17ff.

In Acts 2:42ff and Acts 20:7ff we find a reference to "breaking bread" in the context of the gathering of believers.

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in **the breaking of bread**, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and **breaking bread from house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples **came together to break bread**, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight... Now when he had come up, had

**broken bread** and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed.

These passages from Acts represent the practice of the Jerusalem church and the church at Troas respectively. From them we have a glimpse at the practice of the original Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem and the practice of a Gentile church in the sphere of influence of the Apostle Paul. These passages describe a meal among believers as “to break bread.”<sup>24</sup> Liturgical scholars commonly interpret the phrase “to break bread” as a reference to a meal done in keeping with the instructions of Jesus at the last supper. In other words, what the Apostle Paul calls the Lord’s supper. The phrase “to break bread” is assumed to be a clear reference to the holy supper. Oscar Cullman, for example, passes over the issue with this brief comment. “The fact the one says ‘breaking of bread’ and not ‘eating of bread’ – an unusual expression to designate a meal – indicates that those present were conscious of performing at the same time an act of special significance.”<sup>25</sup> However, among evangelical and Reformed ministers and theologians it is often doubted whether the references to breaking bread in Acts refer to the Lord’s supper.<sup>26</sup> For example, *The Presbyterian Advocate*, a magazine published by the Presbyterian Reformation Society, published articles for and against weekly communion. The Reverend David A. Sherwood replied to a critique by the Reverend Anthony Dallison in which Mr. Sherwood defended his advocacy of weekly communion. In that defense, Mr. Sherwood wrote concerning the meaning of the Acts passages, “I am convinced that the respective contexts are sufficiently clear so that, with the two Johns (Calvin and Murray), I think it highly probable that the Lord’s supper is in view.”<sup>27</sup> This was a response to Mr. Dallison’s critique that there was “no direct evidence whatever in the New Testament that the early church observed a weekly participation in the Lord’s Table.”<sup>28</sup> Given this diversity of opinion as to the meaning of Acts 2:42 and 20:7, it will not suffice to merely cite them as proof of the point being contested. It is necessary, therefore, to analyze their meaning in some detail in order to establish their proper interpretation. In particular we need to ask whether these two passages refer only to an ordinary meal, or to the Lord’s supper?

As we begin this inquiry we need to keep two considerations in mind. First, the phrase “Lord’s supper” is Pauline.<sup>29</sup> It occurs only once in the New Testament in Paul’s letter to 1 Corinthians. It is, therefore, not significant to the interpretation of the two passages in Acts that the unambiguous designation, “Lord’s supper,” is not used. Luke never once uses such a phrase. It is not a part of his literary vocabulary, though he surely knew of it from his close association with Paul. Paul is the only New Testament writer who uses the phrase “Lord’s supper.” It is plausible that he coined the term as well as the similar phrase “Lord’s table.”<sup>30</sup> The issue in the interpretation of the Acts passages is how Luke uses the phrase “to break bread.”<sup>31</sup> Does he use it as the equivalent of Paul’s “Lord’s supper?” That is to say, is it connected in a literary way to the last supper event? Second, we need to note that as late as 53/54 (1 Corinthians) the Lord’s supper was celebrated as a whole meal.<sup>32</sup> In all contemporary Christian practice (and apparently as early as Justin Martyr), the Lord’s supper has become a truncated meal with only a small morsel of bread and a little sip from the cup.<sup>33</sup> But in the New Testament documents, both the last supper as recorded by Luke and the Lord’s supper as practiced at Corinth

were more substantial meals. To break bread in Acts certainly does not refer to symbol meals of tiny portions, but to substantial meals with significant portions. The issue is whether these were meals with special significance given to the bread and cup, or meals without such attached significance. In other words, are the references to breaking bread in Acts 2:42, 46 and 20:7, 11 references to common meals only, or to the special meal Jesus established at the last supper?<sup>34</sup>

The answer to this question will be found in a review of the literary patterns in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts. Such a survey will show that Luke derives his terminology of breaking bread in Acts from the language of Jesus at the last supper in his Gospel. Our approach assumes that the Gospel and Acts have a common author and are intentionally a “two volume” set. Unfortunately, the scholarly fascination with the similarities and divergences of the synoptic Gospels has produced a tendency to treat Luke and Acts as more or less independent documents. Since doubts have been expressed on the Lukan authorship of both volumes, and since Acts is not always viewed in scholarly circles as a reliable historical account, it is little wonder that the study of the interrelation of Luke and Acts has received inadequate attention. However, if we take as reliable the prefaces of Luke and Acts, then it is clear that these two books must be read as a unified treatment of the origins of the Christian church beginning with the announcement of the conception of an obscure Jewish ascetic, John the Baptist, and ending with the gospel being freely preached and believed in city of Caesar.

It would seem that those committed to the doctrine of inspiration are bound to acknowledge that Luke and Acts are a unified literary effort. But even on historical grounds, the evidence points overwhelmingly to their common authorship. First, Acts claims the relationship. The Book of Acts begins with a reference to the Gospel, addressing this second volume to the same Theophilus as the Gospel. Acts opens with these words: “The first account I composed, Theophilus, about all that Jesus began to do and teach . . .” The writer of Acts claims to be also the writer of the Gospel. Second, as our study will in a small way buttress, the literary evidence shows a common authorship. There is both a consistency of phraseology and style as well as a commonality of thematic development. Luke parallels Acts stylistically in a way that is not true of the other two synoptics when compared to Acts. Finally, the witness of the early church writers supports the common authorship of Acts and the Gospel of Luke. This external witness is consistent with the internal evidence of the “we” sections in Luke which indicate that Acts was written by a travel companion of Paul. So then, our interpretation of the Acts 2:42ff and Acts 20:7ff will be constructed on the foundation of Luke and Acts as companion volumes from the same author, Luke, the associate of Paul.<sup>35</sup>

When Luke and Acts are read as a unified literary composition a pattern of phraseology is discernable in Luke that provides the background for properly interpreting the references to breaking bread in Acts. In fact such a pattern is not very hard to discern, even for the casual reader whose access to the texts is through a translation. The language of breaking bread in Acts rings in the ear of the reader because of the memorable description at the last supper. “And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them.” The act of breaking bread was for the ancient Christian reader, not just a literary allusion, but a matter of ritual practice. So too it is for us to

some extent also.<sup>36</sup> At the level of a casual reader, "to break bread" in Acts seems to be an obvious allusion back to the words of institution in the Gospel of Luke. If this obvious connection is in fact the intention of the author, then "to break bread" is an unambiguous reference to meal kept as a continuation of the last supper. In other words, "to break bread" is the Lukan equivalent of the Paul's phrase "the Lord's supper." Since Paul referred to what he elsewhere called the Lord's supper as "the bread that we bread"<sup>37</sup>, Paul would have had little trouble recognizing Luke's meaning. But many interpreters are nonetheless haunted by the possibility that "to break bread" is merely Luke's way of referring to ordinary meals. Oscar Cullmann's comment above notwithstanding, the English reader is not struck by the fact that "to break bread" is an odd way to describe a meal. But what was Luke's usage? Does he normally use "to break bread" for ordinary meals?

The first meal recorded in Luke's Gospel took place at the house of a Pharisee. Jesus came as a guest to this ordinary Sabbath supper. "Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat"<sup>38</sup> bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely."<sup>39</sup> Luke describes this meal of ordinary significance as "to eat bread." Since the meal was hosted by a devout Jew, indeed a Pharisee, there must have been a traditional Jewish blessing. Luke, not interested in the meal itself, does not mention such a detail. The meal was not significant in Luke's narrative. What Jesus says at the meal is Luke's focus. So we see that when Luke wants to refer to a meal of no special significance, he calls the meal "to eat bread." Apparently, such terminology was customary in the first century. One of the other guests at the meal is captivated by what Jesus has said. Luke records the comment of that guest. "Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat"<sup>40</sup> bread in the kingdom of God!'"<sup>41</sup> Both Luke in his narrative and this Jewish guest in his remark refer to this ordinary meal as "to eat bread." The same verb in the original Greek is used in both places. Luke designates a meal of ordinary significance with the phrase "to eat bread."

This ordinary meal with its un-noteworthy description is in marked contrast to the description of the feeding of the five thousand. Luke describes that significant meal with these words,

"Then He **took** the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, He **blessed** and **broke** them, and **gave** them to the disciples to set before the multitude."<sup>42</sup>

In contrast to the meal at the Pharisee's house, this meal is important in itself. To highlight the meal, Luke gives considerable details about how the meal was served. First of all, Jesus is the host of this meal. He had told his disciples to provide food for the multitude, but they were overwhelmed by the enormity of the request. They had only five loaves and two fish so the only means they could imagine to feed such a crowd was to go into the city and buy food. Instead, Jesus instructs his disciples to have the multitude sit down in groups of fifty. Then he takes the loaves, blesses, breaks and gives them. The provision is more than adequate. After they have eaten, twelve baskets of remains are collected.



In terms of the theological meaning, Luke has set up an allusion to the God's provision of manna in the wilderness. This allusion is built upon a number of items in the narrative. First, the followers of Jesus are in a deserted place<sup>43</sup> without provision for their sustenance. This is the same Greek work used frequently in the Septuagint version of Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy and translated as wilderness.<sup>44</sup> The disciples wanted to send the multitudes away from Jesus even as the Israelites wanted to leave the camp of God and return to Egypt. But instead Jesus has the multitude sit down in groups of fifty thus organizing them as a camp. This is reminiscent of the organization of Israel in the wilderness.<sup>45</sup> Then Jesus provides the people with bread miraculously multiplied just as God had provided the Israelites with bread from heaven. Luke is intent on making this allusion clear so he even mentions that when Jesus took the bread, he looked up to heaven. Undoubtedly, this provision of bread by Jesus is to be understood in continuity with the manna of Israel's wilderness wanderings. In John's Gospel the connection of the feeding of the five thousand with the manna is made explicit in Jesus' bread of life speech. But even without the help of that parallel, the connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the manna in the wilderness would be clear.

This narrative, however, has been written not only to provide a backward reference to the manna, but also a foreshadowing of a future meal. The means by which Luke establishes this connection is his description of the actions of Jesus. Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it and gave it to his disciples. They in turn gave the multiplied bread to the multitude. This fourfold action of taking, blessing, breaking and giving bread to his disciples anticipates the meal on the night of Jesus' betrayal. At that event, which we customarily call the last supper, Jesus performs the same four actions. Luke tells us that Jesus "took bread, gave thanks and broke<sup>46</sup> it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.'"<sup>47</sup> It is evident that Luke wants his readers to connect these passages. He has set up an obvious but not a monotonous parallel.<sup>48</sup> He describes the same four actions in the same order but with some variety of phrasing. In these passages we find the same fourfold motif of taking, offering a prayer, breaking and giving bread. On a first reading, the variations in terms are not readily apparent but the parallel of the fourfold action is. In part this is because bless and give thanks are interchangeable in English in much the same way that the Greek words are readily interchangeable in the New Testament. Only on closer examination do the verbal variations become apparent.

Luke's narrative technique of using four verbs (take, give thanks [or bless], break, give) focuses the readers attention on the bread. The bread is important because Jesus took it, gave thanks for it, broke it and gave it to his disciples. The description of feeding of the five thousand anticipates the last supper in a way that the meal eaten at the Pharisee's house does not. At the feeding of the five thousand they did not merely "eat bread", as was the case at the Pharisee's, but Jesus took break, blessed, broke and gave it to his disciples.<sup>49</sup> This elaboration regarding the bread is in marked contrast to how Luke deals with the cup. The New King James version says, "Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying . . ." In fact, the translators have supplied the verb "took." Translated woodenly, Luke simply says, "Likewise also the cup after the supper saying . . ."<sup>50</sup> Luke does not specify the verb or verbs in regard to the cup. The verbs used with the bread are

implied by the word “likewise.” The New King James only supplies one verb, “took.” But Luke means to imply all the appropriate verbs that were used at the bread, namely, took, gave thanks and gave.<sup>51</sup> Matthew and Mark include these three appropriate verbs in their versions of the cup event. Matthew says, “Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying . . .”<sup>52</sup> Mark’s version is almost identical using the same three verbs in the same order and with the same conjugation.<sup>53</sup> So Matthew and Mark have took, blessed<sup>54</sup>, broke and gave with regard to the bread, and took, gave thanks, and gave with regard to the cup. Luke has took, gave thanks, broke and gave with regard to the bread. But with the cup Luke simply has “likewise.”

The effect of this elision is to make the words regarding the bread to be memorable. The reader is not distracted by the repetition of some of the verbs at the cup or the alternation of synonyms as in Matthew and Mark (where bless is used for the bread and give thanks for the cup). This heightens the connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the last supper by placing the literary focus on the actions regarding the bread which are common to both event. In terms of the ultimate meaning of the last supper, none of these verbal variations among the Gospel writers are significant . However, for narrative purposes in Luke’s Gospel, the use of “likewise” instead of the threefold “take, give thanks and give” is very significant. The cup becomes secondary in terms of the literary structure. The bread is given the verbal emphasis. Thus by describing the fourfold action of Jesus in regard to the bread, but merely implying the threefold action with the cup, Luke strengthens the literary connection to feeding of the five thousand for that earlier meal had no cup. Had Luke described the actions with the cup as Matthew and Mark did, it would have dulled the memorableness of the actions with the bread, and weakened the literary parallel with the earlier event.<sup>55</sup>

It is evident, therefore, that Luke intends his readers to perceive a connection between these two events. By establishing a literary connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the last supper, Luke has provided his readers with a thematic context in which to understand the last supper. At the feeding of the five thousand Luke had set up an allusion to the manna. Just as Yahweh fed his people with manna from heaven, Jesus (looking up to heaven) provides food for his followers. Therefore, following Jesus is pictured as a new exodus out of bondage to freedom in the wilderness. At the exodus from Egypt, the real meaning of the manna was not its sustenance of the body, but its nourishment of the soul. Of the manna Moses wrote, “So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.”<sup>56</sup> The words of Yahweh, the covenant at Mt. Sinai, were true life for the people of God. They were sustained in the wilderness by the words of the Lord. In the countryside Jesus feeds his followers, not only with bread wondrously multiplied, but with words of life. His teaching, like the manna in the desert, will sustain his disciples as the new people of God.

This connection allows Luke to further develop at the last supper the themes introduced at the feeding of the five thousand. Luke tells us that Jesus wanted with fervent desire to eat the Passover with his disciples. In this way Luke stresses the connection of his narrative with the Passover theme. The first exodus was accomplished

through the first Passover sacrifice. Now Jesus wants to celebrate the remembrance of that redemption before he suffers. "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."<sup>57</sup> Jesus' impending sufferings should be seen, therefore, as a new exodus for the disciples. As they were made partakers of the first exodus by eating the roasted lamb, now Jesus gives them bread, calls it his body given for them, and commands them to do this in remembrance of him. As Hughes Oliphant Old has expressed it, "Jesus, by means of the covenant meal, joined his disciples to himself before he offered himself up as a sacrifice for their sin and the sin of the world. He joined them to himself because what he was about to do he was doing for them. He shared that meal with them that they might be joined to him in his death."<sup>58</sup> Thus by eating this bread they will be partakers of the new exodus. As the first exodus led to the covenant at Mt. Sinai, so Jesus takes the cup saying that it is the new covenant in his blood. At the beginning of the meal Jesus had said that he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God came. Therefore we have in this passage a complete picture of God's redemption in Christ modeled on the redemption from Egypt. We have a new sacrifice, a new exodus, a new memorial meal, a new covenant, and a new kingdom. Yet the most striking thing is that the sacrifice which will accomplish this redemption is Jesus' sacrifice. The bread that will sustain the people of Christ in the wilderness of this world is his body given for them. The sacrifice of Jesus will be life for the people of God. In his death they find the bread of life. In his enduring of the curse they find the forgiveness of our sins. In his passion they find the joy of eternal life.

However, at the time of the last supper it is doubtful that the disciples understood what that event signified, even as they did not understand the events that would soon follow. Proceeding from the last supper Luke's narrative takes the reader through the dark moods of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and burial. The apparent tragedy of these events tends to make the reader forget the last supper and the even more distant feeding of the five thousand. Even for the reader who knows the joyous end of the story, the narrative is so crafted that the reader gets caught in the sorrow and despair that the disciples experienced. In a similar way the reader experiences the joy of meeting the risen Lord in the resurrection appearances with which Luke completes his Gospel. The second such appearance in Luke's narrative was to the two disciples travelling to Emmaus.

Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him. And He said to them, "What kind of conversation *is* this that you have with one another as you walk and are sad?" Then the one whose name was Cleopas answered and said to Him, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" And He said to them, "What things?" So they said to Him, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was

He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, today is the third day since these things happened. Yes, and certain women of our company, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those *who were* with us went to the tomb and found *it* just as the women had said; but Him they did not see." Then He said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself. Then they drew near to the village where they were going, and He indicated that He would have gone farther. But they constrained Him, saying, "Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent." And He went in to stay with them.<sup>59</sup>

As the reader begins the Emmaus road passage, he feels tension, wondering when the two disciples will discover that their companion is in fact the risen Lord. There is an initial awkwardness in the disciples telling the risen Jesus of the report of the women regarding his resurrection. Then Jesus rebukes them as foolish and unbelieving. He begins to explain to them what he had already explained many times in the past regarding himself. As Jesus opened the Scriptures to the two disciples on the road, their hearts burned. Therefore they insisted he stay longer with them and not continue on his journey alone. But they have not yet recognized who he was. The reader knows that this is the risen Jesus, but he feels the anticipation of the disciples making this amazing discovery for themselves. This anticipation on the part of the reader is heightened as Jesus repeats this actions at the feeding of the five thousand and at the last supper. Now for the third time the reader encounters the motif of taking, blessing, breaking and giving.<sup>60</sup> At first it was suggestive, then ominous and foreboding. Now it is wondrous.

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He **took** bread, **blessed** and **broke** it, and **gave** it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight.<sup>61</sup>

The allusion to the last supper is obvious to the reader. It might not be so obvious to the two disciples since they were not at the last supper. They may not have grasped the connection to an event of which they were not participants. But for the reader Jesus is once more with his disciples at a table where he takes bread, blesses, breaks and gives it. As Jesus takes bread, blesses, breaks, and gives it to the two disciples, he is revealed to them for who he truly is. They had not recognized him before since as far as the two were concerned, he was dead. Whatever wonder there may be in their not recognizing him<sup>62</sup>, the true miracle is the opening of their eyes to see him for who he truly is. For what they see is beyond all belief. It is not Jesus somehow surviving the ordeal of his crucifixion. It is this Jesus whom they knew to be dead, now appearing to them as risen from the dead. In this way Luke shows us that our communion with Christ in the breaking of the bread is not a communion with the still crucified (dead) Christ, but with the risen Christ.<sup>63</sup> In the breaking of the bread Jesus is revealed to them, not as dead, but as risen from the dead. The doing of

this meal in remembrance of Jesus is a setting forth of the death of Christ as the life of the people of God. But it is also a setting forth of the risen Christ for (as the two disciples report to the others) Jesus was made known in the breaking of the bread. They had known him to be dead. But in the breaking of the bread they came to know him as risen from the dead. So it would appear that Luke would fully agree with Paul that the Lord's supper is a "proclaiming of the Lord's death until he comes." That is to say, it is a meal with the living Christ in which we memorialize his death and at the same time recognize him as the risen Lord.

These themes are very much on the surface. They require no great theological acumen to discover. But what is important to notice for our purposes is that Luke sets forth his theology of the Lord's supper without using the Pauline term "Lord's supper." Writing narrative instead of systematic theology, he makes his point by using the motif of taking, blessing, breaking and giving. Hermeneutically speaking, it is more like reading a novel than reading a doctrinal essay. Lexically, Luke knows nothing of a "Lord's supper," but only of "taking, blessing (or giving thanks), breaking and giving." The full meaning of the meal of the church that Jesus instituted to be done in his memory is to be found, not in the last supper in isolation, but in the last supper anticipated by the feeding of the five thousand, and completed in the meal with the risen Lord. The church's meal (what Paul calls the Lord's supper) is defined by these three events tried together by the motif of taking, blessing, breaking and giving. The meal that sustains the church is the true manna from heaven that cannot be exhausted (feeding of the five thousand). It is the body and blood of Jesus given for us and offered to us, that is to say, the new covenant in which the law is written on our hearts and our sins are forgiven (last supper). It is meal at which the crucified and risen Lord is present revealing himself to his people (Emmaus road meal). Given this extensive and profound thematic development, it would be strange if Luke should drop the matter completely without ever mentioning the church's meal done in obedience to Jesus' command at the last supper. At the very least this prejudices the matter in favor of seeing a heightened meaning in the references to breaking bread in Luke's narration of the life of the infant church. But Luke is a careful writer and so he gives us more than a bias toward the correct interpretation.

Taking, blessing, breaking and giving is a long formula. Luke has used it three times. But as he ends his narrative, he shortens the motif to simply breaking bread. He does this by the comments of the two disciples when they have returned to Jerusalem from Emmaus. "And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread."<sup>64</sup> Here the fourfold motif of taking, blessing, breaking and giving is shortened to merely breaking bread. Breaking bread becomes a synecdoche for the full motif of taking, blessing, breaking, and giving. By the end of his Gospel, Luke has established both a long and a short way for referring to this matrix of meals that are to be continued in the meal of the church. The short version is simply "to break bread." But to break bread is to do that by which the risen Christ has been manifested. It is theological not ordinary. As the Emmaus road disciples reported, "he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread." Thus in Luke's narrative, "to break bread" is not merely to take sustenance. It is to do the meal that proclaims Jesus to be crucified for us and to be risen for us in the breaking of bread.<sup>65</sup> It is to receive him as

the bread that nourishes to eternal life, the true manna of God. In Pauline terminology it is to eat the Lord's supper.

This is the literary context which Luke has created for his readers in order to make clear his references to breaking bread in Acts 2:42, 46 and 20:7, 11. In his second volume Luke picks up where he had left off both in terms of the plot line and in terms of language patterns. One could assert that the references in Acts to breaking bread are merely to common meals. In the abstract the language of breaking bread could refer to ordinary meals. It is often used that way in contemporary English idiom. However, this language does not occur in the abstract. And it certainly does not occur in the context of contemporary English idiom. It is found in the closely knit narrative that Luke has constructed. In that context of meaning, to break bread refers to doing what Jesus has commanded at the last supper. To take it any other way is to interpret it in total disregard for its literary context.<sup>66</sup> In contrast, a meal of no particular significance is to eat bread. We are compelled, therefore, to understand the references to breaking bread in Acts to mean meals done in keeping with the instructions of the Lord at the last supper.

However, it is not only the literary pattern that we have traced which convince us that the references in Acts to breaking bread are to the Lord's supper. It is also the context in which Luke places the phrase "breaking bread." In Acts 2:42 Luke is providing a description of the nascent Jewish-Christian community following the event of Pentecost.

Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.<sup>67</sup>

To say the least this is a highly theological passage. In it Luke is providing not only a summation of the early Jerusalem church, but also a theology of what the church is supposed to be. Luke in Acts, as in his Gospel, is not writing a bland account of historical events, but is giving us the theological meaning of the history he narrates. So in verses 41 and 42 we are given four significant aspects of that church life: baptism, apostolic teaching, fellowship (sharing of wealth), and prayers. Each of these items shows us something significant about the original church. It is an assembly marked by the name of Jesus in baptism. It is, therefore, the assembly of those who are forgiven and in whom the Spirit dwells, that is to say, a new Israel. As Old Covenant Israel was founded on the doctrine of Moses, so this new Israel is founded on the teaching of the Apostles, that is, those who have been on the mountain with Jesus as Moses was on the mountain with Yahweh. Unlike old Israel this a people who have the law written on their hearts and thus love their neighbors as themselves, not with words only, but with the sharing of their wealth. Finally, this is the new priest people of God who daily offer up prayers in the

name of Jesus even as the Old Covenant priests offered incense. It would seem odd to insert the mundane matter of daily meals bereft of theological significance in such a list. Even if we had not examined Luke's pattern of usage, the language that "they continued steadfast . . . in the breaking of bread" would demand that we understand this as a reference to doing what Paul calls the Lord's supper. The term "steadfast" is intended distributively. It is to applied to each of that activities of the Jerusalem church. They continued steadfast in the teaching. The continued steadfast in prayers and fellowship. And they continued steadfast in breaking bread. For Luke to say that they continued steadfast in breaking bread as Jesus instructed at the last supper fits naturally in this context. However, to say that they continued steadfast in eating meals for sustenance is odd. Why would Luke bother to tell us that the early disciples were concerned about their nutritional needs? What does steadfastness in eating for sustenance have to do with such theological concerns as apostolic teaching, prayers, and the sharing of wealth for the care of the poor?

A paraphrase will help us see the point. If we understand breaking of bread as a reference to doing the Lord's supper, then Luke is saying, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine regarding Jesus' death and resurrection and in the fellowship of sharing their goods as an expression of love one for another, in the breaking of bread which Jesus had commanded and in which he is made known as the risen Lord, and in prayers to God the Father in the name of his Son Jesus." Such a paraphrase is consistent with the literary usage of Luke and his theological meaning. Remember, he alone of the synoptic writers has the phrase "do this in remembrance of me." And that phrase is attached to the bread only. Should it not be expected that in Acts Luke would record the doing of what was commanded? So then, both the literary usage and the thematic development in Luke-Acts confirm that "breaking bread" is a reference to doing what Jesus had commanded at the last supper.

If, however, we ignore all this and insist that in Acts 2:42 Luke is only referring to common meals of sustenance, then we must give some account for the awkwardness of Luke's combining the highly significant matters of the Apostle's teaching, the fellowship of wealth, and prayers with the mundane matter of daily meals. Again to use the technique of paraphrase, is it credible to understand Luke as saying, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine regarding Jesus death and resurrection and in the fellowship of sharing their goods as an expression of love one for another, in the breaking of bread as their daily sustenance, and in prayers to God the Father in the name of his Son Jesus"? What is the concern about daily sustenance doing here? It does not fit thematically with other items. It is mundane but the others are rich in theological value. Nor is such an interpretation consistent with Luke's literary usage. We must, therefore, reject it as an imposition on the text of a meaning not consistent with the text. We have labored to show this because in conservative Presbyterian and evangelical circles is not uncommon to hear it affirmed that Luke was referring only to common meals. In part that is because we tend to assume that our current practice of the Lord's supper was the original practice. But it is evident that the last supper in Luke's gospel, the breaking of bread in Acts as an imitation of that last supper, and the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians were not truncated meals with tiny pieces of bread and a shot-glass of juice. They were

full meals in which two elements, the cup and bread, were accorded special significance. In verse 46, Luke indicates this by adding to the phrase "breaking bread" so as to indicate the rest of the meal. "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate<sup>68</sup> their food with gladness and simplicity of heart..." If Luke wanted only to convey the idea that the disciples shared a common meal for nourishment, he could have said, as he did at the Pharisees' house, "they ate their food house to house with gladness and simplicity of heart." But the apparently redundant references to both "breaking bread" and "eating" is due to the special meaning that Luke has attached to the phrase "breaking bread." Thus we see that these meals were the Lord's supper (breaking bread) but also daily nourishment (ate their food). Three decades later in Corinth it remained the practice to celebrate the Lord's supper in the context of a substantial meal. It was because of abuse that Paul urged the Corinthians to eat at home so they did not come to the Lord's supper famished.<sup>69</sup> This would appear to be the beginning of the movement away from celebrating the supper as a complete meal.

We conclude, therefore, that the references to breaking bread in Acts 2:42 and 46 are unambiguous references to doing what Jesus commanded at the last supper. To break bread is the Lukan equivalent of the Pauline Lord's supper and Lord's table. How, then, should we regard this historical information? Does Luke intend his summation of the life of the Jerusalem church to be a model for all churches or is he merely providing a historical account? Calvin, and with him most of the Christian past, have understood Luke to be providing instructions for the continuing life of the church. Justin's account of a Christian assembly in the middle of the second century includes these four matters of apostolic teaching, prayers, the breaking of bread and sharing of wealth with the poor. And these are the only items in Justin's account.

In our day we cannot presume that Acts 2:42 has binding force, that is to say, is a rule of faith as Calvin presumed. For a number of reasons Evangelicals read the Scriptures with a greater reserve than our forefathers. In part this is the result of critical approaches that so dominate the academic study of the New Testament. Also the intramural debates among Evangelicals in which Baptists and Presbyterians, Pentecostals and Fundamentalists sling proof texts at each other to prove this point or that regarding church life has taken its psychological toll on our sense of the perspicuity<sup>70</sup> of Scripture.

It is necessary, therefore, to ask whether and to what extent Luke intends his narrative as instruction rather than mere historical information. Luke begins his account referring to his Gospel which he describes as "all that Jesus began both to teach and to do." It is evident, therefore, that Luke intends his readers to understand this narrative as a continuation of what Jesus "began both to teach and do." This creates the presumption that the teaching of the apostles quoted by Luke and Luke's summation of their activities will have the normative force of Jesus' words and deeds in his Gospel. We are justified, therefore, in approaching Acts 2:42 with the assumption that Luke is instructing us and not merely informing us. This presumption is reinforced by carefully balanced form of the sentence which divides the four matters into two couplets identical in form.

They continued steadfastly  
in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship,  
in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.



As the above literal English translation illustrates, this passage has a poetic, memorable quality. So it appears that Luke intends his readers to remember this sentence verbatim. He has provided, not a bland summation, but an aphorism that sticks in the mind of the reader. Luke includes nothing in the sentence that cannot be applied to the life of the church in any location and in any age. He excludes, for example, a time reference such as he uses in verse 46: “Daily.” Likewise he excludes the place references to the temple and house to house. In other words, while Luke intends verse 46 primarily as historical information, he intends verse 42 to have a normative force. No other church but the Jerusalem church in the days following Pentecost could meet daily in the temple. But every church might “continue steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles and in the fellowship, in the breaking of the bread and in the prayers.”

We are justified, therefore, in regarding Acts 2:42 as having instructive and normative force. Luke presents the practice of the first church, not just as a matter of historical record, but as a paradigm for the whole church. He does this presenting the historical information about the life of that church in the form of an aphorism. Therefore the assembly of the saints should always include these four matters: apostolic teaching, sharing with the poor in Christ, breaking bread as Jesus instituted at the last supper and prayers. Acts 2:42 provides us with a core description of the nature of the New Covenant assembly much as Exodus 19 does for the Old Covenant assemblies. As we noted above, Justin’s description of a Christian assembly follows the fourfold outline of Acts 2:42. But so does Paul’s description of the Corinthian church in I Corinthians. For that assembly also included teaching, sharing, the breaking of bread and prayers.<sup>71</sup>

Luke in Acts 2:42ff is writing both as a historian and as a theologian. As a theologian he has given a description of the Jerusalem church that should be the pattern for all churches (verse 42). As an historian he tells us that the activities summarized in verse 42 took place on a daily base in verse 46: “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart...” The gathering of the believers was on a daily, not a weekly schedule. Only later in Acts will we encounter a weekly pattern. In contrast, during the early days after Pentecost, there was a virtually continuous assembling of the saints, a *qahal*<sup>72</sup> of the new Israel reminiscent of the *qahal* of old Israel at Mt. Sinai. Eventually this daily assembling must have given way to less frequent gatherings. Though we have no textual clues, the duties of work and family could not have allowed this daily pattern to persist for too long.

The locations as well as the frequency of these assemblies were unique to the post-Pentecost Jerusalem church. The assemblies took place at the temple by which we should understand the temple precincts, not the temple proper. The gatherings in the temple were in the context of “having favor with all the people” (verse 47). The implication seems to be that as they fell out of favor at least with the temple authorities, they would have had to cease meeting in the temple precincts. Luke narrates the beginning of such disfavor in the next episode in Acts.<sup>73</sup> However, from the beginning they also gathered in houses as well as at the temple. The breaking of bread was associated with these house based meetings. “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and

simplicity of heart...” The phrase “house to house” is somewhat ambiguous in the original Greek. Literally translated it is “according to house.”<sup>74</sup> It could mean that they meet in smaller gatherings in different houses but at the same time, or it could mean they meet as a whole group in one person’s house, then at another time in another person’s house.<sup>75</sup> Which ever way we take the phrase the church met in private homes, not in the public precincts of the temple to break bread. Whatever the reasons for this<sup>76</sup>, it is clear that the doing of what Jesus commanded at the last supper produced a gathering of baptized believers only. This is the beginning of the distinctively Christian assembly. In other words, the Christian assembly has its origins, not in the imitation of the Jewish synagogue, but in the necessity to keep the meal Jesus instituted on the night he was betrayed. The first assemblies that were exclusively Christian assemblies were assemblies to do the Lord’s supper. The early Jewish-Christians taught in the temple courts. They prayed at the temple (or at synagogues). But they gathered privately in homes to “do this in remembrance of me.” In terms of historical origin, the eucharistic command is the cause of the first distinctly Christian gatherings.

Presbyterians assume that the duty to meet together as a church on the Lord’s day is self-evident. There is little in the theological literature arguing the case. At the Reformation the matter of holding an assembly on the Lord’s day was not a point of controversy. Reformed, Lutheran and Papists alike continued unbroken the practice of the meeting on the Lord’s day for what has come to be called in Presbyterian circles a “worship service.” But where in the New Testament is there a dominical command to hold a worship service? The writer of Hebrews exhorts his readers not to forsake the assembling together as was becoming the practice of some.<sup>77</sup> But we search in vain for a command that sounds like “you shall hold an assembly in my name.” What we do find is the command to do the supper in remembrance of Jesus. At a theological level, the only words of our Lord that compel believers to have a common assembly are the eucharistic words “do this.”<sup>78</sup> It would appear from the Acts narrative that the Apostles established a Christian assembly apart from the temple in order to do what was told them at the last supper. Thus the Lord’s supper is not only a necessary part of the regular Christian assembly, it is the cause of that assembly coming into existence in the first place. The need to do the Lord’s supper caused the first Christians to gather together separately from Temple and synagogue. We may say, therefore, that a regular Christian assembly without the Lord’s supper is an event that has forgotten its reason for being.

This insight is confirmed by the next occurrence of the language of breaking bread in Acts.

Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. There were many lamps in the upper room where they were gathered together. And in a window sat a certain young man named Eutychus, who was sinking into a deep sleep. He was overcome by sleep; and as Paul continued speaking, he fell down from the third story and was taken up dead. But Paul went down, fell on him, and embracing him said, “Do not trouble yourselves, for his life is in him.” Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked

a long while, even till daybreak, he departed. And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted.<sup>79</sup>

In this passage the assembly of believers is weekly not daily. Notice the designation of this gathering. It is a gathering to “break bread.” The verb translated “came together” is from the same root as the noun “synagogue.”<sup>80</sup> Luke is describing the Christian synagogue, so to speak. But it was very much unlike the Jewish synagogue in one respect. It was a synagoging (coming together) to break bread. The purpose of the weekly gathering at Troas was to break bread, that is, to eat the Lord’s supper to use Paul’s terminology. Clearly the supper was not an occasion activity in an assembly constituted for other purposes. Rather the reason for the assembly was “to break bread.” So we are confirmed in our earlier conclusion that the need to do the Lord’s supper gave rise to the Christian assembly.

However, lest there be any doubt that “to break bread” in Acts 20 refers to the Lord’s supper, as we have shown that it does in Acts 2 (Pentecost) and Luke 24 (Emmaus Road), consider the thematic parallels between these passages. Just like after Pentecost, there is a meeting that includes Apostolic teaching and the breaking of bread. And like the earlier passage, we have a miracle at the hands of an Apostle. Luke is showing us that the Pauline churches are one with the original Jerusalem church in faith and practice. The significant difference between Acts 2 and Acts 20 is that the gathering is weekly not daily. It was a gathering on the first day of the week. By noting that this gathering at Troas was on the first day of the week, Luke establishes a connection to the resurrection appearances which also occurred on the first day of the week.<sup>81</sup> But especially strong is the allusion to the Emmaus Road event. Consider the thematic connections. Both take place on the first day of the week in the evening. Both center around a meal referred to as breaking bread. Both are connected to the resurrection theme (Jesus’ and Eutychus’). Both involved extended teaching. Luke certainly intends his readers to see this meeting at Troas as in continuity with the Emmaus meal and therefore with the last supper.

This continuity is centered around the meal. The disciples in Troas “came together to break bread.” The purpose of their gathering was to do what Jesus had commanded, namely, remembering him in the breaking of the bread. So then, at Troas as at Jerusalem, the coming together of the church was a coming together to break bread. The Lord’s supper is a part of the regular gathering of the church in the narrative and theology of Luke. The supper is so closely tied to the gathering that the supper gives its name to the gathering. As Luke records, “The disciples came together to break bread.” That gathering may have been daily or it may have been weekly, but it always involved the breaking of bread.<sup>82</sup> The tradition of celebrating the supper in the regular gathering of the church is an apostolic tradition. It is, therefore, a tradition that binds us who confess *Sola Scriptura*. It is also a tradition that continued unbroken in the century that followed the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the apostolic era. Luke’s terminology for the supper, to break bread, continued to be used in the sub-apostolic church. Both the *Didache* and Ignatius employ it. The *Didache* says of what it has called the Eucharist, “gather together and break bread and give thanks.” Ignatius uses the language of breaking bread in his letter to the Ephesians: “breaking one bread, which is the medicine of immortality.” No one

seriously doubts that these are references to the Lord's supper. So too no one need doubt the references in Acts to breaking bread are anything other than references to do what Jesus commanded at the last supper.

In Acts 20:7ff we have the same conjunction of breaking bread and teaching that we found in Acts 2:42. Luke does not mention either prayer or sharing of wealth at Troas. This is probably not significant since prayer could hardly have been absent. Paul's practice of collecting funds for the poor in Jerusalem suggests this too may have played a role in the assembly at Troas. Leaving such speculation aside, Luke does tell us that at Troas as at Jerusalem there was both instruction and the Lord's supper. In fact, Luke's narrative suggests that order of the evening was sermon (a very long one) followed by the Lord's supper as the climax of the gathering. In other words this narrative may give us the earliest example of a unified liturgy of word and supper which we cannot otherwise document before the account of Justin Martyr some one hundred years latter. But this is not apparent in most English translations. On a casual reading the order of the meeting appears to be Paul speaking till midnight, the Eutychus episode, Paul breaking bread and eating, and then Paul returning to this discourse. The meeting finally ends at sunrise. However there are nuances of meaning in the original that are not easily conveyed in translation. First of all, the verb used twice to describe Paul's speaking before the Eutychus episode is the term that Luke has consistently used to describe Paul's discourses at synagogues.<sup>83</sup> For example, in Acts 17:2 Luke says, "then Paul, as his custom was, went in to them, and for three Sabbaths **reasoned** with them from the Scriptures..." The same verb is used of Paul's speaking at synagogues five times and once for his lectures at the school of Tyrranos after he was rejected by the synagogue.<sup>84</sup> These are the only occurrences of this verb in Acts prior to chapter twenty. It is evident, therefore, that Luke wants his readers to understand Paul's speech at the Troas assembly as a reasoned discourse based on the scriptures after the pattern of his earlier synagogue discourses. The American Standard Version provides us with a closer rendering of the original of verses 7 and 9. "And upon the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul **discoursed** with them, intending to depart on the morrow; and prolonged his speech until midnight... And there sat in the window a certain young man named Eutychus, borne down with deep sleep; and as Paul **discoursed** yet longer, being borne down by his sleep he fell down from the third story, and was taken up dead." By using this particular verb (translated "discoursed" by the ASV) Luke indicates that this was an assembly with preaching in the sense of expounding the good news of Jesus from the Scriptures.

Paul's sermon was halted by the Eutychus' accident. When he return after Eutychus' "resurrection," Paul breaks bread and eats. But there is another nuance here. The verb translated "eat" is not the ordinary word for eating a meal, but is a term that has as its literal meaning "to sip."<sup>85</sup> By extension it can mean to "taste" or "to eat a little". Luke uses the term four other times, twice in the sense of "taste" and twice in the sense of "eat a little."<sup>86</sup> Probably "to eat a little" is the correct sense in Acts 20:9.<sup>87</sup> Calvin saw this as an indication that Paul was eating the Lord's supper which would have consisted of only a piece of bread.<sup>88</sup> However it is a least possible that Luke is suggesting not two actions regarding the bread, breaking and tasting, but the two elements of the Lord's

supper. Paul broke bread and sipped. Such a meaning is possible, but there is no way to prove it is the correct sense. However, one thing is clear, Paul's breaking of the bread and tasting it (or sipping of the cup) was the climax of the meeting. Surely Luke does not mean to suggest that only Paul partook although both the verbs are in the singular. Luke begins the pericope by saying the "we came together to eat." So we should have no doubt that others ate as well. But the singular form suggests that Paul presided at the event. He broke the bread and ate, then (presumably) the rest also ate. That Paul himself tasted the bread is significant for it shows the contrast to when Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to his disciples. The disciples, not Jesus, ate the broken bread. Luke is classifying Paul as the disciple by saying that he ate, though he presided at the meal as Jesus did.

The gathering did not end with Paul breaking bread. The English translations might be taken to mean that after breaking bread Paul returned to his discourse. Luke says "Now when he had come up, had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even till daybreak, he departed." To the English reader this looks like Paul continued his sermon after the supper. In fact, Luke uses a verb that means "to converse, to chat" and not "to reason, to discourse."<sup>89</sup> There is a clear contrast between the formal speech at the beginning of this passage and the informal conversation at its end. So it appears that Paul preached until midnight and then conducted the Lord's supper. Afterwards he engaged in conversation until morning. What we have, then, is our first record of a Christian liturgy consisting of sermon and supper. This was followed by a lengthy time of informal conversation from a little after midnight until morning. But the assembly to break bread was of a shorter duration, most likely from after sunset until midnight. Probably about three or four hours. Since Luke regards Paul's discourse as being rather long, we may presume that the custom of Troas was for Christian assembly to last perhaps two to three hours. This is consistent with the length of assemblies in the early church. At the very least, Acts 20:7ff gives witness to an assembly of believers on the first day of the week that included both a reasoned discourse (sermon) and the breaking of bread (Lord's supper). We shall see in the next chapter that what was true at Troas, was true at Corinth.

Our study of Luke and Acts has demonstrated that the phrase "break bread" refers to doing what Jesus instituted at the last supper. It is the Lukan equivalent of the Pauline designation "Lord's supper." The need to do what Jesus commanded on the night he was betrayed gave rise to the first Christian assemblies apart from Temple and synagogue. This meeting "to break bread" kept by the Jerusalem church from the beginning (i.e., from Pentecost) shows us that the Lord's supper is not an occasional activity in the church in the days of the Apostles. Rather the Lord's supper was both the reason for the meeting and source of the name of the meeting. Yet we also saw that this was not in tension with the importance of apostolic teaching, with reasoning from the Scriptures, to show forth the good news that Jesus is the Christ. Luke includes the Lord's supper and the preaching of the word in his fourfold aphorism that describes the proper work of the Christian assembly. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." It is therefore incumbent upon us who profess the Scriptures to be our sole rule of life and faith to conduct our Christian assemblies each Lord's day on the same pattern of apostolic teaching and apostolic

practice. Like the believers at Troas, we should come together to eat, first listening to the true preaching of the word and then breaking bread and so eating our fill of the gifts of grace.

### **The Frequency of the Supper in the Church at Corinth**

The narrative of the last supper is found, not only in the three synoptic gospels,<sup>90</sup> but also in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.<sup>91</sup> Paul's version of the last supper is verbally closer to Luke's version than to either Matthew and Mark. We can confidently date *First Corinthians* to about A.D. 53. Paul's instruction in chapter eleven, therefore, give a picture of how the Lord's supper was conducted about two decades after the last supper. The dating of the synoptic accounts varies considerably. In some scholars estimations, Paul's is the earliest account that we have. Others have argued that Luke preserves the earliest version of the last supper event. In general the dating of the gospels is based on the presumption of Markan priority. However, as John Wenham has shown in *Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke*, a plausible scheme can be constructed with the first gospel produced being Matthew about A.D. 40. Wenham dates Mark to about A.D. 45 and Luke to about A.D. 56.<sup>92</sup> On such an assumption, both the similarity and divergence of between Paul and Luke is explicable. We have already seen that differences between Luke and the very similar versions of Matthew and Mark can be explained in part by the Luke's narrative purpose of constructing a literary tie between the last supper and the events of the feeding of the five thousand and the Emmaus road appearance. Given the close association of Paul and Luke we should expect some interdependence in their versions. And this is what we find. Both use the phrase "in remembrance of me."<sup>93</sup> Luke uses it only at the bread, but Paul both at the bread and the cup. Both use the verb "give thanks" at the bread whereas Matthew and Mark have "bless." Both Paul and Luke imply the actions of the cup with "likewise" rather than enumerating them as do Matthew and Mark.

On the other hand, the major difference between Luke and Paul is that Paul has more "instructional" material at the cup. Paul repeats at the cup the instruction "do this in remembrance of me." Luke has this only at the bread. Also, Paul alone has "as often as you drink it" inserted into "do this in remembrance of me."<sup>94</sup> Paul does not have the verb "give" at the bread. In Paul the cup and bread receive equal emphasis. Perhaps the cup even receives a bit more emphasis. Paul's version, as a result, does not have the literary parallels to the feeding of the five thousand and the Emmaus road meal. The same was true for Matthew and Mark. But Luke, because of his narrative intention of joining together the three events of the last supper, the feeding of the five thousand, and the Emmaus road appearance, does not emphasize the cup. So then, it would appear that both the major differences between Luke and the other synoptics, on the one hand, and between Luke and Paul on the other hand, can be explained by Luke's careful construction of his narrative. This is the case whether Luke modified Paul, Paul expanded Luke or both worked from a common third source. Paul's version of the last supper seems to be given entirely for the purpose of regulating the Lord's supper celebration. Paul

includes no other historical details as do Matthew, Mark and especially Luke. Paul gives the context simply as “on the night Jesus was betrayed.” With regard to the rest of the meal, Paul merely alludes to this saying “after the supper.”

That Paul’s version of the last supper seems more adapted to liturgical order than to historical recitation, fits the purpose of Paul in 1 Corinthians where he is concerned to correct abuses in the life of the Corinthian church. According to the apostle, when the Corinthians came together, it is was not for the better, but for the worse. Several times in this section, and again in the section about spiritual gifts Paul refers to the assembly at Corinth with the verb “come together.”<sup>95</sup> In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul is obviously referring to the same gathering each time. But he describes that gathering differently by adding qualifiers to the verb. Below are the five occasions of the verb “come together” with their qualifying phrases.

- you come together (vs. 17)
- you come together as a church (vs. 18)
- you come together in one place (vs. 20)
- you come together to eat (vs. 33)
- you come together (vs. 34)

From the phrases added to the verb “come together” we can discern the nature of the Corinthians’ assembly. The verb itself is too generic to tell us anything except that the Corinthians came together. However, the phrases attached to the verb tell us a great deal. First of all, this was a gathering of believers in their special calling as the people of God. They came together “as a church.”<sup>96</sup> The Greek word translated by the English term church had already achieved a specialized meaning within the Christian community. Though in common Greek it could refer to any sort of assembly or gathering, in Paul’s usage it refers exclusively to the people of God. Clearly, then, Paul is referring to a gathering of the church as a church. In Presbyterian terminology the gathering at Corinth was a stated meeting, not an informal get together. This gathering was a gathering, not of just a portion of the Corinthian believers, but of the whole group. They came together “in one place.”<sup>97</sup> This contrasts with several smaller gatherings in different places and therefore implies a meeting of the church as a whole. Latter in 1 Corinthians Paul refers to this same gathering as “if the whole church comes together in one place.”<sup>98</sup> This only makes explicit the meaning implicit in coming together “in one place.” The gathering, therefore, which Paul has in mind is the gathering of the church as church in one place. And from 1 Corinthians 16:2 we can glean that this gathering “as a church, in one place” was on the first day of the week.

So then, on the first day of the week the Corinthian believers came together as a church in one place. But what did they come together to do? Paul said, “when you come together to eat.” Therefore, we must conclude that the Corinthians came together on the first day of week as a church in one place to eat. The parallel to Acts 20:7 is obvious. “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” At Troas the disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread. At Corinth the believers came together on the first day of the week as a church in one place to eat. It is evident, therefore, that just as the Christians as Troas gathered weekly to break bread

(Lukan terminology), so the Christians at Corinth came together as a church each week to eat the Lord's supper (Pauline terminology). The Lord's supper was a part of the daily gatherings at Jerusalem and a part of the weekly gatherings at Troas and Corinth. For the Apostle Paul the gathering of the believers as a church is the gathering of believers to eat. Just as Luke refers to the weekly gathering as having as its distinctive activity "to break bread," so Paul refers to the weekly coming together as a church as a coming together to eat. Such an interchangeability of phrases (as a church, in one place, to eat) is only possible because it was the invariable practice of the Corinthians that their weekly gathering was a eucharistic gathering, a coming together to eat the Lord's supper. This ought to be obvious to evangelicals since our gatherings, which have the Lord's supper infrequently, can not be so described. Weekly we come together as a church and in one place, but only occasionally do we come together to eat the Lord's supper. If Paul were writing to a typical American evangelical church, he could not use "come together as a church" and "come together in one place" interchangeably with "come together to eat" as he did with the ancient Corinthians. The weekly Corinthian gathering was a gathering to eat the Lord's supper.<sup>99</sup>

If we attend to a closer analysis of the Paul's thought in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, the importance of the Lord's supper to the nature of the Christian assembly will be further illustrated. There was a problem of division at Corinth. The Corinthians had divided into factions claiming to be the true followers of Paul or Apollos or Cephas. And the really spiritual ones played the trump card that they, in contrast to others, were followers of Christ!

Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you. Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ." Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?<sup>100</sup>

This division that Paul denounced in chapter one also came to expression in the manner in which the Corinthians conduct their assembly. When the Corinthians gathered together they ate what they thought was the Lord's supper. Their communal meal had the form of a Lord's supper. Paul describes the Corinthians practice in two rhetorical questions. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"<sup>101</sup> As the "we" implies the Corinthians blessed the cup of blessing, and broke the bread. And they partook of those elements. But their manner of eating the bread and drinking the cup revealed their divisions. The effect was that though the meal had the appearance of the Lord's supper, it was in fact not the Lord's supper.<sup>102</sup> "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk."<sup>103</sup> The Corinthians indeed ate a meal. They thought they were eating the Lord's supper, but they were not. They ate in division and so they denied the essential meaning of the meal. As Paul had said in 10:17, "For we,



though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” The supper was a pledge of the unity of believers as the one body in Christ. Yet the Corinthians partook of the bread called his body and by which they were to become the body of Christ in a manner that expressed their mutual contempt for one another. The result was that they came together for judgment. The participation in the bread and cup was supposed to manifest the unity of the Corinthians as the body of Christ. Instead, they so corrupted it that it showed forth their schisms.<sup>104</sup> Paul’s advice was not to have the supper less frequently (as if God would be fooled by such a subterfuge), but to eat the supper in an appropriate manner. “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment.”<sup>105</sup>

At the root of Reformed unwillingness to have the supper as a part of the weekly assembly is the fear of abuse. Yet Paul leaves the weekly celebration in place. Rather than change its frequency, he exhorts the Corinthians to change their conduct. To the whole congregation he says, “wait for one another.” To the individuals he says, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” Why is this? We believe it is because Paul, like Luke, cannot image an assembly of the saints that is not an assembly “to eat” or “to break bread.” One of the most difficult eucharistic texts to interpret is Jesus’ statement with regard to the cup: “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>106</sup> This phrase is only found in Paul’s version of the last supper. What does it mean? Does it imply a certain frequency? Or does it mean no more than “whenever you drink it, drink it in my memory.” Paul picks up the phrase “as often as”<sup>107</sup> from Jesus and reuses it in the next verse. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.” The “how often” at Corinth was each Lord’s day. Or to be more exact, it was whenever they came together as a church or came together in one place. These gatherings were invariable a coming together to eat. Paul presumes that the gathering of the church will be a meal event. But he insists that the meaning of the meal event is that Christ’s death is proclaimed until he comes. Two things are evident from 1 Corinthians. One, the Corinthians tried to celebrate the Lord’s supper whenever they came together as a church. Two, “as often as” at Corinth meant whenever they came together. Celebrating the Lord’s supper whenever the church gathers (normally weekly), follows the example of the Jerusalem church, the church at Troas and the church at Corinth. It is consistent with the meaning of “as often as.” It is required by the nature of the Christian assembly as simultaneously a coming together as a church, a coming together in one place and a coming together to eat.

Of course, some will object that the New Testament nowhere says (in so many words), you shall eat the Lord’s supper every time you come together as a church. But then it nowhere says you shall have a sermon, read the scriptures, and sing psalms every time you come together as a church. Paul nowhere describes the assembly as a coming together to listen to a sermon, or to sing psalms or to read the scriptures. Yet we do not doubt that these belong invariable to the assembly.<sup>108</sup> Paul does equate coming together as a church with coming together to eat! Jesus said “do this in remembrance of me.” Every day they came together in Jerusalem and did what Jesus commanded. Every Lord’s day they came together at Troas and at Corinth and did what Jesus commanded. Most Lord’s days we evangelicals come together and do **not** do what Jesus commanded. And

we think we are all the more spiritual for it! The evidence for Acts and First Corinthians is clear. The gathering of the church as church is a gathering to share in the Lord's supper. Shall we follow the examples given in the New Testament or shall we invent our own tradition? Of course we have already invented our own tradition of occasional communion, and it is not the tradition of the apostolic church. We must, therefore, confess with Calvin, "For it is evident from St. Luke in the Book of Acts that communion was much more frequently celebrated in the primitive Church; and that continued for a long time in the ancient Church... we must acknowledge that it is a defect in that we do not follow the example of the Apostles."<sup>109</sup>

### **The Role of the Supper in the Church at Corinth**

The Lord's supper was a part of the daily gatherings in Jerusalem, and the weekly gatherings at Troas and Corinth. It provided the name and defined the purpose for those gatherings. At Troas the believers gathered together to break bread. At Corinth they come together to eat the Lord's supper. It should be expected, therefore, that the Lord's supper would be foundational to the faith and piety of such churches. If the assembly of the saints in the primitive church was invariable a eucharistic assembly, then we should expect there to be numerous references to the holy supper in the writing of the Apostles. Further, we should expect the supper to play a significant role in the teaching and exhortations of the Apostles. In other words a weekly celebration of the holy supper (daily at Jerusalem following Pentecost), should have left its mark on the faith and piety of the Apostolic Church.

This is what we find when we examine the New Testament documents. The narrative of the last supper occurs in three of the four gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke). It also occurs in a letter to a church (1 Corinthians). In that letter, the supper is unquestionable appealed to twice (10:16f, 11:23ff). In Acts there are two unquestionable references to doing the Lord's supper as we have shown. So beyond dispute we have seven reference to the holy supper in five different books of the New Testament. Furthermore, at least at Corinth, the holy supper figured profoundly in the Apostle Paul's exhortations to that Church. He sought to shape their piety by appeal to the holy supper. This is obviously the case in 1 Corinthians 10:14ff and 11:17ff. But as we shall see, it is also true 5:1ff. We turn now to a consideration of the role of the supper in the exhortations of the Apostle and the piety of the people at Corinth.

The church at Corinth was an apostle's nightmare. The Corinthian church was rent by schism, its purity marred by incest, and its integrity ruined by compromise with idolatry. Significant portions of Paul's letter contend against the sins of factions, sexual immorality and involvement with idolatry by eating meat sacrificed to idols. In each case, Paul bases his appeals to the Corinthians on the holy supper.

#### *The Problem of Incest*

In chapter five Paul addressed the problem of incest. "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles -- that a man has his father's wife!"<sup>110</sup> Paul did not directly rebuke the man involved in this incestuous relationship. His concern was with the way the congregation had handled the situation. They had taken no action. Apparently they prided themselves on their tolerance! "And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you."<sup>111</sup> The man with his father's wife was a participant in the Corinthian church. He was "among you." When the Corinthians came together as a church, he was present. Paul insisted that the Corinthians rectify the situation by removing this man from their midst. His presence in the Corinthian assembly was intolerable. Therefore Paul instructed the Corinthians to take firm action. "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus."<sup>112</sup>

Let us notice that the context for this “excommunication” is the church assembly. Paul says, “when you are gathered together... deliver such a one to Satan.” The incestuous man was to be excluded from the literal assembly. Whether the church had yet instituted rolls of membership modeled on the census of Numbers we have no evidence. But we must not confuse the current practice in Presbyterian churches with this event. It is not unheard of today for a person to be “excommunicated” by action of a session, yet to attend the services of the church. Such a person has been erased from the roll of membership, and barred from the Lord’s table, but is allowed to be present in the morning service. Paul had nothing of the sort in mind. “To deliver such a one to Satan” at least meant “not to keep company with sexually immoral people.”<sup>113</sup> This man was to be put out of the Corinthian gathering together as a church. As Paul expressed his intention, “that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.”

To further encourage the Corinthians in their duty, Paul reminds them that a little leaven leavens the whole lump. “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”<sup>114</sup>

The presence of this man in the assembly put the entire congregation at risk. The yeast of his sin had contaminated the whole lump. Paul further develops the metaphor reminding the Corinthians that in Christ they have already been unleavened. “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.”<sup>115</sup> In the next chapter he will express the same thought without the metaphor. “But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”<sup>116</sup> As those who “truly are unleavened,” Paul exhorts the Corinthians to purge out the old leaven that they may be a new lump. Paul often exhorts his readers to be what they have become in Christ. Elsewhere Paul says that we have died with Christ, therefore we should put to death our members on the earth.<sup>117</sup> Here he says that the Corinthians are an unleavened lump, therefore they should purge the leaven (the incestuous man) from their midst. In this way they will become a new lump. This allusion to the Passover meal with its unleavened bread is made explicit in the next two sentences. “For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”<sup>118</sup>

Paul tells the Corinthians how it is they were purged of leaven. “Christ... was sacrificed for us.” Paul was devoted to this preaching of Christ crucified. He would let nothing, not even baptism, distract him from it.<sup>119</sup> “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.”<sup>120</sup> For the apostle, Christ crucified was the wisdom and power of God.<sup>121</sup> This Christ, sacrificed for us, is our Passover according to Paul. The Old Covenant Passover involved the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. But it was also a deliverance from the wrath of God. As the angel of death descended upon Egypt killing the firstborn, only the blood of the lambs kept that judgment from falling upon the Israelites. So now Christ has delivered us from sin and death by his sacrifice. Truly he is our Passover.

Therefore, Paul exhorts the Corinthians, “Let us keep the feast.” But what is this feast? Three possibilities exist. First, as some liturgical writers have understood it, this may be a reference to an annual Christianized Passover celebration. “Many have pointed

out that 1 Corinthians 5:7 seems to indicate that such an observance was already common to Christians, but other exegetes are doubtful.”<sup>122</sup> Second, the feast may be a only metaphor for the Christian life. In such an interpretation keeping the feast would mean living as a Christian. Third, as we shall argue, the feast is the weekly Lord’s supper.

For students of the Church year, a New Testament reference to an annual Christian feast celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ has great appeal. The earliest form of what we call Easter was a feast celebrated on what was calculated to be the anniversary of his death. Only later did it become differentiated into the complex of celebrations we know as holy week. Unfortunately for those looking for an apostolic justification of annual feasts, the only connection between the annual feast of later church tradition and this passage is the presence of the same term “Passover.”<sup>123</sup> However, Paul uses the term very differently than it will be used later in Church history. For Paul, Passover is not a annual Christian feast on the model of the Old Covenant Passover. Passover is Christ sacrificed for us. For Paul the term Passover does not designate an annual celebration but a once for all historical event. “Christ our Passover has been sacrificed for us.” Paul shows no interest whatever in perpetuating Jewish festivals among Gentile believers (in a Christianized form or otherwise). “So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.”<sup>124</sup> The verb phrase in 1 Corinthians 5:8, “let us keep the feast,” which is one word in Greek, and the noun in Colossians 2:16, “festival,” share the same root. It is unlikely, therefore, that Paul was exhorting the Corinthians to keep an annual feast (Passover) in 1 Corinthians 5:8 and rejecting the value of such a feast in Colossians 2:16-17. The Old Covenant feasts were mere shadows as far as Paul is concerned. The reality is of Christ.<sup>125</sup> Rather for Paul, Passover is Christ sacrificed for us. The Old Covenant Passover was only a shadow of which Christ is the reality. So then, it is not plausible that Paul meant by “let us keep the feast,” “Let us keep an annual Christianized version of the Jewish Passover feast.” As inviting as this might be for other reasons, it is exegetically unjustifiable.

Furthermore, Paul was concerned with a very specific problem in this pericope. He wanted the Corinthians to remove the incestuous man from their midst. He not only did not want them to keep company with him, he did not want them even to eat with him. Given this, does it make sense for Paul to urge the Corinthians to keep an annual feast? The problem at Corinth was not the presence of this incestuous man at a supposed annual Christianized Passover. It was the presence of this man in the weekly gathering when the believers shared together in the body and blood of Christ. So then, we can dismiss the interpretation of “feast” as an annual Christian Passover as liturgical wishful thinking. The Corinthians held a feast every week when they gathered together. In fact, they got a bit carried away with feasting. Some gorged themselves and even got drunk! A believer at Corinth would have heard the injunction, “Let us keep the feast,” in terms of his experience. The natural sense, therefore, is that the feast to be kept with sincerity and truth was the weekly Lord’s supper. For this same reason a purely metaphorical reference to living the Christian life seems unlikely. The Corinthians kept a weekly feast that proclaimed Christ’s death. In other words, they held a meal in which Christ was presented as their Passover from sin and death. But they kept that feast with old leaven.

They tolerated incest (wickedness). They divided into competing factions (malice). What Paul insisted was that they keep this feast with sincerity and truth. Therefore, we conclude that the feast referred to by Paul was the weekly supper. It was this feast that was marred by the toleration of incest (and also by factions as Paul will rebuke in Chapter 11).

Reformed Christians invariably misinterpret this passage because the supper is not a part of the Reformed weekly assemblies as it was at Corinth. Thus “Let us keep the feast” is taken as a metaphor for living the Christian life. But as we have shown, the natural referent of “Let us keep the feast” is the supper the Corinthians held each week. Therefore, Reformed Christians need to heed the apostle and begin to keep the feast, not merely as an external rite, but to eat the bread and drink the cup in sincerity and truth.

### *Meat Offered to Idols*

In chapter ten, Paul concludes his instructions regarding meat offered to idols. Earlier he had made the point that while idols were nothing, believers ought not to use their freedom to eat meat sacrificed to idols if it injured a fellow believer.<sup>126</sup> Paul takes up the issue again chapter ten. He had left the matter at the level of doing what was loving in regard to another. The meat may itself be indifferent but if eating of it injures another, then love limits our freedom to eat what we wish. Paul now addresses the problem from a different angle. This time he draws his arguments from the Lord’s supper. Paul begins with two rhetorical questions. “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”<sup>127</sup> Paul’s command to flee idolatry would not be new to the Corinthians. They, like the Thessalonians, had turned from idols to the living God through the preaching of the gospel.<sup>128</sup> It is doubtful that they would have engaged in idolatry as they understood it. But Paul wants them to perceive the issue in a more profound way. Thus he mentions by means of rhetorical questions what he knows the Corinthians will heartily agree to. The cup is the communion in Christ’s blood. The bread is the communion in his body. At each weekly gathering the Corinthians shared in the cup and the bread. They ate and drank what was called “my body given for you,” and “my blood shed for you.” With this basis derived from the worship experience of the Corinthians, Paul is ready to make his point. But first he wants to insure that the Corinthians have focused on what he is saying. Thus he draws an analogy to Israel according to the flesh. “Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?”<sup>129</sup> Israelites are partakers of the altar when they eat the meat sacrificed on it. The allusion here is to the peace offering, sometimes called the fellowship offering. It is the only offering of which the person bringing the sacrifice partook. Just as the Israelite partook of the altar by eating the sacrifice, so believers partake of the body and blood of Jesus by eating the bread and drinking the cup. Paul then reaffirms that idols are not really anything. “What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything?”<sup>130</sup> Apparently this was the Corinthians’ justification for eating meat offered to idols. Since the idol was nothing it could not contaminate the believer who ate such meat when he brought it home from the market place. Or if he ate it at an unbelieving neighbor’s house. But the Corinthians took their

logic even further. If the idol was nothing, then eating the sacrifice at the temple or in a religious festival was nothing. Paul does not agree. He sees this as idolatry that the Corinthians ought to flee. Reminding the Corinthians of their communion with Christ in the bread and the cup, he makes his point. “Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?”<sup>131</sup> The Corinthians dare not eat meat sacrificed to idols at a religious festival or at the idol’s temple. Such eating is a fellowship with demons. As Paul will say on a related matter in his second letter, “And what accord has Christ with Belial?”<sup>132</sup> So we see that it was the eating of the Lord’s supper that was the basis for Paul’s demonstrating that Christians could not eat sacrificed meat at a pagan temple or festival. Here again the supper is basic to the piety and the ethics of apostolic Christianity.

### *Eating in Disunity*

In chapter 11:17ff Paul takes up the problem of schism at Corinth. We have examined this passage at some length in showing that the Corinthians church kept the supper (or at least tried to keep it) at their weekly assembly. We return to this passage now to note the divisions at Corinth were ruining the celebration of the Lord’s supper. Paul boldly says that “when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others...” The Corinthians came together to eat the holy supper, but Paul insists that they were not eating the Lord’s supper. The divisions among the believers destroyed the supper. At a mundane level, the supper was ruined, for some gorged themselves and others when home hungry. The supper did not manifest the unity of the believers, but rather their disunity. At this juncture we might expect a comment from Paul like he had made earlier. “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.”<sup>133</sup> But Paul does not repeat himself though his earlier comment seems germane. Instead he recalls his initial instructions to the Corinthians: “For I received from the Lord, what I also delivered to you...” Since it was not the Lord’s supper that the Corinthians were eating, Paul deemed it necessary to instruct them on this essential matter. It is doubtful that the Corinthians had forgotten the words of institution. They were blessing the cup and breaking the bread as Paul’s comments in 10:16 imply. But they had lost sight of the significance of those words and actions. Thus Paul comments at the end of his citation of the words of institution, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”<sup>134</sup> For Paul the supper is the gospel. It has the same meaning as his entire ministry at Corinth. “For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”<sup>135</sup> Therefore, what the Corinthians violated by their schisms was the very self-offering of Jesus. The Corinthians were guilty, not merely of violating an aspect of the supper (one bread therefore one body), but of “the body and blood of the Lord.” They had rendered his sacrifice vain. Paul’s remedy is very straightforward. He says, “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”<sup>136</sup>

In this passage we can see that Paul uses the supper as a lever to move the Corinthians to recognize the seriousness of their sin of disunity (“guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”). Since each week they will come together to eat, they cannot hesitate in their duty of repentance. Rather they must heal their divisions in a most public way, namely, “wait for one another.” Conservative Presbyterians have their problems with disunity also. But since the supper is an occasional part of the Presbyterian worship, the Reformed pastor would have little effect using the supper as Paul does.

We conclude, therefore, that not only was the supper celebrated each week in the Corinthian assembly, it was basic to the piety of the believers. Paul urges the exclusion of unrepentant sinners from the assembly in order that the feast may be kept with sincerity and truth. Paul resolves the difficult problem of meat offered to the idols by reminding the Corinthians that they cannot eat of the Lord’s table and the table of demons too. In fact this theology of the supper as communion with Christ becomes his model for understanding idolatry as communion with demons. Finally, Paul addresses the problem of disunity by showing that such disunity destroys the very supper that is the reason for their weekly gathering. They come together to eat, but their schisms mean that they are eating and drinking judgment. To eat in disunity, to be a divided church, is to sin against Christ’s body and blood by which we are redeemed. Paul’s resolution is not to hold the supper less frequently, but to eat the supper in unity. Or as Paul puts it, “wait for one another.”

Conservative Presbyterians who are committed to *Sola Scriptura* need to have the honesty to admit that these three passages in 1 Corinthians have no parallel in contemporary Presbyterian piety. This is not because our credal theology of the supper is inconsistent with Paul’s doctrine, but because our practice is different. Even when kept as a monthly feast, the supper does not play the role in Presbyterian piety that it played at Corinth. We do not see our disunity as sinning against the body and blood of Jesus. And we have lots of disunity. We do not insist unrepentant members be excluded from our assemblies lest we keep the feast with old leaven. We do not see that we cannot eat at the table of demons because we eat at the table of the Lord. The only remedy for this is to conform our practice to that of the apostolic church.

### **Other References to the Supper in the New Testament**

In the preceding paragraphs we examined the role of the Supper in the exhortations of Paul and the piety of the Corinthians. In two of the three passages examined there can be no dispute that they refer to the Lord’s supper. On careful examination it is clear that the third passage concerning Christ as our Passover must also be understood as an appeal to the holy supper. In this section we turn our attention to two texts that are not quite as obvious (to conservative Presbyterians, that is), yet when considered are also to be allusions to the holy supper. Our point is to show two things. First, to continue to illustrate the significant role that the supper played in apostolic theology and piety. And second to demonstrate that weekly communion provides an important hermeneutical structure for the correct interpretation of the New Testament. In other words, what was obvious to the original readers because of their eucharistic practice, is obscure to us because our practice differs from that of the apostolic church. We have already seen this to some extent in the Corinthians passages. Especially with



reference to the Christ our Passover passage, the meaning of the feast became clear when we focused on the practice of the Corinthians as evidenced in chapter 11. Since the Corinthians held a feast each week, from their perspective Paul's injunction to "keep the feast" was obvious in its meaning. Now we turn to a consideration of two other passages where the meaning is revealed to us when we keep in mind the apostolic practice of breaking bread as a part of the regular assembly of the saints.

*Revelation 3:20*

In the book of Revelation Jesus addresses the church of Laodicea with the invitation, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."<sup>137</sup> This verse is a classic evangelistic text among Evangelicals. Its use as an invitation to unbelievers was popularized by Bill Bright in his tract, "The Four Spiritual Laws." This Campus Crusade for Christ booklet has been used, not only on college campuses, but in variant forms by such establishment evangelistic ministries as the Billy Graham Association. Therefore, its meaning for evangelicals is firmly fixed by its usage. This popular use of Revelation 3:20 as an evangelistic text illustrates the dictum that a text out of context can become a pretext for almost anything. Even for the causal reader, it is obvious that the people addressed by Jesus in the text are not unbelievers, but the church of Laodicea.

Conservative Presbyterians often find this text uncomfortable. Part of its popular usage is its portrayal artistically. In this artistic rendering (which can be bought in almost every Christian bookstore) a very handsome Jesus stands outside a house knocking on the door. The door has no knob or handle. It can only be opened from the inside. This implicit Arminianism bothers Presbyterians with their Augustinian doctrines of sin and grace.

The address to the Laodicean Christians presumes that the Laodiceans had a meal as a part of their regular assembly. This is consistent with the pattern we have observed in Acts and 1 Corinthians. Furthermore, the Laodicean church was part of the network of Pauline churches. One of Paul's "lost letters" was addressed to the Laodiceans.<sup>138</sup> The Laodiceans met to eat as did the Corinthians, but Jesus was not present with them. They may have eaten bread that was called his body, but he was far from them. The problem was not in the form of the celebration, but in the spiritual pride and pretense to self-sufficiency that characterized the Laodiceans. They lacked zeal (lukewarm), were conceited ("you say, 'I am rich.'") and so were self-deceived (you are wretched). As a result, no matter what they did with the bread and cup, there was no communion with Jesus Christ. But any at Laodicea who would "be zealous and repent,"<sup>139</sup> Jesus would come to such a one to dine with him and he with Jesus. In the New Testament, the supper always has both a corporate and an individual pole. It is the common meal of the Church, a sign of being one body in Christ. Yet it requires of the individual, not merely participation in the event, but zeal and repentance. Only then will it be true that "I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." This zeal and repentance is presented metaphorically as hearing Jesus' voice and opening the door.

The emphasis in Revelation 3:20 is not on eating Jesus' body and blood (as it is in Corinthians 10 and 11), but on sharing a meal with Jesus. "I will dine with him and he

with me.” The same theme of fellowship with Jesus at a meal can be found in the Emmaus Road event. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus comes as guest when the repentant believer opens the door. But having come, Jesus becomes the host of the meal as also happened in the Emmaus Road episode. This is also reminiscent of the resurrection meal in John 21 where the emphasis is not on the elements (bread and fish), but on the presence of Jesus who hosts the meal. It is fellowship with Jesus that is the central concern.

The noun form of the verb “dine” in Revelation 3:20 is used in Revelation 19:9 and 17. The first reference is to the wedding supper of the Lamb, a eschatological feast of salvation. The second reference is to the judgment of the nations in the birds’ feast on the corpses of the dead. Thus Revelation is suggesting that those who truly eat with Jesus in repentance (and so make their robes white) will share in the eschatological feast of eternal life. Those who do not, will become a feast for the birds of the air, that is, will be consumed by the wrath of God. This literary connection between the invitation in 3:20 and the two antithetical feasts of chapter 19 makes the significance of truly eating with Jesus all that more profound.

#### *Hebrews 13:10*

The last passage we will consider is Hebrews 13:10. “We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat.” Reformed exegetes almost invariably reject any association between the supper and this passage. Two main reasons are given for this disassociation. First, it is argued that the association between altar and table will not be established until later in Church history. The Reformed reject thoroughly the idea that the Lord’s table is an altar on which Christ is in any sense sacrificed or offered. The second reason is that the verse before this quotation refers to eating of animal sacrifices which has not profited those who have so eaten. In contrast to such literal eating, the writer urges his readers to have their hearts strengthened by grace. “Do not be carried about with various and strange doctrines. For it is good that the heart be established by grace, not with foods which have not profited those who have been occupied with them.” Thus Reformed Christians see in this passage a contrast between an outward and ceremonial religion and an inward and spiritual religion. This pattern of interpretation has even affected the translation of these verses. The New International Version renders the text as “It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace, not by ceremonial food... “ The word “ceremonial” is purely a gloss with no basis in the original. But it does reveal the interpretive propensity of Evangelical and Reformed scholars. There always lurks in the hearts of Reformed exegetes the fear of the Rome with its doctrines of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass. In this case the term “ceremonial” is added to exclude any possibility of understanding the text in a Roman Catholic manner.

However, on careful examination, we believe this passage also alludes to the holy supper. The apostolic church did hold the holy supper as a part of its regular gatherings. So an allusion to the supper is at least plausible in terms of the historical circumstances. And given those circumstances, the interpretive issue is why the reference to eating what the Jewish priests have no right to eat would not be a reference to the Christian communal meal, the Lord’s supper. The use of the term altar is not definitive in this matter. First, the

term is suggested by the context. The Old Covenant sacrifices were offered at the altar in Jerusalem. In Malachi, the term “table” is used for the altar.<sup>140</sup> Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 10:21 Paul refers pagan altars with the term table. In the Old Covenant the sacrifices were food for God, and a portion was eaten by the priests. The peace offering was even eaten by the family of the one making the sacrifice. If then the Old Covenant altar could be called a table since what was sacrificed on it was eaten, could not the Lord’s table be called an altar since what was eaten from it had been sacrificed on the cross?<sup>141</sup> One did not actually sit at the altar and eat. It was a table metaphorically. So too the table of the Lord was not where Christ was sacrificed. As the writer of Hebrews is at pains to point out, Christ has been offered once and for all. His sacrifice on the cross is *einmaligkeit*. Yet the table proclaimed Christ’s death for us. At it one ate of the sacrifice, that is, one shared in the body and blood of the Lord. Could it not be metaphorically called an altar for the sake of making the contrast between the ineffectual sacrifices of the levitical priesthood, and the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ of which we have communion in the bread and the cup?

Paul has no qualms about drawing a parallel between the Jewish participation in the Old Covenant altar by eating the sacrifices and believers sharing in Christ’s body and blood (his sacrifice) by eating the bread and drinking of the cup at the Lord’s table. The writer of Hebrews draws a similar parallel. However, when the believer eats of this altar of which the Jewish priests have no right to eat, their hearts are established by grace. This has nothing to do with an *ex opera operata* doctrine of the sacraments not yet invented. It has to do with the difference between the Old Covenant sacrifices which could never take away sin, and the sacrifice of Christ. “For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”<sup>142</sup> There are numerous New Testament passages that make the point that mere outward eating of the supper does not convey a communion with Christ. We have considered some of these in the preceding material. In Revelation 3:20 zeal and repentance are required to dine with Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 11, unity and love are necessary. But the contrast that structures the entire book of Hebrews is not a contrast between heart religion and mere ritual. What makes the food of the sacrifices of no profit to those who eat them is not that they are outward and ceremonial. It is that such sacrifices are ineffectual. They can never take away sin. In contrast, Christ’s sacrifice is perfect and complete. Therefore to eat of his sacrifice (“we have an altar from which to eat”) is to have one’s heart strengthened by grace.

The Lord’s supper sets forth for us in the clearest terms that we must eat of that sacrifice. We must have communion with the body and blood of Christ. Given the apostolic practice of weekly supper, and the theology of Hebrews, it seems clear that “we have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat” refers to the eating of the Lord’s supper in faith and repentance. Non-believing Jews were excluded from this meal because eating the meal was necessarily a proclamation that the Old Covenant sacrifices were inadequate. Forgiveness of sins comes only through the once for all sacrifice of Christ. For this reason, eating of the Lord’s table was a renunciation of the Jewish sacrifices. Thus the writer of Hebrews say, “Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”<sup>143</sup> Earlier he had urged his readers not to forsaking their assembling together as was the habit of some. Apparently, some of the

Christians were neglecting the Christian assembly for the sake of participation in the Jewish tabernacle. The writer intends to end this practice and to draw the baptized back to the Christian assembly. Here there is grace because of the sacrifice of Christ. Here they can eat of an altar of which the Jewish priests have no access. How could this refer to anything else but the Lord's supper? The only reason for rejecting an allusion to the supper is a dogmatic one. Let us not give the Romanists even an inch of ground. But no New Testament book is more in antipathy to the Roman doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass than the book of Hebrews. We ought not to let this latter controversy color our interpretation of the New Testament. No one reading Hebrews in the original setting would have taken the reference to eating of an altar as anything but a metaphor. The writer is far too insistent that Christ's sacrifice is once for all. And likewise, no one whose ecclesiastical practice was to hold a meal at the weekly gathering would have missed the allusion to the Lord's supper.

Furthermore, just a few sentences below the statement "we have an altar from which to eat" the writer describes the sort of sacrifices that the Christian is to make. "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased." Here we do not encounter the idea of a priest offering Christ as sacrificed to God for the atonement of our sins. Rather Christians offer the "sacrifice of praise... the fruit of our lips." It is at least plausible that the writer is intending the blessing of the bread and the cup by this statement. But even if the reference is more broadly to any sort of praise, the blessing of the bread and cup would be included in that sacrifice of praise. Therefore we must disagree with the judgment of Hughes Oliphant Old that, "Nowhere does the New Testament speak of the Supper as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."<sup>144</sup>

When we examine the New Testament documents we see that the doing of what Jesus had commanded at the last supper was essential to the emerging Christians assemblies, to the theology of the New Testament writers, and to the piety of the first Christians. The command to do this compelled the Jerusalem church to meet separately from temple and synagogue. This was the genesis of the distinctive Christian assembly. Thus the eating of the Lord's supper belonged to the very nature of gathering of the church as church. The Christian assembly was a gathering together on the first day of the week to break bread. It was a coming together to eat. The supper structured the piety of the early believers. For its sake it was necessary to get rid of the leaven of sin. The communion of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and cup was the reason that all association with pagan temples and sacrifices had to be ended. It summoned the church to a unity of love and acceptance. It set forth the spiritual poverty of mankind and summoned believers to find their wealth in communion with Jesus Christ. Finally, it called the Christian community to forsake its association with Judaism, and to bear the reproach of Christ who was crucified outside the walls of the city. This entire complex was built upon the practice of eating the holy meal whenever the Christians gathered together as the church. Reformed piety has been deformed by the infrequent celebration of the supper. Our theology, derived from Calvin, is consistent with what we have seen in the New Testament. The problem for Presbyterians is not in our creed, but in our practice.

And an acquaintance with our churches reveals that practice informs our piety more often than creed. The pattern of practice has become the rule of piety.<sup>145</sup>

### **The Nature of the Supper Requires a Weekly Celebration**

We have shown that there is an apostolic tradition of celebrating the holy supper at the gathering of believers, whether daily as in Jerusalem or weekly as at Troas and Corinth. So important is the supper to the assembly that it was both the cause for that assembly and gave its name to the same. In this chapter we will show that it is the very nature of the Supper demonstrates that it ought to be included in the regular Lord's day worship of the church. That nature determines frequency is obviously the case for the other sacrament, baptism. Because baptism is the sign and seal of our inclusion in Christ and the New Covenant, it is to be administered only once to any person. The Bible never says in so many words, "only baptize a person once." It is the nature of baptism, as the sign and seal of our union with Christ, of regeneration, of justification, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit, that makes its repetition a contradiction of its meaning. To repeat baptism is to repeat the unrepeatable, namely, to repeat regeneration, justification, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit.<sup>146</sup> Since baptism by its very nature is only to be administered once to a person at his entrance into the church, baptism must be an occasional element in worship. It will be celebrated only when there are infants or new converts to be admitted.

The Lord's supper, on the other hand, is not the sign of our initial inclusion, but of our continuance and growth in Christ and the New Covenant. Its very nature as a meal requires a repeated observance. One does not eat and drink but once in life. It would be as wrong to have the Lord's supper only once in the lifetime of each baptized Christian as it would be wrong to administer baptism to a Christian more than once. The nature of baptism forbids its repetition. The nature of the Supper requires its repetition. The Reformed churches have recognized this difference in their various creeds and catechisms. For example, the Westminster Larger Catechism #177 summarizes the difference this way.

*Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ?* The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's supper is to be administered often in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him...

This, however, leaves us with the question "How often is often?" Neither the Westminster Standards nor the continental confessions specify whether we should celebrate the Supper weekly, monthly, or quarterly. Though by the time of the Westminster Assembly quarterly celebration was the most common, the Reformed churches had not come to a doctrinal consensus on the matter. In fact some of the leading theologians of the era continued Calvin's advocacy of weekly celebration. John Owen, a theologian from Cambridge, produced a catechism in 1667. It was initially published anonymously. Question 40 dealt with the frequency of the holy supper. "How often is this ordinance to be administered? Every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained." The proof texts for this citation are 1 Corinthians 11:26 and Acts 20:7. This citation uses language associated with a low view of the sacraments. The supper is called an ordinance not a sacrament. It is administered

not celebrated. Yet Owen believes this ordinance should be administered weekly if possible or at least as frequently as opportunity allows. Calvin, Bucer and Owen advocated weekly celebration. Zwingli and Knox thought a quarterly celebration was sufficient. The practice at Strasbourg had been weekly at first, and remained so at the Cathedral. Zurich and Geneva had quarterly celebrations. In Scotland the shortage of ministers made even Knox's quarterly preference an ideal difficult to put into practice. Given this diversity it is not inexplicable that none of the Reformed creeds, either those stemming from the Reformation era or from the Puritan era in Britain should venture to prescribe the frequency of the supper's administration. The matter is much the same today as it was four hundred years ago.

What is bizarre about this situation is that all of the Reformed churches embraced Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's supper in their creeds. Whether one agrees or disagrees with Calvin's theology, no one who has read him would charge him with being superficial and naïve. His thought is universally recognized as profound. So then, is it the case that Calvin's doctrine of the supper is inconsistent with his advocacy of frequent celebration? Or is it the case the Reformed churches have embraced Calvin's understanding of the sacrament in their creeds, but not in their practice of piety? The question is rhetorical. The practice of the Reformed churches is the result of a hodgepodge of historical factors. It has always lacked a theological justification. Is this not obvious when, for example, The Orthodox Presbyterian Church's Directory for Worship says, "The Lord's supper is to be celebrated frequently, but the frequency may be determined by each session as it may judge most conducive to edification"?<sup>147</sup> In this quotation, and in Presbyterian practice, the frequency of communion has been separated from the theology of supper. In effect, the Directory says, do it as often as it feels good. However, it is at least plausible that there was in Calvin's understanding of the supper (and so in the Reformed churches' understanding) something that compelled him to advocate a weekly celebration. Our concern in this chapter is to show that the nature of the supper according to the Scriptures and the Reformed creeds requires its weekly celebration.

As we begin to consider the theology of the supper and its implications for the frequency of celebration, our intention is only to survey such material. A full exploration of the theology of the supper would be a book in itself. Our intention is only to highlight the core themes found in the New Testament and summarized in the Reformed creeds. Likewise, we will note distinctives of the Roman, Orthodox and Lutheran doctrines of the supper only in passing. Again, interaction with such issues as Christ's bodily presence or absence, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, and the sacrifice of the mass goes beyond the limited scope and purpose of this book. Our intention is not to change the Reformed understanding of holy supper, but to bring Reformed practice into conformity with the Reformed understanding of Lord's supper. Our analysis will focus around four themes: remembrance and proclamation, communion and presence, unity in one body and thanksgiving.

### **The Lord's Supper as Proclamation and Memorial**

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."<sup>148</sup> This sentence is Paul's interpretation of the words of institution

that he has quoted immediately prior to this statement. This text is often cited to show the “eschatological” character of the supper. While there is an eschatological aspect to the supper, an anticipation of the resurrection feast at the end of the age, that thought is not the main point of Paul’s assertion. What Paul is reminding the Corinthians is that the supper they have been abusing is a proclaiming of the Lord’s death.<sup>149</sup> Since it is a proclaiming of the Lord’s death, their abuse of the supper is a sinning against the body and blood of Christ. Thus Paul’s next sentence is “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” The “therefore” refers to the immediately prior statement that eating and drinking is a proclaiming of Christ’s death. The supper proclaimed Christ’s death, that is to say, it proclaimed reconciliation with God and with one another.<sup>150</sup> The Corinthians demonstrated their malice and indifference to each other in the manner in which they partook of the supper. Some got drunk; others went home hungry. It would be as if a sermon were preached on Christ’s sacrifice as reconciliation during which the congregation divided into mutually hateful groups. And that is the point that we wish to make. The supper according to Paul is a proclamation. It is a sermon.

The Reformed, following the ancient custom, have distinguished the sacraments from the word. Whatever value such a categorization may have for systematic theological purposes, it tends to blind the Reformed reader to the force of this passage. Paul was not setting up a contrast between word and supper in 1 Corinthians 11:26. He was asserting an identity between them. From the outset of his letter, Paul told the Corinthians that his great concern was the death of Christ. As we noted in the earlier section, Paul came to the Corinthians determined to know nothing among them but Christ crucified.<sup>151</sup> The preaching of the cross, though foolishness to the world, was the wisdom and power of God for the believer.<sup>152</sup> So too, for Paul the essence of the supper is that by it believers “proclaim his death.” The verb<sup>153</sup> translated “proclaim” has been used twice earlier in 1 Corinthians. In each case it refers to the act of preaching the gospel. We have indicated its occurrences with bolding.

And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom **declaring** to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.<sup>154</sup>

Even so the Lord has commanded that those who **preach** the gospel should live from the gospel.<sup>155</sup>

In the first passage, Paul says that he came to the Corinthians “declaring... the testimony of God.” In the next sentence it is clear that the content of the testimony is “Christ and him crucified.” This was Paul’s preaching. In the second passage, Paul uses the verb with the noun “gospel.” We see, then, that the message of Christ crucified was gospel that Paul proclaimed.<sup>156</sup> It was the content of his preaching. Paul preached or proclaimed Christ crucified and risen as his gospel.<sup>157</sup> For Paul, to proclaim Christ’s



death was to declare the testimony of God. In 1 Corinthians 1:26 Paul uses the same terminology about the supper. Eating the bread and drinking the cup is proclaiming Christ's death till he comes. Or to put it into theological speak: eating the supper is a kerygmatic (preaching) event. For Paul, the doing of the supper is a preaching of the gospel. It is not merely a sign of the word. It is the word. It is the proclamation.

Furthermore, if the supper is a proclaiming of Christ's death "till he comes," the supper cannot be construed narrowly as proclaiming of Christ's death to the exclusion of his resurrection, ascension and final coming. It is rather a proclaiming of his death that necessarily implies his resurrection and ascension.<sup>158</sup> Thus the meaning of the supper is as comprehensive as the preaching of the gospel. Or to be more to the point, it is a form of the preaching of the gospel.

So then, it ought to be obvious to Reformed Christians that proclaiming Christ's death till he comes is essential to every meeting of the church as church. The supper is such a proclamation. For the Apostle preaching and the supper are both a proclaiming of Christ's death. The supper is a kind of preaching the gospel. And since it is proclaiming of the gospel, its presence in the assembly cannot possibly be a threat to the primacy of the word. How can that which is kerygmatic detract from the kerygma? How can what proclaims his dead detract from preaching Christ crucified? The weekly celebration of the supper, therefore, does not detract from the word because it is the word. The supper supports, and as it were, "amens" the word as delivered verbally by the minister in his discourse. Precisely because the church is to be word centered, that is, always heeding the gospel, it ought to be supper centered. According to Paul the supper is sermon.

Though not expressed as we have said it, this insight has been incorporated into the Westminster Larger Catechism, even if its implications have not been developed. According to the Catechism, in the supper "his death is showed forth."<sup>159</sup> The elements are said to "represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment."<sup>160</sup> If the supper shows forth Christ's death, and the sermon proclaims Christ crucified, are not these two things really two forms of the same thing, namely, the gospel message? Whatever may be the tensions between word and sacrament latter in church history, Paul does not even have a hint of tension. The supper for Paul is proclamation.

However, having said that, it is important to remember that the Reformed have always contended that the Roman mass was not the holy supper but a corruption of it. It is a mistake to say that Roman worship is sacrament centered while Reformed worship is sermon centered. In fact, both traditions have both sermon and sacrament. The Reformed may have had the supper only occasionally, but Rome has the problem (only recently addressed) that people rarely ate the supper.<sup>161</sup> There was always a place for the sermon in the shape of the mass even if it was often neglected in the period leading up to the Reformation. There were efforts to restore preaching at the council of Trent. A homily by the priest is standard in contemporary Roman practice. The problem with Rome, from the Reformed perspective is not with emphasis. It is with content. For the Reformed, the Roman doctrines in general are serious distortions of the gospel.<sup>162</sup> In the same way the Roman doctrines of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass are regarded by the Reformed as severe distortions of the supper. These distortions are not just in the dogma,

but in the words and form of the mass.<sup>163</sup> So from a Reformed perspective, Rome has neither faithful preaching from the pulpit, nor faithful proclaiming in the supper.

As churches that desire to be obedient to the Scripture, the Reformed need to restore the supper to its place alongside the preaching, because what really matters is “proclaiming Christ’s death till he comes.” It is the nature of the supper as proclamation of the gospel that requires its weekly celebration. Just as it is the nature of faithful preaching that requires its weekly presence in the assembly of the saints. There is, after all, no command in the New Testament to have a sermon every Lord’s day. Indeed, as we have shown, it was the command to “do this” that caused the Christian assembly. Yet the very nature of the assembly as the gathering of Christ’s people requires the proclamation of that word by which the people both become Christ’s and are sustained and completed as Christ’s people. So for the same reason, the supper is necessary. It belongs to the assembly, not just as a tradition started by the Apostles, but because it proclaims that which makes the assembly to be an assembly of the redeemed, namely, the death of Christ.

Closely related to this idea of proclamation is the notion of remembrance. It is probably the case that Paul’s interpretive words we have just discussed are a gloss on the phrase “do this in remembrance of me.”<sup>164</sup> This phrase is used both at the bread and cup in Paul’s version, and at the bread in Luke’s account. At the cup in Paul’s account the additional words “as often as you drink it”<sup>165</sup> are inserted between “do this” and “in remembrance of me.” The phrase “do this in remembrance of me” is not in Matthew and Mark.<sup>166</sup> This phrase is traditionally rendered into English as “in remembrance of me.” In fact, the original is much plainer than the rather august “in remembrance.” A simple translation would be “in memory of me,” or “in my memory.”<sup>167</sup>

The only other passage in the New Testament where the word here translated “remembrance” is used is Hebrews 10:3. There it conveys this sense of a public event that sets forth a truth. The writer of Hebrews argues that the repetition of the sacrifices of the Old Covenant show their inadequacy to take away sin. Their repetition is a public reminder of the continuing presence of sin. We have indicated the word with bolding.

For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a **reminder**<sup>168</sup> of sins every year.<sup>169</sup>

The very act of offering the sacrifices displays the truth that such sacrifices can never take away sins. Whether the people understood the message is doubtful. But the message was displayed nonetheless. What the writer of Hebrews had in mind is a public memorial, a proclaiming of theological truth by prescribed actions. This is the sense in which we should understand “remembrance” in the Pauline and Lukan narratives of the Last Supper. Also, the preposition traditionally rendered “in”<sup>170</sup> when used in such a construction like this one has more the force of “for” or “for the purpose of,” than “in.”<sup>171</sup> Thus the sense of the original is “do this for my memory.”

What Jesus was instituting was not a mere aid for the disciples' memory, but a memorial action that would set forth the meaning of his death. Or as Paul has put it, would "proclaim Christ's death until he comes." The Passover had been such a public, covenant memorial. Hughes Oliphant Old makes the point that the Passover meal constituted the worship of Israel. "It was the eating of the feast itself that was the service of worship."<sup>172</sup> We can say the same thing for the role of the Lord's supper in the apostolic church. "Quite important to a true understanding of the sacrament of communion is an understanding of what is meant by celebrating 'in remembrance of me'... Neither Jesus nor Paul had in mind a simple mental recollection. They had in mind far more. The text says 'Do this in remembrance of me.' They had in mind holding a religious service. In a true celebration of a covenant meal the remembering of God's saving acts had an essential function."<sup>173</sup> But to say this is to presume that the supper was understood in an expansive and not a reductionist way. The centrality of the supper as the essential act of worship did not exclude preaching but rather demanded it. The evidence suggests that the supper was normally held in the context of both preaching and prayers. Preaching prayer and supper are linked in Acts 2:42, 46. We have already suggested that Acts 20:7ff gives us the first example of a unified liturgy of sermon and supper. Likewise, the supper on the road to Emmaus was the climax of the risen Christ's teaching of the two disciples. At Corinth the assembly in one place included teaching and prophesying as well as the supper.<sup>174</sup> The church came together to break bread, but it did that in the context of the ministry of preaching.

The Lord's supper is a memorial action that proclaims the death of Christ. According to Paul the Lord's supper is an objective action, and not merely a mental action. Paul does not say that when you eat this bread you are reminded of the Lord's death. Certainly we are so reminded. But the Apostle Paul says that when you eat the bread you "proclaim" the Lord's death. Paul interprets Jesus' words, "do this in remembrance of me," to mean "proclaim this by the acts of eating and drinking." The nature of the Supper as a memorial that proclaims Christ's death is also taught by the Westminster standards. "The Lord's supper is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is showed forth."<sup>175</sup> In the Confession the supper is "for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death," and is a "commemoration of that one offering up of himself."<sup>176</sup> That such an objective covenant memorial requires from the participants a subjective remembering, recalling and reflecting is also stressed by the Standards.<sup>177</sup> God is not honored if our actions are correct but our hearts are far from him. Yet we cannot allow the necessity of subjective faith, repentance, love, and joy on the part of the participants to abolish the words of Scripture. "For as often as you **eat** this bread and **drink** this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes." The Lord's supper is not merely a subjective remembering, but an objective memorial, that is, a proclamation of the death of Christ.

The context of the Last Supper was the Jewish Passover. The Passover was a covenant memorial that recalled the events of Israel's redemption from Egypt. "So this day shall be to you a memorial; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance."<sup>178</sup> The

Passover memorialized the once for all event of deliverance from Egypt. So too the supper memorializes the once for all event of Christ's death as deliverance from sin and death. Because of this objective meaning, this public memorializing by a feast, the Passover was also intended to foster a subjective recalling, that is an appropriating by faith. "And you shall observe this thing as an ordinance for you and your sons forever. It will come to pass when you come to the land which the Lord will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.'"<sup>179</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, the same is found in the New Covenant Passover feast, the Lord's supper. It too is both a memorializing of a once for all event by a feast and a call to believe and so share in the meaning of that event.

Luke presents a theology of the supper that is very similar to Paul's. However in his account of the Emmaus road supper, the emphasis falls not on Christ's death but on his resurrection. As we noted earlier, it is the risen Jesus who is not recognized by the two disciples as they walk toward Emmaus. In the blessing and breaking of the bread Jesus is made known to them. Therefore, it is not only the death of Christ that is proclaimed in the supper, his resurrection is also made known. As was said above, the resurrection is implicit in Paul's statement that the supper proclaims Christ's death till he comes. In Luke this understanding is given the focus. The supper is a meal with the risen Christ. He is present as the host and is made known in the banquet as the resurrected one. This was also implicit at the Last Supper since Jesus had repeatedly said that he must be put to death and then arise on the third day. Certainly Jesus offered himself to the disciples in the form of bread and cup in anticipation of his resurrection. Had there been no resurrection, there would have been no Christian community and no celebration of the Lord's supper. Furthermore, the idea of food that sustains life suggests that it is the risen Christ who offers us communion with his body and blood. The supper is eaten unto life and not unto death. We ought not, therefore, to see the supper's emphasis on the death of Christ as in tension with the reality of the resurrection. The supper proclaims the death of him who has been raised from the dead such that death has no power over him. The supper proclaims Christ's death till he comes and so in the supper the risen Christ who died for us is made known. Or as Jesus himself expressed it, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me."

No meeting of church should be on any other basis than the once for all death of Christ. Likewise, every meeting of the saints is a gathering in the presence of the risen Lord. The supper both proclaims his death (Paul) and makes him known as the risen Lord (Luke). No meeting should take place without proclaiming and remembering his death and resurrection. The Lord's supper is Christ's appointed means for doing this very thing. Can you imagine a Christian church gathering for worship with no mention of Christ crucified and risen. Such a meeting would be no Christian assembly. Yet we regularly gather for worship and do not use Christ's appointed means of proclaiming and remembering his death and making known his presence with us as the risen Lord. Does

this not violate the regulative principle that we are to worship God, not as we devise, but as God appoints? Can we not break this principle as much by deletion as by addition?

This is why the Lord's supper should be celebrated each Lord's day. It sets forth the death of Christ as the only basis of the Christian's life. It focuses our worship on Jesus crucified and risen. However, the Lord's supper not only proclaims Christ's death as an objective and once for all event in history, but also as that which Christ shares with us. It is memorial, but because it is a meal that is eaten, it is also communion.

### **The Supper as Communion with Christ**

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”<sup>180</sup> This passage is the source of the most common name for the holy supper in Reformed circles. It is as common for the Reformed to call the supper “communion” as it is for the Orthodox or the Anglicans to call it “eucharist.” The English term “communion” is derived from the Latin *communio*. It in turn was employed to translate the Greek term “koinonia”<sup>181</sup> translated in this passage as “communion.” Communion with Christ is a crucial concept in New Testament theology. This is the case both for the understanding of salvation in general and for the theology of the holy supper. Paul in 1 Corinthians uses the term “koinonia” not only for the bread and cup of the supper, but also for the relationship into which God has called the believer. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the **fellowship** (koinonia) of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>182</sup> The term koinonia as used by Paul has the meaning of sharing or participation. The believer according to Paul shares in Christ's death, resurrection and ascension. We are buried with him and raised with him. In him we are chosen and redeemed.<sup>183</sup>

This theme of salvation as union and participation in Christ is also central to the Reformed understanding of salvation. It is part of what makes Reformed ministers vaguely uncomfortable with the broader American evangelical tradition. Often in evangelicalism, salvation is conceived of as somehow abstracted from the person of Christ. Jesus provided salvation for us by his death. We “get saved” when we believe. As those who are saved we should have fellowship with Jesus on a regular basis through prayer and Bible reading. (Some have even gone so far as to assert that if a person has once received Christ, he will be saved even if he becomes an atheist!) This typical presentation of faith in evangelical circles leaves the Reformed feeling that something is missing. What is missing is the biblical notion that salvation is communion or participation in Christ. Salvation is not so much a thing that God gives us when we believe, but a person in whom we share.

Calvin expressed it this way, “And I do not see how any one can trust that he has redemption and righteousness in the cross of Christ, and life in his death, unless he relies chiefly upon a true participation in Christ himself.”<sup>184</sup> According to the Reformed faith, salvation is applied to the believer by the Holy Spirit who unites the believer to Christ. This union with Christ, this sharing in him, is a participation in the humanity of Christ. Again to quote Calvin, Christ “is obtained, I affirm, not only when we believe that he was made an offering for us, but when he dwells in us – when he is one with us – when we are members of his flesh – when, in fine, we are incorporated with Him (so to speak)

into one life and substance...”<sup>185</sup> In recent decades this notion has been reformulated and further developed in the work of Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. His book, *The Centrality of the Resurrection* painstakingly develops the idea of union with Christ in his death and resurrection as we find it in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Generally speaking, contemporary Reformed thinkers usually avoid Calvin’s language of sharing in Christ’s substance. But a careful reading of Calvin will show that by such language Calvin was not thinking about a static sharing in the “stuff” of Jesus’ humanity, but a dynamic sharing in his historical experience of death and resurrection. Jesus joins us to himself, that is, to his humanity in that humanity’s experience of death, resurrection and ascension.

This understanding of salvation is basic to the structure of Paul’s thought. “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.”<sup>186</sup> In baptism and by faith, the believer is buried with Christ. For the Apostle the union that Christ effects with the believer is so strong that the believer, as it were, is transported back in time to the tomb of Christ. We are buried with him, and hence the body of sin is cut off once and for ever. This for Paul is the true circumcision. And so when Christ arose on the third day, we too were raised up with him by faith and through the working of God. The meaning of this text is often missed by taking “through the working of God” as the object of faith. Thus the meaning would be that we are raised with Christ by believing in the working of God. However, in Paul’s usage, the object of faith is always Christ or the gospel. Further, in other places, it is Christ who is raised through the working of the Father.<sup>187</sup> In other words, just as Christ was raised up by the working of the Father, the one who believes the message of Christ’s resurrection is raised up with Christ by the working of the Father.

Just from this passage it is clear that salvation involves such a union with the humanity of Jesus that his death becomes our death and his resurrection becomes our resurrection. Paul finds in this union and participation both the basic status of the believer as forgiven and the new life of the believer as delivered from the power of sin. In other words, the justification of the believer is by sharing in Christ’s death and resurrection. “And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.”<sup>188</sup> In this text, the believer is assured that he is forgiven all his trespasses because he is risen with Christ. All that is left on the cross is the canceled indictment of his sin. The sanctification of the believer, that is his transformation in character and deed, is also the result of this union with the humanity of Christ. “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin.”<sup>189</sup>

Our purpose is not to explore all the implications of this Pauline doctrine, but to note that it plays a central role in the Reformed understanding of salvation. For the Reformed salvation is participation in Christ, and therefore, in his death and in his resurrection. We can say, therefore, that the believer is joined to the person of Christ, shares in the humanity of Christ and in the historical experience of Christ (death and resurrection) and so participates in the resurrection life of Christ. This is the Reformed understanding of salvation.<sup>190</sup> It should not be surprising, therefore, that a connection would exist between this idea of salvation and the Reformed understanding of the supper. Paul refers to both the believer's continuous sharing in Christ and the focused sharing that is the Lord's supper by the same term. God has called us into the *koinonia* of his son, and in the supper we have a *koinonia* with his body and his blood. Much of the historical debate over the supper has surrounded the issue of how Christ is present in the supper. Not only have the Reformed rejected any effort to explain the manner of his presence (transubstantiation, consubstantiation), but the Reformed have rejected any notion of a bodily or physical presence of Christ in the supper.<sup>191</sup> The bread becomes Christ's body, not by being changed in its material substance, but by being transformed in its function. As Leenhardt has expressed it, "Indeed this bread is the body of Christ because Christ makes use of this bread. Outside this action it is only bread."<sup>192</sup> Leenhardt continues regarding the bread that though it is "unchanged on the level of its material composition, has become another thing because Jesus Christ chose it, at the moment of leaving His disciples, in order that in its very materiality, it could be the instrument of His presence."<sup>193</sup> The change, therefore, is not in the "stuff" of the bread, but in the signification and use of the bread. Ordinarily, bread is nourishment for bodily life. In the Lord's supper the bread becomes "the communion of the body of Christ" and hence is spiritual nourishment for eternal life. Whatever the presence of Christ is in the supper, it is not a physical presence. As far as the Reformed are concerned, the body of Jesus is in heaven. Period. End of discussion. Of course, neither Roman Catholics, Orthodox nor Lutherans will be willing to leave the matter there. But given this emphasis, it is not surprising that many assume that the Reformed hold only a Zwinglian memorialist view in which communion with Christ in the supper is merely a matter of personal remembering and reflecting on his death. Unfortunately, sometimes even the Reformed think this way.

From Calvin forward the Reformed churches have insisted that Paul's words demand a far more substantial communion than a subjective remembering and reflecting. Rather, what is received in the supper is nothing less than a sharing in the body and blood of Christ, a real participation in his humanity. Beginning with the last supper, the Reformed have understood the holy supper as a sharing in Christ's human experience of death. "Jesus, by means of the covenant meal, joined his disciples to himself before he offered himself up as a sacrifice for their sin and the sin of the world. He joined them to himself because what he was about to do he was doing for them. He shared that meal with them that they might be joined to him in his death."<sup>194</sup> Calvin was fond of saying that what Christ promised in calling the bread "my body," he fulfilled when that bread was eaten in faith. "And so speak the words of promise added there: 'Take, this is my body given for you.' We are bidden to take and eat the body which was once for all offered for our salvation, in order that when we see ourselves made partakers of it, we may assuredly

conclude that the power of his life-giving death will be efficacious in us.”<sup>195</sup> This same conviction found its way into the Reformed creeds. Notice in the following quotation the careful balance between a rejection of any bodily presence of Christ in the supper and an insistence on a true communion in the humanity of Jesus. “Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine, yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to be their outward senses.”<sup>196</sup> The proof texts for the paragraph are 1 Corinthians 10:3-4, 16 and 11:28. In the supper the believers “really and indeed... receive and feed upon Christ crucified.” And his body and blood are “really present to the faith of believers.” If this is what Paul taught in 1 Corinthians (as the proof texts indicate the Westminster divines believed), then why would Reformed Christians not demand that Christ be so offered to them every week? This is the inconsistency between the Reformed understanding of the supper as communion with Christ and the practice of infrequent celebration.

The idea of a real communion with the humanity of Christ is grounded, not only in the words of institution viewed as a promise and in Paul’s reference to the bread and cup as a communion in the body and blood, but also in the bread of life speech in John’s gospel.

I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever.<sup>197</sup>

Here too there is a real sharing in the humanity of Jesus. Jesus says that it is necessary to eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. Thus eternal life is portrayed, not as a thing that a Christian receives when he believes, but an effect of sharing in the humanity of Jesus. Eternal life does not exist apart from Jesus. He is the life.<sup>198</sup> That life resides, not only in his divinity, but also in his humanity. “For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself.”<sup>199</sup> Eternal life resides in the humanity of Jesus both by virtue of the incarnation,<sup>200</sup> and especially by his death, that is to say, his offering of himself for us. “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world.”<sup>201</sup> It is through his humanity that he offers himself for us. Therefore, it is in communion with his humanity that we receive all the benefits of his mediation.



Beginning with Calvin this passage was not interpreted as narrowly referring to the Lord's supper but as expressing the communion that the believer has with Christ always. In other words, the text was seen as parallel to 1 Corinthians 1:9, not 11:23ff. Calvin says, "For there are some who define the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of his blood as, in one word, nothing but to believe in Christ. But it seems to me that Christ meant to teach something more definite, and more elevated, in that noble discourse in which he commends to us the eating of his flesh. It is that we are quickened by a true partaking of him; and he has therefore designated this partaking by the words "eating" and "drinking," in order that no one should think that the life that we receive from him is received by mere knowledge. As it is not the seeing but the eating of bread that suffices to feed the body, so the soul must truly and deeply become partaker of Christ that it may be quickened to spiritual life by his power. We admit indeed, meanwhile, that this is no other eating than that of faith, as no other can be imagined. But here is the difference between my words and theirs: for them to eat is only to believe; I say that we eat Christ's flesh in believing, because it is made ours by faith, and that this eating is the result and effect of faith. Or if you want it said more clearly, for them eating is faith; for me it seems rather to follow from faith. This is a small difference indeed in words, but no slight one in the matter itself. For even though the apostle teaches that "Christ dwells in our hearts through faith," no one will interpret this indwelling to be faith, but all feel that he is there expressing a remarkable effect of faith, for through this believers gain Christ abiding in them. In this way the Lord intended, by calling himself the "bread of life," to teach not only that salvation for us rests on faith in his death and resurrection, but also that, by true partaking of him, his life passes into us and is made ours—just as bread when taken as food imparts vigor to the body."<sup>202</sup>

According to Calvin, the Christian by faith is so joined to Jesus that "his life passes into us and is made ours." We eat his flesh in the profound sense that we are made to share in his life. And this is a life that was both given for us on the cross and then was victorious over the grave on the third day. As a careful reading of John 6 shows, we partake of this manna from heaven by faith.<sup>203</sup> The passage begins with the question addressed to Jesus, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus replies, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent." The Jews then ask Jesus for a sign so that they may believe even as Moses gave them manna. Jesus responds, "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."<sup>204</sup> The work of God necessary for salvation is to believe in Jesus. When we believe, we have everlasting life. "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life."<sup>205</sup> There can be no doubt, then, that this eating of the flesh of Jesus is an eating by faith. But the point that we are stressing is that the Christian has a real share in Christ's humanity. In that he believes, he eats Christ's flesh and drinks his blood. That is to say, he is made such a sharer in Christ's humanity, that the life of Christ flows into him. "So he who feeds upon me will live because of me."<sup>206</sup>

As we have said, neither Calvin nor most Reformed commentators view the bread of life discourse as narrowly referring exclusively to the Lord's supper, but as rather

describing the union that the believer has with Christ always. “Therefore, the Sacrament does not cause Christ to begin to be the bread of life; but it reminds us that he was made the bread of life, which we continually eat.”<sup>207</sup> However, if it is true in general that we must share in Christ’s body and blood in order to have eternal life, then it is true in particular in the supper. For the supper presents this reality to us in a most pointed fashion. The supper proclaims to us by its very nature as a meal that Christ is our life, and we must eat and drink of him to live. It is not that **only** in the supper we eat and drink of him, but that **especially** in the supper we eat and drink of him. Whenever Christ is proclaimed as the bread of life, and we, hearing that good news, believe, then we most assuredly are made partakers of his life. That is to say, we eat his flesh and drink his blood. In the sermon as well as the supper we eat of Christ by faith. But in the supper this is presented to us in a most pointed and emphatic way. In the supper “they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.”<sup>208</sup>

Therefore, in the supper Christ is both proclaimed to us as the bread of life, and offered to us that we may partake of him. Calvin writes that Christ as the bread of life is applied to us “through the gospel, but more clearly through the Sacred Supper, where he offers himself with all his benefits to us, and we receive him by faith.”<sup>209</sup> If the essential nature of salvation is union and communion with Christ, then it follows that Christ ought to be so presented and so offered to the people of God. The supper does this. It does this by its very nature as a meal in which the bread is called his body and the cup his blood. In the supper Christ is portrayed for us as the bread of life. Salvation is pictured in the supper as a communion with Christ in his death and resurrection, that is a sharing in his body and blood. And in the supper we are invited to eat and drink of him. He is offered to us that we might receive him in faith. The bread that we break is the sharing in his body. The cup that we bless is the participation in his blood. If this is the biblical doctrine of the supper, why would anyone hold a Christian assembly and not so present and offer Christ? If a Reformed minister neglected to preach and offer Christ in his sermons would he not be thought a faithless man, unworthy of the office? So too how is it faithfulness if the minister (and the session) fail to preach and offer Christ to the people in the way he has ordained, by the holy supper?

Thus the nature of the supper as a true and real communion with Christ, with his body and blood, and all the benefits of the New Covenant show us that the supper ought to be offered and received each week in the assembly of those who are called by Christ’s name. If the purpose of the Christian assembly is communion with Christ (and who would deny this!), then we ought to have that communion in the manner that Christ appointed. The holy supper is the means Christ has ordained (along with preaching) that we may feed upon him as the bread of life. The nature of the supper as communion shows that it belongs to every Lord’s day assembly of the church.<sup>210</sup> It is not surprising that the actual practice of the Reformed churches, which is inconsistent with the creeds of those churches, forms the view of members much more than the occasional Sunday school class on the *Confession*. Talk to Reformed Christians and you will find that most are more Zwinglian than Calvinist in their view of the supper. Why shouldn’t they be. Their experience teaches them that the supper is not crucial to the life of the Christian. It is time

either to conform our practice to our faith (the supper is a communion with Christ) or it is time to renounce the faith. Let us keep the faith and keep the feast.

### **The Supper as Sign of Unity for the Church**

The Lord's supper, because it is our communion with Christ, is also a sign of our communion together as common sharers in Christ. It is the bond that unites the church for it unites us to Christ. We cannot be in Christ without being in his church, which is his body. "For we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we all partake of that one bread."<sup>211</sup> According to Paul the eating of the bread makes us to be one body even though we are many individuals. It is not that we are not already one body by the work of the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ. As Paul also says to the Corinthians, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body."<sup>212</sup> In the Lord's supper this unity is made manifest. We cannot see or feel the bond of the Spirit. But we can eat the one loaf and drink from the same cup.<sup>213</sup> In this way we are signified and sealed as one body. And let us not take this lightly for the Apostle told the Corinthians that many were sick, and some had died because they tried to eat the Lord's supper in disunity. Eating in disunity was sinning against the body and blood of Christ. Notice that Paul's advice was not to have the Lord's supper less frequently, but to examine ourselves before we eat. "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep."<sup>214</sup> The Corinthians tried to have the Lord's supper despite their divisions. The result was an unworthy manner of eating and drinking. That unworthiness was not the result of private unconfessed sin on the part of a few in the congregation.<sup>215</sup> It was an unworthiness that stemmed from their public factions. As a result, they sinned against the body and blood of the Lord.

As communion with Christ, the Supper is necessarily the sacrament of the unity of the church. This is inherent in the fact that we all eat of the one loaf and drink of the one cup. The Westminster confession says that the Supper is, "to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body."<sup>216</sup> Whenever the church gathers for worship, it gathers as the body of Christ. The Lord's supper is the sign and seal of that reality. It signifies and conveys to us that we are one body. It marks us as the body of Christ. The Lord's supper, therefore, is essential to a proper gathering of the church. Indeed, we may say, that it is the celebration of the Supper that makes a gathering to be a distinctly ecclesiastical gathering. The Word may be preached on all sorts of occasions not only to Christians, but also to outsiders. Preaching on the street is every bit as much preaching as from behind a pulpit. Prayers may be offered anytime, by all Christians. But the Supper alone can be celebrated only in the assembly of the saints by a minister of the Word.<sup>217</sup> Therefore, it is the sign and seal of that assembly.

This is one of the reasons why Protestants have a hard time maintaining a high view of worship. We do not weekly do the one thing that only the church assembled can do. You can have prayers and preaching, hymns and praise from a televised ministry (any day of the week if you have cable!). You can truly participate in these by faithfully listening to the Word, by joining in the hymns (and who hasn't sung along with recorded

music?), and by adding your “amen” to the prayers. But you have not been in the assembly of the church. You have not shared in the one loaf, and partaken of the one cup. You have not properly worshipped God according to the New Covenant. You have not kept the command of Jesus, “Do this in remembrance of me!”

The supper signifies that those who eat are one body for they eat of the one bread. It, therefore, by the same action distinguishes those who eat from those who do not share in the meal. The Supper puts “a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church and the rest of the world.”<sup>218</sup> Paul insisted that the Corinthians remove the incestuous man from their midst. His presence defiled the supper. It was like leaven in the Passover bread. However, his removal marked him as no longer belonging to the church, but as belonging to Satan. Exclusion from the assembly and its meal was tantamount to being handed over to the domain of the devil. In a similar way, the writer of Hebrews reminds his readers of the altar from which the unbelieving Jewish priests had no right to eat. Eating and drinking the supper signifies one’s inclusion in Christ and his one church. Not being allowed to eat shows that you are excluded. The Lord’s supper is thus both a sign of unity for those who partake, and a mark of distinction from those who do not believe.

Should we not so mark each assembly of the church? It is the Supper that “visibly” distinguishes the members of the church from the world. And it is the Supper that “visibly” distinguishes the gathering of the church as church from the gathering of the same people for a social event. All the other elements of worship (preaching, prayers, singing of psalms) can be present at a variety of gatherings that are not the assembly of the saints. The recent banquet for the local Christian day school had all these activities along with the banquet meal. But it was not the assembly of the saints. The supper by its very nature can only be faithfully celebrated in such an assembly, and, therefore, it is the distinguishing mark of that assembly. So then, the supper is essential to the proper form of the weekly gathering of the church. It is the sign that this is the one body of Christ, the people of God. When the church gathers as church, the supper ought to be celebrated to mark that reality. If we are gathered as the body of Christ, then we ought to eat of that bread by which we are signified and sealed as that one body.

### **The Supper as a Sacrifice of Praise and Thanksgiving**

Finally, the Lord’s supper is the great thanksgiving of the church for the gift of Christ. Paul speaks of the “the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks.”<sup>219</sup> In all the accounts of the last supper, Jesus offered thanks. The ancient church, therefore, took the Greek word that means “thanksgiving”<sup>220</sup> as a name for the Lord’s supper. They called the Lord’s supper “the Eucharist” (literally “the Thanksgiving”). When we give thanks for the cup and the bread, we do not give thanks for them merely as food and drink. We do that at every meal. Rather, in the Lord’s supper we give thanks for the bread that Jesus called his body and the cup that Jesus called the New Covenant in his blood. Though the prayers offered at the bread and cup are nowhere specified in the New Testament, the meaning of the bread and cup indicate the themes appropriate to the prayers. To fail to offer thanks for Christ, his sacrifice, and all the benefits which that sacrifice bestows upon us would be to miss the very meaning of the bread and the cup. Thus the Lord’s supper is the church’s great offering of thanks to God for the gift of

Christ, his body given for us and his blood shed for us.

In the Old Covenant, God's people were required to bring a sacrifice whenever they came to the Lord. Indeed, to worship and to sacrifice were virtually interchangeable concepts. Now in the New Covenant we no longer are to offer animal sacrifices. Christ has himself offered the one and only sacrifice on the cross. We can add nothing to his sacrifice. It needs no augmentation. All we can and need do is to receive his sacrifice and give thanks. The Lord's supper is the sacrament of our receiving Christ's sacrifice for it is the communion of his body and blood. But the Lord's supper is also the sacrament of thanksgiving. Through the faithful doing of the Lord's supper (as well as all forms of prayer and praise), the church brings to fulfillment what the prophet said: "From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and pure offering..."<sup>221</sup>

The incense of the New Covenant is the prayers of God's people, and the pure offering is the sacrifice of praise. "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name."<sup>222</sup> The Westminster Confession does not separate the Supper from this sacrifice of praise, but rather calls the Supper "a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same..." Some have questioned whether this idea of the supper as a sacrifice of praise is in the New Testament. "Nowhere does the New Testament speak of the Supper as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving."<sup>223</sup> However, the earlier exposition of Hebrews 13 shows that even if the idea of a sacrifice of praise was not applied specifically to the thanksgiving at the supper, it was applied generically to any offering of praise. But it is likely that the Hebrews passage is referring specifically to the prayers of the supper. Furthermore, the earliest occurrences of the language of sacrifice in connection with the Lord's supper convey the idea of a sacrifice of lips. In the Didache we read, "On the Lord's own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure."<sup>224</sup> Here the sacrifice is the offering of thanks. In fact, the emphasis on offering thanks predominates in the Didache. The section on the Eucharist begins, "Now concerning the Eucharist, give thanks as follows..."<sup>225</sup> The prayers that follow for the cup, bread, and the post communion prayer are almost entirely words of thanksgiving. Biblically speaking, the thanksgiving at the supper is a sacrifice of praise because it is an offering of praise to God. This is the case whether or not the reference in Hebrews 13 is to that specific prayer, or to praises in general. Therefore, the Westminster Confession is justified in calling the supper an oblation of all possible praise.

Why would the church, then, meet to give thanks to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, without doing so in the way that Jesus commanded? If it is normal and right for the church when it gathers to give thanks for Christ, then it is normal and right for the church to do so in the way that Christ appointed with bread and wine. Otherwise, we violate the regulative principle by deletion. We offer our worship to God, not in the form God sets forth in his Word, but according to what we regard as appropriate.

So then, according to the Bible, the Lord's supper is: (1) the memorial of Christ by which we proclaim his death till he comes; (2) a communion or participation in his body and blood; (3) an offering of thanksgiving to God for Jesus Christ; and (4) a bond

expressing the unity of the church. These are things that belong to every meeting of the church. Hence it is the very nature of the Supper that requires its celebration each Lord's day. The church meets on the basis of Christ's once for all death, to give thanks to God for Christ, to have communion with Christ, not merely as individuals, but as the one body of Christ. This is what the Lord's supper is all about. This is why the Lord's supper is a necessary part of Lord's day worship.

### **Relation of Supper and Sermon**

The Westminster Larger Catechism defines the outward means by which Christ communicates his grace as "all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer." In theological discussions this threefold structure of word, sacraments and prayer is usually reduced to the simply bipolar word and sacraments. Ask any Reformed Christian and he will tell you that the Reformed Churches are word-centered unlike Roman Catholicism which is sacrament-centered. This is reflected in Reformed church architecture which is usually dominated by a large central pulpit. But it is reflected also in Reformed piety in which the assembly has as its main event the sermon. When the supper is held, it is "tacked on" to a service that is regarded as sufficient in itself. In conversations with both ministers and members it is evident that the Lord's supper is celebrated, not so much out of sense of a need for it, but rather out of a sense of duty. Jesus commanded it so we do it. But in rare moments of inner honesty, we admit we are not sure why Jesus commanded us to do it. The regular preaching service feels complete and not in need of augmentation. On the other hand, almost any emphasis on the supper raises the specter of Romanism. This fear of falling back into the errors of Rome is a very significant ingredient in the psychology of the Reformed Churches. Historically speaking this is understandable. However, after four centuries it is time for the Reformed to develop a more wholesome attitude. With this in mind, we approach the problem of the relationship of word and sacrament.

Classically, the Reformed have understood the supper as the sign and seal of the word. The Heidelberg Catechism, written in 1563, defines the sacraments in question #65. The sacraments "are visibly holy signs and seals instituted by God in order that by their uses he may fully disclose and seal to us the promises of the gospel."<sup>226</sup> The sacrament both portrays (signs) the word, and confirms (seals) the word. A number of different terms have been used to describe this dual function of the sacrament in relation to the word. Beginning with Calvin, the Reformed have often used Augustine's phrase that the sacrament is a "visible word." "Calvin... quotes with approval a saying of Augustine to the effect that the sacrament is the 'visible word.' The sacraments are so designed that the man who is pointed to them by the Word is able to see in the form of the action and in the use of the elements the very promises of the Word of God set forth patently and visibly. 'The testimony of the Gospel is engraven upon the sacraments.'"<sup>227</sup> As sign the sacrament is like the word. It has the same meaning. It sets forth the promises of the word.

The sacrament is also the seal of the Word. Its use is intended to confirm and assure the believer that he is the recipient of the grace promised in the word. Again to quote the Heidelberg Catechism, question 75:

*How are you reminded and assured in the holy Supper that you participate in the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross and in all his benefits? In this way: Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup in remembrance of him. He has thereby promised that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood was shed for me, as surely as I see with my eyes that the bread of the Lord was broken for me, and that the cup is shared with me. Also, he has promised that he himself as certainly feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood as I receive from the hand of the minister and actually taste the bread and the cup of the Lord which are given to me as sure signs of the body and blood of Christ.*<sup>228</sup>

For the Reformed, the supper confirms our inclusion in the sacrifice of Christ and our spiritual nourishment through communion with his body and blood. The Westminster Confession refers to supper as “a bond and pledge of their [true believers] communion with him.”<sup>229</sup> Therefore, from this doctrine, it should be obvious that a weekly celebration of the supper is no threat to the primacy of the word. If the supper is a sign and seal of the word, and its whole meaning is to portray and confirm the word, then the presence of the supper should enhance and strengthen the word’s effect, not lessen or dilute it.

Each of the aspects of the supper delineated in the *Westminster Confession*, chapter XXIX, suggests the propriety of the supper as the weekly sign and seal of the word. The supper is “for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself.” It has the effect of “sealing all the benefits thereof unto true believers.” It is for believers’ “spiritual nourishment and growth in him.” And it is an “engagement in and to all duties which they owe to him.” There is nothing in this understanding of the sacrament that is inconsistent with the weekly celebration of the supper. Rather, if the supper is all these things, why would it be excluded from most Reformed assemblies? There is a tension between the Reformed understanding of the sacrament and the Reformed practice of the sacrament. Hageman expresses it this way, “those churches which were avowedly Calvinist in their theology became practically Zwinglian in their liturgical and sacramental life.”<sup>230</sup> If someone not of the Reformed faith were to read the confessional and catechical definitions of the supper, would he not conclude something as important and spiritual as the holy supper would surely be included in the weekly assembly of Reformed Christians? And if he discovered that it was included only four times a year, or even once a month, would he not have a right to question whether such churches really believed what they professed to believe? There is nothing in the Reformed doctrine of the supper that makes it occasional. Just the opposite, the Reformed doctrine of the supper demands its weekly celebration as the divine sign and seal of the word.

However, the fear that weekly celebration will impinge on the primacy of the Word remains the chief obstacle to a more frequent celebration. Experience has shown that the idea of the supper as sign and seal of the word has not sufficiently allayed those

fears. The Reformed are very much trapped in a Pulpit - Table dichotomy. Putting an “and” between the terms does not seem to help much. The problem is one of seldom noticed presupposition. In the Westminster standards as well as most Reformed discussions, the relation of preaching to supper is always discussed in the categories of word versus sacrament. Even assertions of their unity maintain the dichotomy. Hageman says, for example: “In the act of Christian worship, Word and Sacrament belong together. Any attempt to set up an antithesis between them is completely false to the Biblical witness. They belong together not as successive or even complementary acts. They are aspects of a single whole.”<sup>231</sup>

They may be aspects of a single whole, but they remain divided aspects: word and sacrament. As long as the Reformed churches remain churches of the word, then the tension will exist between word and sign. Of course, such a categorization long predates the Reformation. It can be found, for example, in the writings of Augustine and Cyril of Jerusalem. But it is worth asking if this is the only way to conceive of the matter. From the perspective of form, there is an obvious difference between a monologue (sermon) and a ritual action that includes words (prayers, words of institution, words of delivery), elements (bread, cup of wine) and action (take, break, give, eat, drink). Word and sign seem a natural and fully justifiable way of categorizing the matter if we attend to the form. However, if we attend to the substance, then we find not a dichotomy, but an identity. Both the sermon and the supper have the content of Christ crucified, risen, ascended, and coming again. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”

We note earlier in our exposition of 1 Corinthians 11 that the eating of the supper was the word. Its content was the same as Paul's preaching. So then we can say that the only means of grace is the word of Christ, the message of his incarnation, death, and resurrection. But this message is presented to us in more than one form. We have it in an inscripturated record – the New Testament. We have it weekly announced and explained to us by an appointed messenger – the sermon. But we also have it announced, pictured, and applied to us in a meal that combines words, elements and actions – the Lord's supper.

Our entrance into the church is through preaching and baptism. But our continuance in the community of faith is through preaching and the supper. The supper, being the word in the form of a ritualized meal, speaks to us in a way that compliments and reinforces the announcement and explanation of the sermon. First, it requires our whole person to become involved. We do not merely listen and respond in our hearts as is the case with the sermon. But we see, touch and taste. Christ's sacrifice is portrayed, not just with words, but with elements and actions, taking bread and breaking it. Our need for Christ is presented not merely in words, but as hunger and thirst that we feel. The words of institution and the prayers joined to the elements and the actions make clear that the hunger and thirst is not merely of the body, but also of the soul. We have no physical life unless we eat, so too in the supper it is impressed upon us that we have no spiritual life except we eat of Christ. Here in the bread and cup we are confronted with the essential truth of our lives – that Christ is our life, and without him we die as sure as we die bodily if we do not eat and drink. Every time the bread and cup are given to us, we are being told



in a most profound way that we must receive Jesus Christ to live. He is the forgiveness of our sins. He is our reconciliation with God. He is the New Covenant in which we become the children of our heavenly Father. It is precisely the weekly, regular eating and drinking of the supper that impress these things upon us. They are all obscured when the supper is occasional and voluntary. But when it is the weekly duty of the Christian to attend the holy supper, then all this meaning flows upon us. We are arguing, therefore, that the weekly celebration of the supper is essential to the proper celebration of the supper. Infrequent communion denigrates the very meaning of communion. How can I say that Christ is my life and I must partake of him to live, and yet feel that such a portrayal need only be held four times a year?

The Reformed churches are convinced that they have a more consistently biblical theology of the supper than the other major traditions. But our practice falls short of our theology. The result is that the theology exists for the most part only in creeds and classrooms of our seminaries, and not in the hearts of our people. For this reason, the following comment of Calvin is almost incomprehensible to most members of the conservative Reformed churches. Calvin says of our Lord, “being made a sharer in our human mortality, he made us partakers in his divine immortality; when, offering himself as a sacrifice, he bore our curse in himself to imbue us with his blessing; when, by his death, he swallowed up and annihilated death; and when, in his resurrection, he raised up this corruptible flesh of ours, which he had put on, to glory and incorruption. It remains for all this to be applied to us. That is done through the gospel but more clearly through the Sacred Supper, where he offers himself with all his benefits to us, and we receive him by faith.”<sup>232</sup> Would it be true in the Reformed churches that each Lord’s day in the supper, where Christ offers himself to us, we would receive him by faith. Calvin said of the medieval practice, “Plainly this custom which enjoins us to take communion once a year is a veritable invention of the devil, whoever was instrumental in introducing it... It should have been done far differently: the Lord’s Table should have been spread at least once a week for the assembly of Christians, and the promises declared in it should feed us spiritually.”<sup>233</sup> Yes, it should have been done differently in Zurich, in Geneva, and in our conservative Reformed churches. Now is the time to do it differently. Now is the time to keep the feast each week.

### **Considerations for Implementing Weekly Celebration**

The implementation of weekly communion presents a number of practical and pastoral problems. This section is concerned with how to overcome such problems and allow for a positive transition from infrequent celebration to a weekly eating and drinking of the Lord's supper. The purpose of weekly communion is to be more faithful to the triune God in our worship, to enhance our thanksgiving to God for his mercy, to be more focused on Christ's death and resurrection as our complete salvation, to deepen our communion with him, and to act together more as his one body. The goal is the implement the biblical theology of the supper that was surveyed in the first section of this presentation. Therefore, it will not do to force feed the supper to an unwilling congregation. To enable the congregation in a faithful way to weekly share in the supper, two crucial matters must be addressed. First, there must be a "liturgy" for the celebration. Current Reformed practice is merely to add the supper at the end of the service. However, the traditional pattern of Presbyterian worship is the result of a restructuring of the order of the service in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century to compensate for the infrequent celebration of the supper. The current forms suggested in the Presbyterian directories of worship are both bare bones and oriented to an infrequent celebration. They major on warnings about unworthy reception and minor on cultivating a faithful and joyous meal of remembrance, proclamation, communion, thanksgiving and unity. This emphasis needs to be reversed. Two sample liturgies are included which integrate the supper with the entire service and restore the balance between warning and worship.

Second, there is a need for literature both to educate the congregation and to provide an *apologia* for visitors and inquirers. The material in this section includes two essays developed for these purposes, and have been used with good effect at two Presbyterian congregations where communion is celebrated weekly.

The material in this section is the result of sixteen years of pastoral service that included the establishment of weekly communion ten years ago and the creation of adequate liturgies for the worship of the people of God. Given both the considerable diversity in worship styles<sup>1</sup> among Reformed congregations, and general Reformed distrust of form and ritual, the liturgies offered in this section are offered as examples to aid pastors and congregations at the local level. Some will never find them acceptable since any form is regarded as stifling the Spirit. But my hope is that some will find them stimulating and helpful.

#### **A Brief Theology of Worship**

Presbyterians have an interesting but not widely known liturgical heritage. In recent decades that heritage has been explored in a number of scholarly works which should be made mandatory reading in the seminaries.<sup>2</sup> The pastor considering increasing the frequency of the supper in his congregation would be well served by reading such books. One result of these historical studies is to bring to light the major transition in worship practice that took place at the Westminster Assembly in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century and

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, there are not merely differing styles, but differing theologies! But that is a topic too large for the limits of this presentation.

<sup>2</sup> A list of such works can be found in the bibliography.

which was codified in that assembly's *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*. This document along with the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms* was adopted by the Church of Scotland. The hopes for their adoption by the Church of England were dashed by the rise of Cromwell (an independent) to be Lord Protector of England, and later the restoration of the Monarchy and the Episcopal establishment.

The Westminster Assembly failed in its goal of reforming the Church of England, but it succeeded in "reforming" the worship of the Church of Scotland, which the Scots did not regard as in need of reform. Until the adoption of the *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*, the Church of Scotland had used the *Book of Common Order*, the liturgy produced by John Knox who was the leading reformer of the Scottish Kirk. That liturgy continued in use among the Scots for some time after the adoption of the *Directory*.<sup>3</sup> The Scottish Kirk's liturgy was derived from Calvin's in Geneva which in turn was derived from Bucer's version of the Strasbourg liturgy.<sup>4</sup> These liturgies had three characteristics which were significantly changed by the *Directory*. First, they were ordered after the pattern of the ancient liturgies in which the supper was integral to the structure and flow of the service. Second, they provided written prayers and speeches for the minister to use in the conduct of public worship. Third, they provided a theologically profound prayer for the confession of sins, and sometimes an absolution. The Westminster *Directory* provided only directions as to the content of the prayers, but no actual prayers. However, the theological content of the instructions in the *Directory* is rich and full.<sup>5</sup>

Current Presbyterian practice almost universally follows the order of the Westminster *Directory*, not the order of the older Reformed liturgies. Below is a comparison of the order of Knox's liturgy and the Westminster *Directory*. The items in italics are category terms to help the reader see the differences between the two orders. They are not terms found in the documents themselves.

### **Knox's Liturgy**

#### *Entrance*

Confession of Sins  
Singing of a Psalm

#### *Sermon*

Prayer for Illumination  
Sermon including Bible Reading

#### *Prayer*

General Intercessions  
Lord's Prayer  
Apostles, Creed

#### *Dismissal*

Singing of a Psalm

### **Westminster Directory**

#### *Entrance*

Call to worship  
Prayer (including confession of sins)  
Bible readings  
Singing of a Psalm

#### *Prayer*

General Intercessions

#### *Sermon*

Sermon  
Prayer after Sermon

#### *Dismissal*

Singing of a Psalm

<sup>3</sup> Bridges, *Communion: Meal That Unites?*, p. 102, and Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, p.32.

<sup>4</sup> English translations of these liturgies are available in *Liturgies of the Western Church*, edited and introduced by Bard Thompson, Fortress Press, Philadelphia, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> This is in marked contrast to the current Directories of the conservative Presbyterian churches.

## Benediction

## Benediction

The Scottish Kirk inherited from Geneva, both its basic liturgy and the practice of celebrating the supper four times a year. This was what Knox experienced during his sojourn in Geneva and became his model for Scotland. Two things are evident from the above comparison. First, Knox's liturgy ends awkwardly with the Apostles' creed. This is because the Creed is actually the beginning of the Lord's supper portion of the liturgy. When the supper was celebrated, the service has a logical flow and an appropriate ending. The shape of Reformation liturgies presumed the supper as an ordinary element (even if in practice it was occasional). Thus on a Lord's Day when the supper was celebrated, the classic order of the service was evident.

Entrance  
Sermon  
Prayer  
Supper  
Dismissal

This shape belongs to all the ancient liturgies beginning with the account of a Lord's Day assembly in Justin's First Apology. It is a theologically correct order that reflects the nature of salvation. God speaks to us in his grace (Sermon). We respond to God (Prayer). God communes with us who have heard and responded to him (Supper). Likewise, it is the order of conversion. We here the good news (Sermon). By God's grace we respond to the good news calling on the name of the Lord (Prayer). The result is we are reconciled to God and live in communion with him (Supper). Calvin self-consciously kept this liturgical shape even though he dispensed with almost all of the actual language of the medieval mass. As Hageman expressed it, "Calvin preserved the historic shape of the liturgy for us. But in the violence of his time he rejected the whole treasure of liturgical materials in which that shape had been clothed."<sup>6</sup> Calvin's and Knox's liturgies are prosaic documents that are rich in theological meaning. But they allowed for few responses by the congregation. They tend, therefore, to have more the feel of monologues. Almost all the Reformed liturgies from the period are of the same prosaic character.<sup>7</sup> But it is not true that Calvin and the other Reformed liturgists "rejected the whole treasure of liturgical materials." They rejected (or at least omitted) some. But they paraphrased others. The collapse of the Reformed liturgical heritage was not so much in the imperfection of these early efforts, but in the lack of effort of succeeding generations to build on the theological foundation laid in these liturgies. Just as importantly, all these early Reformation liturgies maintained the shape of the service found in the ancient church.<sup>8</sup> So did the medieval mass. The difference was that the priest said all the prayers and did all the actions of the supper even if no one else ate and drank. The Reformers

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<sup>6</sup> Pulpit and Table, p. 126.

<sup>7</sup> The one great exception is Cramner's liturgy (Book of Common Prayer). It is not surprising, therefore, that when Reformed ministers look for something better for their people's worship, they often turn to the Anglican Book of Common Prayer that began as one of the early Reformed liturgies.

<sup>8</sup> Zwingli is the great exception to this. He used the non-eucharistic medieval Prone as his model. See Hageman, Pulpit and Table, p. 17ff and Jones, *The Study of Liturgy*, p. 300.

preferred not to have the supper at all, than to have such a fundamental corruption of it. Thus the Reformation liturgies ended most Lord's days without the supper even though the supper was integral to their shape and flow.

The result was that these liturgies ended abruptly. Apparently, this was deliberate. Calvin never gave up advocating the weekly celebration of the supper, and he never reordered his liturgy to accommodate its absence. Thus all the Reformation liturgies bore witness to the proper place of supper in the weekly worship of the church by their shape and hence their imperfection. However, by the time of the Westminster Assembly the Reformed churches were accustomed to infrequent celebration. Thus the Assembly reordered the service by moving the general intercessions from after the sermon to before it. Yet remnants of the older pattern still persisted even within the new framework. The Bible readings were left at the beginning of the service where the entire ministry of the word had been in the Reformation liturgies. Also, the *Directory* allowed for a minister to move the main intercession to after the sermon if he so chose. "We judge this to be a convenient order, in the ordinary public prayer; yet so the minister may defer... some part of these petitions till after his sermon..." Furthermore, the instructions for prayer after the sermon have a eucharistic ring to them. They pick up motifs used in the prayers belonging to the Lord's supper in the older liturgies.

One item obviously missing from the service is the offering. The Churches of England and Scotland were state supported churches so no provision was needed for a collection to pay for the expenses of the congregation. More importantly, the offertory in the medieval mass was linked to the doctrine of the sacrifice of the mass. "The early Reformed liturgies studiously avoided anything which looked like or even sounded like the offering of bread and wine to God."<sup>9</sup> As a result Reformed liturgies up to and including the Westminster *Directory* make no provision for a collection of offerings within the service. Calvin's service ended with an exhortation to remember the poor but no offering was taken as an act of worship. Without an offertory the elements of the supper were simply placed on the table before the service and covered with a cloth. Such a practice remains commonplace today.<sup>10</sup>

So then, it seems best in developing liturgies for the weekly celebration of the supper to return to the ancient order of Sermon - Prayer - Supper. It is not only a more theologically appropriate order, but placing of the sermon before the prayers better prepares the people for prayer. The prayers become responses to God's Word. It also accents the reading of Scripture and the sermon by placing them as the first major item in the order. Since the preaching of the word is necessary to a faithful eating of the supper, as well as a faithful offering of our petitions to God, it rightly belongs at the head of the service. In such a location it gives definition and meaning to all that follows. Second, with the supper as a weekly part of the assembly, it is necessary to restore the Reformation practice of a prayer of confession of sins to aid the people in a proper preparation for both the sermon and the supper. We come to the table as those who

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<sup>9</sup> *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 138. See also, Bridges, *Communion: Meal That Unites?*, p. 36.

<sup>10</sup> For this reason the offering in the sample liturgies provided in the presentation do not place the offering of gifts immediately before the supper.

acknowledge that we are sinners and have no hope but in the sacrifice of Christ. A prayer of confession of sin, which all the Reformation liturgies included, is a practice much needing to be restored in our Reformed churches. Weekly communion, of course, means the end of a historically important Reformed practice, namely, a special service of preparation before the supper. Such a practice, however significant in the history of the Reformed churches, is without precedent in the New Testament or the ancient church. So then, the orders being offered in this presentation will have this basic shape.

- Entrance
  - Call to Worship
  - Greeting
  - Prayer of Confession of Sins
- Sermon
  - Prayer for Illumination
  - Scripture Lessons
  - Creed
  - Sermon
  - Prayer of Application
- Offering
  - Collection of Gifts
  - Presentation of Gifts
- Prayer
  - Pastoral Prayer (General Intercessions)
  - Lord's Prayer
- Supper
  - Invitation and Warning including Words of Institution
  - Prayer of Thanksgiving
  - Distribution
  - Post-Communion prayer
- Dismissal
  - Benediction

The above outline does not specify the location of hymns, but as the actual orders will show, the hymnody is crucial to the shape of the service. The hymns are not specified in the outline because the two orders have the hymns placed differently. The purpose of the outline is to illustrate the common order used in both worship orders.

It is often said the Reformed churches have no written liturgy. This is false in two senses. They did have such liturgies in the beginning, even if they fell into disuse later. But more importantly for our study, the churches always had the metrical Psalter, and later the hymnal. There is a great wealth of liturgical material in this heritage if it is used with imagination and creativity. For the purposes of this presentation, all the sung responses are taken from the Trinity Hymnal which is the approved hymnal of both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Church in America. This has two advantages. First, the words and music are not strange or unfamiliar. Attempts to import liturgical music from other traditions have not been well received. Conservative Presbyterians do not want to be Lutherans or Episcopalians. When liturgical music is

borrowed from those traditions, the liturgy seems foreign and un-Presbyterian. Second, while there is considerable resistance to corporately read prayers (sometimes even to the Lord's prayer<sup>11</sup>), no one objects to singing from the hymnal.<sup>12</sup>

Two samples liturgies are included in the following section. The first is adapted from the actual use of an Orthodox Presbyterian congregation. It is a service with a considerable amount of congregational responses. It is one of three settings in use by that congregation.<sup>13</sup> The second service is less complex and has fewer congregational responses. It is closer to the ordinary worship orders of most Presbyterian congregations and is included for that reason. In both liturgies the corporate responses are taken from the Trinity Hymnal. Fortunately, that hymnal includes both the Apostles' and Nicene creeds printed in a manner well adapted for unison reading. Whenever possible scriptural texts and metrical versions of psalm texts have been used. Reformed Christians are more comfortable with such a usage.

The liturgies are presented in two forms: first a more complete version to be used by the minister and then a streamlined version for the congregation. The streamlined version includes only what the congregation needs to respond. It is designed to be printed in the customary bulletin used in most Presbyterian churches. This approach is to avoid the discomfort many Presbyterians feel about a liturgy book. The goal of this presentation is to foster the weekly celebration of the supper, not the implementation of a universal Presbyterian liturgy. We have limited our liturgical discussion to what seemed essential to the weekly celebration of the supper.

Finally, the communion portions of the liturgy include the items regarded as essential to the faithful administration of the supper by the Reformed churches. The words of institution are required to be read by all the Presbyterian directories for worship. Likewise an explanation of the supper along with a warning are required. But the goal has been to do this with what Calvin called "lucid brevity." The old Reformed liturgies all suffered from a wordiness that made them good statements of theology put poor forms for corporate worship.

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<sup>11</sup> "The people's participation in the prayers of the service was confined to their following silently as the minister prayer. Even their saying "amen" was ruled out by Samuel Miller as 'universally' alien to Presbyterian practice." Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America: Changing Patterns Since 1787*, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> "Singing was the only part of the service in which Presbyterian congregations participated audibly..." Melton, *Presbyterian Worship in America: Changing Patterns Since 1787*, p. 35.

<sup>13</sup> The other two settings which have different prayers and sung responses are available from Echo Hills Christian Study Center.

## A Complete Liturgy with Commentary

Order of Worship One (Minister's copy)

### *Entering into Worship*

#### **Call to Worship**

Pastor: Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. (Psalm 100:1-2)

#### **Hymn of Entrance**

Trinity Hymnal #1

All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice;  
him serve with fear, his praise forth tell,  
come ye before him and rejoice.

The Lord ye know is God indeed;  
without our aid he did us make;  
we are his folk, he doth us feed,  
and for his sheep he doth us take.

O enter then his gates with praise,  
approach with joy his courts unto;  
praise, laud, and bless his name always,  
for it is seemly so to do.

For why? The Lord our God is good,  
his mercy is forever sure;  
his truth at all times firmly stood,  
and shall from age to age endure.

#### **Greeting**

Pastor: Greetings congregation of the Lord Jesus. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger and great in mercy. Let us, therefore, confess our sins to him. (1 Cor 13:14; Ps 145:8)

#### **Confession of Sin**

Pastor: Let us pray: O Lord God, whose mercy is without measure, and whose kindness has no end, look with favor upon us, your sinful people. Forgive us for we have fallen short of your glory by breaking your commandments in thoughts, words and deeds. Renew in us, by your Holy Spirit, a lively faith that



we may rest upon Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of our sins, and restore in us a sincere repentance that we may pursue obedience to your commandments, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Song of Renewal**

Trinity Hymnal #486, stanza 5

Gracious God my heart renew,  
 Make my spirit right and true;  
 Cast me not away from thee,  
 Let thy Spirit dwell in me;  
 Thy salvation's joy impart.  
 Steadfast make my willing heart.

(From Ps 51:10f)

### **Assurance of Pardon**

Pastor: Almighty God, our heavenly Father, loves us, and forgives us all our sins when we sincerely repent and trust in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. God our Father welcomes us who believe into his heavenly courts, and invites us to this, his table of salvation. But if you do not believe in our Lord Jesus Christ, then you remain under the wrath of God for your sins, for God's promise is that "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." (Eph 1:7)

### **Gloria Patri**

Trinity Hymnal #734

Glory be to the Father,  
 And to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost  
 As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be,  
 World without end. Amen, amen!

*Listening to God's Word*

### **Prayer of Illumination**

Pastor: Almighty Father, who made the light to shine at the beginning of the creation, enlighten our hearts by your Holy Spirit in the reading and preaching of your Word, that hearing the good news of your Son, we may put our hope in him alone as our justification, sanctification and redemption. Amen.

### **Scripture Lessons**

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

2 Corinthians 4:7-18

Responsive Psalm 16

John 11:17-27

Trinity Hymnal, p. 788

### **Confession of Faith**

Trinity Hymnal, p. 845

Pastor: Let us join together and confess our faith in the words of the Apostles' creed.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he arose from the dead, he ascended into heaven, and now sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from where he shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Preaching of the Word** *"The Resurrection and the Life"*

**Prayer of Application**

**Hymn of Application**

Trinity Hymnal #706

Jesus lives, and so shall I. Death thy sting is gone forever!  
He who deigned for me to die, lives, the bands of death to sever.  
He shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives and reigns supreme; and, his kingdom still remaining,  
I shall always be with him, ever living, ever reigning.  
God has promised: be it must: Jesus is my hope and trust.

Jesus lives! I know full well naught from him my heart can sever,  
Life nor death nor pow'rs of hell, joy nor grief, henceforth forever.  
None of all his saints is lost: Jesus is my hope and trust.

*Offering our Gifts*

**The Offering**

Pastor: Let us worship God by offering to him the devotion of our hearts, and our gifts and tithes.

**Collection of Offerings**

**Song of Consecration** (from Ps 116:12ff) Trinity Hymnal #637, Stanzas 1, 3

What shall I render to my God  
for all his kindness shown?  
My feet shall visit thine abode,  
my songs address thy throne.

How happy all thy servants are!  
How great thy grace to me!  
My life, which thou hast made thy care,

Lord, I devote to thee.

*Offering our Petitions*

**Pastoral Prayer** (General Intercessions)

Pastor: Almighty God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our Father, look with mercy and patience upon us, your elect people, whom you have called into the communion of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, through the Holy Spirit. Grant to us, and to our children, a renewed faith that daily we may receive and rest upon Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Restore in us a true repentance that with sorrow and hatred for our sin, we may turn from it to you, accepting your mercy in Jesus Christ, and endeavoring to keep your commandments.

O God of love, who loved us while we were still your enemies, inspire in our hearts love for one another that we may be one even as your are one with your Son and with the Holy Spirit. Keep us, O gracious God, from division and suspicion, from bitterness and jealousy, but enable us, and all Christians, to live together in peace, unity and truth. Overcome the divisions of the Church universal with the truth of your Word and the indwelling of your Spirit.

O God of truth, whose word is life, reform your Church. Deliver her from false shepherds who teach the doctrines of men instead of the commandments of God. Overcome by your Spirit the heresies of this day. May the whole counsel of your word be preached from the pulpits, and the true supper of our Lord administered at the tables of your holy Church throughout all the world.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who suffered on the cross for our sins, comfort and sustain those who suffer for your name's sake. Deliver your people from their enemies, and grant that they may make the good confession before their persecutors. Be pleased, O Lord, to make the blood of your martyrs to be the seeds of the Church, that where unbelief and injustice once prevailed, there may men confess that your are Lord and govern their lives by your Law.

O God of the nations, to whom every knee shall bow, empower all those who labor in the preaching of the Gospel. Make your word to accomplish that for which it is sent, that the knowledge of you may cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. And give to us in this congregation, boldness of witness, and love for the poor, and for strangers, that our city may be converted to you.

O God who makes the mighty to fall, and raises up the lowly, look with favor upon our nation, and grant to us godly rulers who will govern according to your justice. Frustrate and bring to naught all those in public office who oppose the righteousness of your law.

Hear us, Heavenly Father, as we join our voices together, and pray as Jesus taught us.

**The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

### **Doxology**

Trinity Hymnal #731

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;  
 Praise him, all creatures here below;  
 Praise him above ye heavenly host:  
 Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

### *Sharing in the Lord's Supper*

### **Invitation and Warning**

Pastor: Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast. For the "the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Christ invites all of you who believe in him, who are baptized, and are members in good standing in an evangelical church to eat and drink at his table. But if you do not believe, or have not made a public profession of your faith, then you ought not to partake. To those who come in faith, Christ gives himself, his body and blood, with all the benefits of the New Covenant, not by a change in the bread and wine, but by the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ. As it is written, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" Therefore, lift up your hearts to heaven where our Savior sits at the right hand of the Father.

### **Song of Ascent**

To the tune of Trinity Hymnal # 647

We lift our hearts unto the King,  
 Our make and our God.  
 For it is right our thanks to bring,  
 And good his name to laud.

### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

Pastor: Let us pray: We give thanks to you, O Lord, Holy Father, Almighty,

Everlasting God for you who made the heavens and the earth have had mercy upon us sinners, and given your Son for our salvation. Therefore we join with the chorus of angels praising and magnifying your glorious name.

Song of Heaven

Trinity Hymnal #100, Stanza 4

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
 All thy works shall praise thy name  
 in earth and sky and sea.  
 Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and Mighty!  
 God in three Persons, blessed Trinity!  
 (From Isa 6:3, Rev 4:8)

Pastor: Holy are you, Almighty and Gracious God, for you demonstrated your love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. To you be all glory, praise and honor, for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who by his incarnation and passion has redeemed us, by his resurrection and ascension has raised us to eternal life, and by his heavenly reign and his coming again delivers us from all our enemies. Mercifully grant, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that we who eat this bread and drink of this cup in faith, may also be sharers in your Son, in his body crucified for us, and in his blood shed for us. Amen.

**Song of Reception**

Trinity Hymnal #423, Stanza 2

Thy body broken for my sake,  
 My bread from heaven shall be.  
 Thy testamental cup I take,  
 And thus remember thee.

**Passing and Eating of the Bread**

Pastor: In ourselves we have only sin and death, but Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Believe the good news: the body of Christ given for you.

**Passing and Drinking of the Cup**

Pastor: We are full of sin and even our best works are marred and impure, but Jesus has cleansed us by his sacrifice. Believe the good news: the blood of Christ shed for you.

**Closing Prayer**

Pastor: Let us pray. Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, now dismiss your servants in peace. For our eyes have seen your salvation which you have

prepared in the sight of all people, as a light for revelation to the nations, and as glory for your Church, the Israel of God. Amen.

### **Closing Hymn**

Trinity Hymnal #420

At the Lamb's high feast we sing, praise to our victorious King,  
 who has washed us in the tide, flowing from his pierced side;  
 praise we him whose love divine gives his sacred blood for wine,  
 gives his body for the feast, Christ the victim, Christ the priest.

Where the paschal blood is poured, death's dark angel sheathes his sword;  
 Israel's host triumphant go through the wave that drowns the foe.  
 Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed, paschal victim, paschal bread;  
 with sincerity and love, eat we manna from above.

Mighty victim from the sky, pow'rs of hell beneath thee lie;  
 death is conquered in the fight, thou has bought us life and light:  
 hymns of glory and of praise, risen Lord, to thee we raise;  
 holy Father, praise to thee, with the Spirit, ever be.

### *Dismissal*

### **Benediction**

Pastor: Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

### **Choral Amen**

Trinity Hymnal #740

## Order of Worship One (Bulletin copy)

Call to Worship Hymn of Entrance	Trinity Hymnal #1
Greeting	(1 Cor 13:14; Ps 145:8)
Prayer of Confession	
Song of Renewal	Trinity Hymnal #486, stanza 5
Assurance of Pardon	
Gloria Patri	Trinity Hymnal #734
Scripture Lessons	
Confession of Faith	Trinity Hymnal, p, 845
Sermon	
Hymn of Application	Trinity Hymnal #706
Collection of Offerings	
Song of Consecration	Trinity Hymnal #637, Stanzas 1, 3
Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer	
Doxology	Trinity Hymnal #731
Invitation to the Lord's Supper	
Song of Ascent	To the tune of Trinity Hymnal # 647
<i>We lift our hearts unto the King,  Our make and our God.  For it is right our thanks to bring,  And good his name to laud.</i>	
Prayer of Thanksgiving	
Song of Heaven	Trinity Hymnal #100, Stanza 4
Prayer continued	
Song of Reception	Trinity Hymnal #423, Stanza 2
Eating and Drinking	
Closing Prayer	
Closing Hymn	Trinity Hymnal #420
Benediction	
Choral Amen	Trinity Hymnal #740

*Commentary on Worship Order One*

This order of worship is an adaptation of the services developed and used at the congregation this writer served for sixteen years. The adaptation consists mostly of drawing musical material from three different settings of the services of that congregation so that all the music in this sample worship order comes from the Trinity Hymnal. This is to avoid the problem of needing to obtain copies of the copyrighted material from a number of musical sources in order to use this service. Also, the services in use by that congregation includes more spoken responses, more corporate speech, than this proposal.

The service begins with a call to worship. This is usually a few verses from a psalm that expresses a summons or invitation to worship. It is at the discretion of the minister and so varies from week to week. Psalm 100:1-2 has been chosen for this example since it is a commonly used text for this purpose. Often the call to worship is read by a ruling elder rather than the pastor. This is to be encouraged since it has the effect of making the first words of the pastor the greeting described below. The use of a “call to worship” was first prescribed by the Westminster *Directory for the Publick Worship of God*. It is not found in the early liturgies of Strasbourg, Geneva or Scotland. This practice may derive from Cramner’s first liturgy where the service began with a chanted psalm.<sup>14</sup> The Westminster divines were English and so would have been more influenced by Cramner’s liturgy than by Knox’s order.

The first hymn has been titled “Hymn of Entrance” because it functions as the congregation’s entrance into the act of worship. Since the call to worship was taken from Psalm 100, a metrical version of that Psalm has been chosen as the first hymn. Ordinarily this first hymn should have the character of general praise. The Trinity Hymnal includes a large number of hymns and metrical psalms that are thematically and musically appropriate for the opening hymn. The choice of hymns is very important in Presbyterian worship because almost all of the congregational involvement is through singing. Picked carefully, the hymn selections become the prayers, confessions and praises of the people of God. The Roman Catholic, Orthodox Divine, and the Episcopal liturgies have a certain completeness apart from the hymnody. It is not that hymns have no role, but the hymnody does not carry the flow of the service. Those liturgies can be read and understood without the inclusion of hymn texts. This is not true for Presbyterian worship. For this reason, the hymn texts have been included in this presentation.

Ministers desiring to adapt this order of worship to certain occasions of the Church year can use the selection of the first hymn to introduce that theme. Likewise, some of the prayers can be rephrased for such a purpose. Ordinarily, Presbyterian congregations observe only the major Christological feasts: Christmas, Good Friday,<sup>15</sup> Easter, Transfiguration and Pentecost. Some Presbyterian congregations ignore the Church calendar completely. Therefore, it did not seem important to offer such

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<sup>14</sup> *Liturgies of the Western Church*, p. 246: “Then shall the Clerkes syng in Englishe for the office, or Introite, (as they call it) a Psalme appointed for that date.” This is the first item in the service followed by the Lord’s Prayer with a prayer of confession of sins attached.

<sup>15</sup> Good Friday is not a feast, but a fast, but Presbyterians wouldn’t know a fast if it drove over them!



adaptations in this presentation. The actual services from which this worship order was derived have been adapted to the Church year to some extent.

The greeting of the congregation by the pastor with something more theological than “Welcome, it good to be with you today!” is very much needed. The Presbyterian understanding of the ministerial office not only appoints that the minister should bless the people, it forbids others from this function. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church’s *Directory for the Public Worship of God* encourages the practice of a ministerial greeting. “It is proper that the minister at the beginning of the service extend a welcome in God’s name to the congregation by the use of the apostolic salutation ‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.’”<sup>16</sup> The text from 2 Corinthians 13:14 has been used instead for two reasons. First, it is explicitly Trinitarian in structure. Thus it mirrors the classic western practice of beginning the service with the triune name of God. Second, this text is associated with the bishop in traditional usage. The Reformed understanding of office is that the pastor is the bishop of the local congregation. No response by the congregation such as “and also with you” has been included. This elision is an accommodation to the general Presbyterian discomfort with read “dialogues” commonly found in Lutheran and Episcopal liturgies.<sup>17</sup> The practice is worthy of restoration but the purpose of this presentation is not (broadly) liturgical renewal but (narrowly) the restoration of weekly communion. Therefore the liturgical material suggested in this service is only that which is judged needful for a faithful celebration of the supper.

What follows the greeting is a Bible verse that introduces the theme of sin and forgiveness. Since so many biblical texts are appropriate here, the minister can vary this as much as he likes. The prayer of confession that follows is brief compared to those in the Reformation liturgies, but a significant addition to current practice. It picks up the theme of the biblical text attached to the greeting and states briefly the character of human sinfulness as understood by the Reformed churches. It would, therefore, be unacceptable to other traditions. In this adaptation the entire prayer is said by the minister. It can therefore be varied as the minister chooses. A written corporate prayer could be used here as in Episcopal and Lutheran practice but this has been avoided since the Reformed are uncomfortable with such usage.

The next item has been entitled “song of renewal.” Its purpose is to involve the congregation actively in the prayer of confession. In this case a stanza from a metrical Psalm has been used. The reluctance to read a prayer, characteristic of Presbyterians, vanishes away if that prayer is in the form of a hymn and is sung to a likable tune. The Trinity hymnal has a number of metrical psalms and hymns of confession from which a stanza or two could be chosen for this part of the service. Thus a fair amount of variety is available. However, experience suggests that using the same musical piece for two or three months works best since the congregation ends up memorizing the song. After a few weeks, the congregation will not even bother to open the hymnal but will sing the song

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<sup>16</sup> Chapter III, Paragraph 4.

<sup>17</sup> Though this discomfort (even impassioned rejection) with read dialogue is characteristic of Presbyterians, yet most congregations read responsively from the Psalter in the back of the hymnal. Such is the power of tradition!

from memory. Do this for a few years and the congregation will have memorized a number of metrical Psalm texts.

The assurance of pardon that follows the song of renewal reflects a Reformed understanding of justification. Most Reformed ministers could rewrite this using a number of biblical texts to provide all the variety needed. This assurance of pardon is, theologically speaking, a very brief sermon. It is a short preaching of the gospel that anticipates the longer exposition of the sermon. The congregational response of praise is the customary *Gloria Patri*. This is often used after the opening prayer (invocation) in a Presbyterian service. At this point the first section of the service is completed. The congregation has entered God's presence, been confronted with their sin, and sought the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. This is, if you will, a sort of liturgical conversion experience. Emotionally speaking this first section of the service has moved from a high point of initial praise to a low point of confession and contrition back to a high point of reconciliation and praise. It is important that the music chosen for each part be consistent with the emotional character of that part. The service can be ruined by a mournful opening hymn or a giddy tune for the song of renewal.

The next section of the service is the sermon unit. It begins with a prayer of illumination reflecting on the Reformed conviction that only by the ministry of the Holy Spirit can we rightly understand and believe the gospel. This is a practice that goes back to the Reformation liturgies but that has sadly dropped out of practice. The scripture lessons are chosen to illustrate the possibility of combining the Reformed practice of preaching continuously through books with the lectionary practice of reading from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Psalms and the Gospels. In this case the sermon is taken from the Gospel and other texts are chosen to thematically reinforce the gospel lesson. However, in terms of the structure of this service, the more common practice of reading only the passage to be expounded in the sermon could be used. The confession of faith has been placed inside the sermon section to express the Reformed idea of *Sola Scriptura*. The creed stands as a response to the reading of the scripture lessons. God's word is the basis of our faith, and our confession of the faith is a response to that word. Both the Apostles' and Nicene creeds are in the Trinity Hymnal. For further variety the first answer of the Heidelberg Catechism works very well as a corporate confession of faith.<sup>18</sup> Following the sermon is a prayer and a hymn chosen for its thematic value. These are standard Presbyterian practices that do not need comment.

The offering is the next item. It is deliberately kept at a distance from the Lord's supper because of the Reformed rejection of the medieval offertory. The Reformed churches do not believe that the bread and wine are offered to God in the supper. To place the collection of monetary offerings just before the Lord's supper would be inappropriate. It has been placed, instead, as a response to the sermon. This reflects the Reformed conviction that our obedience to God is a response of gratitude for his grace to us. The

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<sup>18</sup> My only comfort is that I belong, body and soul, in life and in death, not to myself, but to my faithful savior Jesus Christ, who at the cost of his own blood has fully paid for all my sins, and has completely freed me from the dominion of the devil. He protects me so well that without the will of my Father in heaven not a hair can fall from my head; everything must fit his purpose for my salvation. By his Holy Spirit he assures me of eternal life, and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.

idea of personal consecration to God has been included along with offering of gifts. This has been done through the use of two stanzas of a metrical psalm. Again, there is a considerable selection of material in the Trinity Hymnal that would be thematically appropriate.

The next section is the prayer of the church in the customary Presbyterian pattern of a pastoral prayer<sup>19</sup> followed by a unison saying of the Lord's Prayer.<sup>20</sup> The prayer included here is merely for sake of completeness of example. This prayer is always at the discretion of the minister. The doxology follows the Lord's Prayer as an amplification of the praise in the last sentence of the Lord's Prayer. The text of the Lord's Prayer is from the King James version of Matthew. This is the one commonly used in Presbyterian churches.

The Lord's Supper begins with an invitation and a warning. This custom goes back to the Reformation liturgies and is required by the directories of worship of the various Presbyterian churches. The Biblical texts used reflect the exegetical material earlier in this presentation. All the Reformation liturgies, beginning with Zwingli's, use a long paraphrase of the *sursum corda*. A brief paraphrase with the people's response set to music has been used. Given the importance of the *sursum corda* to Calvin's development and defense of his understanding of the sacrament, it seemed appropriate to include it.<sup>21</sup> Beyond that, the movement from invitation and warning to prayer of thanksgiving requires some sort of transitional words. The paraphrased *sursum corda* provides this transition with theological content expressive of the sacramental reality.

An alternative would be to use Revelation 3:20 in place of "lift up your hearts" and Trinity Hymnal #379 in place of "we lift them up to the Lord." It would have this form:

Pastor: Our Lord Jesus says to us, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Song: "Lord Jesus Christ be present now, our hearts in true devotion bow. Unseal our lips to sing your praise, our souls to you in worship raise." (Stanzas 1a, 2a)

This has been tried and works well. That is to say, the congregation understood that it is Christ who is the host of the banquet and so they understood the need to lift up their hearts to him who is at the right hand of the Father. Of course, the *sursum corda* in standard dialogue form could be used. This has been tried and it also met with the

<sup>19</sup> It would be much better to call this the prayer of the church. It is not the pastor's prayer but the pastor giving voice to the prayer of the whole church.

<sup>20</sup> There are even some conservative Presbyterians who object to the unison saying of the Lord's prayer since any prepared prayer stifles the Spirit!

<sup>21</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraphs 18 and 38. The latter quotation is as follows: "For, in order that pious souls may duly apprehend Christ in the Supper, they must be raised up to heaven ... And for the same reason it was established of old that before consecration the people should be told in a loud voice to lift up their hearts. Scripture itself also not only carefully recounts to us the ascension of Christ, by which he withdrew the presence of his body from our sight and company, to shake from us all carnal thinking of him, but also, whenever it recalls him, bids our minds be raised up, and seek him in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father."

(frustrating) Presbyterian dislike for reading liturgy responses. It is not, therefore, recommended, at least at the initial stage of the implementation of weekly communion.

The prayer of thanksgiving reflects a Reformed understanding of the supper. It offers thanks to God for creation and redemption. A brief anamnesis and epiclesis are included. The epiclesis, however, concerns only the Spirit's ministry in enabling the people to eat in faith.<sup>22</sup> The Reformed concern is not a change in the "stuff" of the bread and wine, but the change in the hearts of the people of God. It is the bread eaten in faith that is the communion of the body of Christ. A sung version of the sanctus has been included since this ancient practice is consistent with a Reformed understanding of the supper. The theme of God's holiness is very important in Reformed theology and it deserves a weekly liturgical expression. However, if the singing of a hymn stanza in the middle of a prayer proves awkward, the song could be replaced with the biblical text as part of the pastor's prayer of thanksgiving.

The reception portion of the supper begins with a hymn stanza that allows the congregation to corporately express the meaning of what they are about to do. There are a number of hymns with appropriate stanzas for this purpose. The use of a musical response here (as well as the sanctus song above) goes a long way to overcome the somewhat melancholy feel that Presbyterian Lord's suppers tend to have. The initial sentence at the presentation of the bread and cup are adapted from the sermon theme. Practice has shown that it is often possible with a single sentence to connect the theme of the sermon to the supper. If it does not seem appropriate with a particular sermon, the words, "Believe the good news, the body of Christ given for you" can stand alone. The inclusion of the novel "believe the good news" at the presentation of the bread and cup is intended as an expression of the truth that the supper is a preaching of the gospel. The response required, therefore, is to believe. In Reformed theology the outward act of eating has always been linked to the inward act of believing as its necessary concomitant.

The service ends with a prayer paraphrased from the prayer of Simeon (*nunc dimittis*).<sup>23</sup> In practice a pastor would probably offer an *extempore* prayer but this is a good example of what would be thematically fitting. The service ends with a hymn. The hymn included in this example was chosen for its eucharistic allusions. In ordinary practice a large number of hymns would be appropriate here.

The outline of this service on the next page is designed to fit within the customary Sunday bulletin. Since all but one of the congregational responses are taken directly from the Trinity Hymnal, the form of the order of worship that is the hands of the congregation does not differ greatly from what is typically used in Presbyterian churches. This will require the pastor to give some directions to the congregation such as, "Let us sing hymn #486, stanza 5." Those accustomed to a traditional liturgy, whether Protestant, Roman Catholic or Orthodox would find such instructions distracting. However, Presbyterians are accustomed to it. In the abstract it would be better to train the congregation to sing or say the responses without prompting. In the real world of Presbyterian piety such pastoral

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<sup>22</sup> See Old, *Guides to Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 142, on the role of epiclesis in Reformed worship.

<sup>23</sup> Calvin put this biblical prayer at this place in his service. Phifer, *A Protestant Case for Liturgical Renewal*, p. 70.

prompting is expected. However, if the sung responses are not changed too frequently (every two or three months), the congregation will soon learn them and the need to prompt will decline. This is a “natural” process that does not lead to objections about the “rote” use of a liturgy. Finally, in the bulletin it is best not to entitle the service a liturgy, but a service or order of worship.<sup>24</sup> In the minds of many Presbyterians a liturgy is not the public service offered to God by his people, but written prayers said without passion. For similar reasons it is best to use traditional Reformed terminology: Lord’s supper or communion is preferable to eucharist. The goal is not to bring conservative Presbyterians into the liturgical fold, but to establish a weekly celebration of the Lord’s supper for the spiritual nourishment and growth in grace of the congregation, and the glory and praise of God. In a word, the goal is to be more biblical in our worship.

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<sup>24</sup> True as it is that both “liturgy” and “service” are valid translations of λειτουργία, connotation matters. Therefore I have, for the most part, used the term liturgy for historical references and service or worship order for the proposed services (liturgies).

# Worship According to the Word

## How should we worship God?

As Christians we know that we ought to worship God. The worship service is the main weekly activity of every church. Week after week Christians attend such services. But if we are honest, we will admit that we seldom consider why we worship the way we do. There is little instruction about worship among Bible-believing Christians. And there is little serious theological reflection on the topic by pastors and seminary professors. As a result, most Christians evaluate worship services by how they are affected emotionally by them. The tunes of the hymns, the inflections of voice and phrasings of the pastor's prayers, and the rhetoric of the sermon (as opposed to its content) often determine whether a service is judged to be uplifting and spiritual. What "feels" right becomes the standard of evaluation in the absence of any firm doctrinal convictions.

What feels right may be either "traditional" or "modern" depending on whether our past church experience has been positive or negative. If we grew up in a traditional church, and were spiritually nourished there, its forms of worship will feel right. If, however, our church experience was shallow and we were converted to a sincere faith in Christ later in life, then those traditional forms may seem shallow and empty. On the other hand, if we grew up in a sparse fundamentalist style, or an emotional Pentecostal style of worship, and later came to question those theological traditions, then older liturgical forms of worship may "feel" right.

It is not surprising that most Christians approach worship from an emotional perspective. This is very much in tune with the subjectivism of our man-centered culture. We evaluate popular music by how it makes us feel. We judge TV shows by how they affect us emotionally. There is nothing surprising about the same emphasis in worship. But as understandable as this may be, it is none the less deplorable. Indeed, it represents an essential distortion of worship. From a biblical perspective the goal of worship is not to please ourselves, but to please God. Both in the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament the words translated "worship" have the basic meaning "to serve." They are used not only for worship activities, but also for any service rendered to the will of God. Therefore, the crucial issue is what does God want from us in worship. What is the service he requires of us? In what does he delight?

We may appreciate the thought behind a gift of flowers, but if we are allergic to flowers, well... The gift would be all the more appreciated if it were something we wanted. So too, God may be glad that we intend to worship him, but he hardly delights in that worship if it is offered in opposition to his revealed will in Scripture. In fact, there are pointed examples of God's anger at his people when they dared to offer worship he had not authorized. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's sons, decided that they could offer incense just like Aaron the High Priest. God took notice of their endeavor, but only to turn them into whole burnt sacrifices when fire came out of the tent of meeting and consumed them (Leviticus 10:1ff). God decides how he is to be worshipped. He is the Lord and we are his servants who are to delight to do his will.

Theologians have termed this biblical truth that God is to be worshipped only as he has appointed, the "regulative principle of worship." We are to worship God not as seems best to us, but as he instructs us in his Word. How worship makes us feel is secondary. We cannot ignore our emotional responses, but we can hold them in check while we pursue the more fundamental question of how God instructs us to worship him in his Word. Let us remember that no matter how we are pleased, uplifted, and renewed by a certain form of worship, it is all for naught if God is not pleased.

### **Worship According to God's Will**

What is the worship that God has appointed in his Word? How should we worship God? In particular, where in the New Testament are we commanded to gather together for worship? Where did Christ establish the worship assembly of the New Covenant? As we consider these questions we may discover that the worship that feels right to us includes things with which God is not pleased, and excludes things that God requires. So we must be ready to reform our worship by the Word of God.

In the Old Covenant the provisions for God's worship are very specifically set forth. A special day (sabbath) and special annual seasons (feasts) were appointed for God's people to worship him (Leviticus 23). The forms of sacrifice and offering are given in considerable detail (Leviticus 1-10). Furthermore, Israel was warned not to worship God with the practices of the nations around them. Rather they were to worship the Lord at the time and place he appointed, and in the manner he commanded.

*You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place. You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things. But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. (Deuteronomy 12:2-7)*

and

*Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD. (Exodus 23:17)*

### **The Lord's Supper**

God clearly instructed his people through Moses how they were to worship him. We, however, no longer live in the age of the Old Covenant. Where then are the instructions for worship in the New Covenant? In what way did Christ establish the pattern of worship of his Church as the Israel of God, the true priesthood and temple?

Let us begin with the historical record of our Lord's ministry. During his earthly ministry Jesus and his disciples attended synagogue on the sabbath. He also went to the temple at the appointed times. Indeed, he even cleansed it with great vigor. So we see our Lord keeping the provisions of Old Covenant worship even as he announced a new order.

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." (John 4:21-24)*

The apostles after the resurrection continued to frequent the synagogue and the temple. All the early Christians were also Jews. It took some time for the new Christian community to fully grasp the transformation that Christ had accomplished by his death and resurrection. They struggled with whether they should preach to the Gentiles. They debated whether Gentile converts had to be circumcised and become Jews. Nonetheless, from the beginning the Christian community was compelled to hold special Christian gatherings that were apart from the worship of the temple and the synagogue. Though the early Jewish Christians attended the public worship of the Old Covenant, they also held special Christian-only gatherings. Luke in his Acts of the Apostles mentions one of these:

*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight. (Acts 20:7)*

Luke tells us that these Christians gathered together on the first day of the week rather than on the Old Covenant sabbath. In every mention of worship days in the literature of the ancient Church, Christians came together on the first day of the week, the day of Christ's resurrection (Sunday), not the day of the Old Covenant sabbath (Saturday). Further, Luke tells us that they came together "to break bread." Paul also mentions that the Corinthians came together to eat (1 Corinthians 11:33). They did so on the first day of the week (1 Corinthians 16:2) taking up a collection for the poor in Jerusalem at the same time.

This passages reveal to us how Christ established the worship of the New Covenant Church. Jesus never said, hold a "worship service." Rather "the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread ..." Our Lord's institution of his supper (at the last supper) is the institution of the New Covenant worship assembly. From the beginning the Christian community met apart from the synagogue and temple services to do this one thing Jesus commanded: "Do this in remembrance of me." They had to meet as a distinctly Christian assembly, and not merely as a part of Old Covenant Israel. They could pray at the temple, they could teach in the temple courts (where Rabbis frequently held classes). But they also had to gather by themselves (initially in private homes) to do the Lord's supper.

*And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness*



*and simplicity of heart... (Acts 2:42, 46)*

To our modern way of thinking there may seem to be little connection between eating and worshipping. We naturally understand "breaking bread from house to house" as a reference to ordinary meals, not worship services. After all, for most of us the Lord's supper is an occasional ritual tacked on at the end of an otherwise complete worship service. This, however, is a long way from the pattern of the Old Covenant out of which the New Covenant emerges as its fulfillment and reality.

In the Old Covenant all worship was a holy meal. The sacrifices offered at the altar were called "food" and "bread" for God (Leviticus 3:11; 21:6, etc.). The altar itself was called "the table of the Lord" (Malachi 1:7, 12). When the people came to worship God, their worship was an offering of various foods to God: slaughtered animals, grains, and wine. And they too were commanded to eat.

*There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you. (Deuteronomy 12:6-7)*

In the Old Covenant public worship was always a meal, food offered to God, and a feast in the presence of God. With this background in mind we can see that in instituting the supper, our Lord was establishing both the worship assembly of the New Covenant, and its essential activity. Just as in the Old Covenant God's people gathered in his presence to offer sacrifice and to eat before the Lord, so now in the New Covenant God's people gather in Christ's presence to offer thanks for the once for all sacrifice of Christ, and to eat with and of the Lord. The Lord's supper is not an occasional element in the Church's worship. It is the source and center of Christian worship.

For this reason, when the Apostolic Church gathered together, they did so "to break bread" or "to eat" (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:33). When we read Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11, we see that for him, "to come together as a church" and "to come together to eat" are synonymous.

*For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. (1 Corinthians 11:18)*

*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. (1 Corinthians 11:20-21)*

*Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. (1 Corinthians 11:33)*

If we truly believe that God is to be worshipped, not as we please, but as he commands (the regulative principle), then we will do what Jesus told us. When we come together, we will take bread and give thanks... This is not ritualism. It is not Romanism. It is New Testament worship. For when the supper is at the center of our assembly, the gospel is at the center.

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*

And we may say in passing, that if the Roman Catholic Church can hold mass each Lord's Day, and yet be so far from a clear proclamation of the gospel to its own people, then it is not the Lord's supper that they eat. It is rather a severe distortion of Christ's institution. This is, by the way, the viewpoint of the Protestant reformers, namely, that the mass was a serious distortion of the essence of the holy supper.

The Lord's supper is not an addendum to the gospel. Rather the Lord's supper is nothing less than the gospel itself. In the first place, the supper is the covenant memorial ("do this in remembrance of me") of the saving act of God in the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The supper celebrates and proclaims the only one through whom men can be saved. And the supper is the Church's proper response to God who has given his Son for us. In the supper we give thanks for Jesus Christ. But as is true of all of God's dealings with us, just when we lose ourselves in his service offering thanks to him for his gift, we find that it is God who is still doing the giving. For the Lord's supper is also Christ sharing himself with us. It is a communion or participation in his body and his blood. Since we are partakers of Christ in the supper (if we believe), then we are members of his one body, the Church.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)*

And so by sharing in Christ we become his Church, his body. It is in the actions of the supper that the Church becomes the Church, the redeemed of the Lord. And so the Lord's supper is not merely an activity of worship, nor an element in the worship service. It is the worship. It is what the Church does when she gathers in her Lord's presence. To worship God according to his will is to gather around the table of the Lord in order to do what our Lord appointed for us.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

Since New Testament worship is the gathering of Christ's people in his presence to do his supper, it would seem essential, therefore, that we would speak to God. That is to say, that we would pray. Indeed we cannot do the Lord's supper without prayer, for Jesus himself prayed over the bread and the cup. Likewise the Israelites came to the temple with their sacrifice to pray. Inside the temple was an altar of incense that represented the prayers of God's people coming before his throne. Many of the psalms of David were prayers used in connection with temple worship (1 Chronicles 15:7, Psalm 51, Psalm 116). So too when the New Testament Church gathers, a Church which is the temple of God on earth (1 Corinthians 3:16f, Ephesians 2:20f) and which through the body of Christ enters into the heavenly temple where God sits on his throne (Hebrews 10:19ff), we gather to offer up our prayers to the Lord. Our Lord himself defines our gathering in his presence as a gathering to pray.

*Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they*

*ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them. (Matthew 18:19-20)*

Likewise, Luke notes the Church was devoted, not only to the breaking of bread, but also to prayers (Acts 2:42). Paul instructs Timothy that:

*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior... I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; (1 Timothy 2:1-3, 8)*

Prayers also played an important role in the Christian assembly at Corinth when they gathered together to eat the supper. Paul gives instructions for how women are to pray (1 Corinthians 11:13) and he insists that all vocal prayer be in a known language (1 Corinthians 14:13-19). This raises the practical question "what should we pray?" Prayer is not something we do naturally. Indeed, apart from grace, we refuse to pray as we ought. Even Christians are prone to pray amiss (James 4:3-4). How, then, do we learn to pray in an acceptable manner?

The disciples asked Jesus how to pray. His instruction was what we call the Lord's prayer. Like the Lord's supper it is our Lord's institution for us. We are not free to omit the Lord's prayer from our use any more than we are free to omit the Lord's supper.

*Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." So He said to them, "When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven..." (Luke 11:1-2)*

The Lord's prayer is the central and most essential prayer of Christian worship. It is both a prayer for us to pray, and a model of prayer to teach us how to pray. But it teaches us how to pray, not by listing for us principles of prayer, or by being an outline of topics, but by being the chief prayer of our Christian lives whose echoes are to be heard in all our prayers.

The Lord's prayer teaches us that the prayers of Christians are in the first place, not a cacophony of individual requests, but the common prayer of the Church that with one voice calls on God our Father. And so Jesus said, "When you pray (plural), say (plural), 'Our Father...'" Christ himself commands us to pray this prayer together in unison. We are not at liberty to exclude this corporate spoken prayer from the worship of God. Rather the Lord's prayer is by Jesus' command a vocal, unison prayer. From this we learn that worship is not private devotions done in a room with other people, but the common service of God's people as a people, a holy priesthood, the body of Christ (1 Peter 2:9f).

The Lord's prayer focuses us on our role as God's servants. The first petitions of the prayer are about God's name, God's kingdom, and God's will. Likewise, the meaning of our lives is found in losing our lives in service to Christ (2 Corinthians 5:15). It is the

God-centeredness of the Lord's prayer that is often so lacking in our extemporaneous prayers. But this focus does not exclude our needs, as the later petitions of the Lord's prayer show us. Yet even here the Lord's prayer teaches us to pray for the common needs of the body of Christ - the forgiveness of our sins, our daily bread, our deliverance from evil. Too often the prayers of Christians in worship are rendered trite and trivial by a focus on a multitude of individual requests. Praying the Lord's prayer as the chief and central prayer of worship keeps the biblical emphasis. We should view our other prayers as harmonies on the melody of the Lord's prayer.

In a similar way, all the praises and thanksgivings of the people of God are echoes of the end of the Lord's prayer: "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever." The Lord's prayer teaches us to include our thanksgiving and praises, said or sung, with our prayers. We are exhorted in many places in the New Testament to give thanks and praise to God, to sing to him and glorify his name.

*And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. (Colossians 3:15)*

and

*...speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ... (Ephesians 5:19-20)*

The Lord's prayer is the first and chief prayer of the Church. But it is not the only prayer, nor the only praise that God has provided for us. Rather we are exhorted to draw upon the riches of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" which are found throughout the scriptures. There is, in the first place, the book of Psalms. But to these psalms, hymns and spiritual songs we can add the songs found elsewhere in the scriptures from the song of Moses in Exodus 15 to the song of the Lamb in Revelation 15. And it is likely that Paul also had in mind songs, hymns and psalms not in the scripture. In 1 Corinthians 14:26 Paul says that "whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation." This reference seems to be to a new composition even as the teaching, the tongue, or the revelation were not mere recitations of existing texts.

God has not forbidden the use of prayers of our own composition whether they are confessions, intercessions, or praises. But Christ has commanded the use of the Lord's prayer. In a similar way, God has not forbidden the composition of songs after the pattern of the biblical psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, but he has commanded the use of those biblical texts. Much Christian worship is defective since it neglects these divinely inspired prayers, praises, and confessions. That we prefer church hymns to the exclusion of these inspired songs shows the extent to which worship is focused on what pleases us, rather than what pleases God.

So then, when we Christians gather together, we are to do so around the Lord's Table, with the praying of the Lord's prayer, as well as our other prayers and praises, said and sung. In contemporary worship singing by the congregation often functions only to provide a transition between the sermon and prayer. Thus there is little connection between the hymns and the rest of the service. But in the scripture the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are parts of the prayers of the people, or of the instruction of the congregation (Colossians 3:15). They are addresses to God and exhortations to one another (Ephesians 5:18-19). Thus we find in the scripture songs which are said rather than sung (Exodus 15:1, Revelation 5:9, 15:3).

Modern music usually requires that the words be in meter and rhyme. Even in music with an irregular meter, there is a meter such that the words have to be fitted to the music. Ancient music, a form of chanting, needed neither meter nor rhyme. Any text could be sung without altering the text. The result was that a psalm, for example, Psalm 51, could be said or sung. But whether said or sung, it was a prayer of confession. Indeed all the Psalms of David are classified as prayers (Psalm 72:20). We err if we view singing as an essential element in worship. Prayer is an essential element. Singing does not add or take away from the content of the prayer or praise, it rather "glorifies" it. Nothing mars the quality of contemporary worship more than singing for singing's sake. It is amazing the trivial dribble that Christians will sing if they like the tune. But if the text is not an adequate expression of our prayer or praise to God, or of our confession before him, it is not worth singing no matter how beautiful the tune. The only basis for including a particular hymn in worship is that it expressed the appropriate prayer or speech of God's people.

Sometimes it is said that the New Testament prescribes no fixed forms for public worship. Certainly the New Testament contains nothing like the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. But Jesus has prescribed the supper and the Lord's prayer. The New Testament commands the use of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, which are provided in great abundance in the scriptures. While it is true that the Bible does not give us "a full liturgy", it does establish a liturgical core. The essential form for the Church's gathering is the Lord's supper, and the central prayer is the Lord's prayer. And to this prayer we have added all the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs found in scripture.

### **The Reading and Preaching of the Word**

Our Lord not only commanded the supper and gave us his prayer, but he appointed and equipped men to be his servants to declare his Word to us (Matthew 28:18ff). When the Church gathers around the Lord's table, we come to hear and believe the good news of Jesus. Indeed, it is the gospel that calls the assembly into being. Therefore, preaching is not something added to the supper as a little extra. It is the indispensable pre-condition for the supper. Preaching is a verbal proclamation of the same truth that is proclaimed by the actions of the supper.

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*

According to Paul, the eating the drinking of the supper is a preaching of the gospel. Likewise Paul says of his preaching to the Corinthian Christians,

*For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:2-5)*

The gathering of the Church around the Lord's table requires the preaching of the Word of Christ. We have no one less than Jesus himself as the example. For when our Lord appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, he not only ate with them, but he taught them (Luke 24:43-48). So too Paul as he went about visiting the Churches preached to them (Luke 14:21-22). And he commanded that his written instructions be read as well (Colossians 4:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:27). In 1 Corinthians 14:26 the Apostle expects that the leaders of the Corinthian congregation will edify the saints by teaching and revelation.

*How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*

Likewise, Paul instructs Timothy to follow the same pattern of preaching.

*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. (1 Timothy 4:13)*

and

*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. (2 Timothy 4:1-4)*

Preaching the Word is indispensable. The New Testament in many places refers to the Word of Christ or the Word of God. (For example: Romans 10:17, 1 Corinthians 15:2, Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:8, 2:13) This Word is the message from Jesus and about Jesus. It is the declaration of his coming in human flesh, his sufferings for us, his resurrection on the third day, and his ascension to the right hand of God the Father. This Word was entrusted to the Apostles, and they have preserved it for us in their writings, the scriptures of the New Testament. It is also the key to understanding the scriptures of the Old Testament. The Word of Christ is the true interpretation of the Old Testament as fulfilled in Christ. It is, therefore, the preaching of the Scriptures. But it is more than a historical commentary on an ancient text. It is rather the glad announcement that all God had promised in the past, he has now accomplished in his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In other words, it is the Gospel.

Because the Word of Christ has been written for us in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the form of preaching the Word in the assembly is necessarily the exposition and explanation of the Scriptures. Only by tying preaching directly to the scriptures can we be assured that it is the Word of Christ, and not merely the human

opinions of the minister that we hear in the Church's assembly.

It is the Word of Christ that called the church into existence, and that nourishes the Church in her continuing life in this world (Romans 10:17, Ephesians 5:26). Whenever the Church gathers, she gathers to hear the Word of her Lord, that is, to listen to the voice of him who is present in our midst. It is from that Word that our faith is strengthened and our repentance renewed. And so the center of Christian worship is not the works of men, but the works of Christ announced to us in his Word. There can be no true worship where the Word of Christ is neglected for there can be no true Church of Christ without the Word of Christ. True worship is rooted in the faithful preaching and hearing of the Word of Christ. Without the preaching of the Word both the supper and the prayers soon degenerate into ritualism devoid of faith. But neither the refusal to do the supper weekly, nor to say the Lord's prayer guarantees that worship will be from the heart. Liturgy, whether divinely inspired (Lord's prayer), or humanly composed, does not lead to ritualism. Only the preaching of the Word renews the heart, and only its neglect leads to dead formalism. Forms in worship are both inescapable and commanded by Christ himself. But it is devotion to the preaching of the Word that alone breathes life into the congregation.

So then, we have contended that the essential form and content of Christian worship is commanded by our Lord. The Lord's supper is the essential form of the Church's worship. The Lord's prayer is the essential prayer, a corporate spoken prayer, to which we have added the inspired psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of the scriptures. To these we are free to add our own prayers, and our own hymns in imitation of the divine examples. Finally, we have insisted that the preaching of the Gospel as the exposition of the scripture as fulfilled in Christ is the necessary condition for all true worship. There is no worship without the preaching of the Word by those set apart as ministers of that Word.

### **The Care of the Poor**

This pattern of preaching, prayer and the Lord's supper was present from the beginning of the Church. Luke writes of the early Church in Jerusalem that

*... they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)*

In this passage we find one more element we have not mentioned. This is "fellowship." Fellowship in this passage, however, is not what we usually mean by the term. For modern Christians fellowship means talking together, sharing our concerns, and befriending one another. As important as that may be, it is not what Luke has in mind. The word translated "fellowship" means participation or sharing. In this passage it means that the Christians shared their wealth with the poor among them. This should remind us

of the Corinthian passage where Paul exhorts the believers to store up money each Lord's day for the relief of the poor in Christ in Jerusalem.

*Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come. And when I come, whomever you approve by your letters I will send to bear your gift to Jerusalem. (1 Corinthians 16:1-3)*

If we have listened to the Word of salvation, and eaten of the Savior in the Holy supper, the effect of being so loved by God is that we will in turn love our brothers who are in need. So from the beginning of the Church, the assembly of the saints has included a collection for the poor of Christ's Church. Certainly there must also be provision for those who labor in the ministry of the Word (1 Corinthians 9:8ff, 1 Timothy 5:17f). But the focus is on sharing with those in need in the body of Christ.

### **The Pattern of New Covenant Worship**

From our study we can see that the core of the New Covenant Worship according to the New Testament is:

The reading and preaching of the Word

The Lord's supper

The Lord's prayer together with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs

Collection for the poor of Christ's Church

Now it is often said that there is no description of an entire worship service in the New Testament. This is true in a sense. The Book of Acts, for example, never gives us a full description of a Church assembly like we find in the early second century in the writings of Justin Martyr. But there is a rather full picture of worship at Corinth in 1 Corinthians. In that letter we have already noted that worship was an assembly to eat the Lord's supper (11:20-21, 33). The assembly also involved the offering of prayers, psalms, teaching and revelation (14:26) as well as the collection for the poor (16:1ff). (The revelatory gifts of tongues and prophecy did not cease until the destruction of Jerusalem in A. D. 70. See Daniel 9:24.)

But we have an even more important example of New Covenant worship, namely, the resurrection appearances of Jesus. Here for the first time the disciples worshipped the risen Christ (Matthew 28:17, Luke 24:42). In Christ's appearances to his disciples he conducts the assembly of believers. He greets them with a word of peace (Luke 24:36, John 20:19, 26), he reveals himself to them in the breaking of the bread (Luke 24:30f, 35, John 21:13), he instructs them in the true meaning of the scriptures as fulfilled in himself (Luke 24:27, 44ff), and he dismisses them with a word of peace (Luke 24:50). These narratives are especially important in instructing those who are ministers in how to conduct the assembly of the Church. The ministers of the New Covenant are only servants through whom Christ speaks to his people. Their work is his work. He blessed so they bless. He broke bread so they break bread. He taught the scriptures so they teach the same. Who better to use as the example of how to lead the assembly than the Lord



himself?

Finally, we note that the resurrection appearances of Jesus occurred on the first day of the week, the day of resurrection. The narrative takes pains to point this out (Mark 16:9, Luke 24:13, John 20:19). Thus it was Jesus himself who established the pattern of the New Covenant assembly meeting on the Lord's Day, with the breaking of bread, and the exposition of the scriptures. Who are we to do it any differently?

What then is the worship in the New Covenant? It is the assembling of the saints in the presence of the Lord, on the Lord's Day, to hear the Word of the Lord, to pray the Prayer of the Lord, with biblical psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, and to do the supper of the Lord. To these we may add our own prayers and songs. It is also the work of the ministers of Christ to greet the gathering with the peace of Christ, to announce the forgiveness of sins to all who believe (John 20:23), and to dismiss them with the blessing of Christ. And that our worship may not be a hollow performance, let us remember to share with those in need, even as Christ became poor for our sakes, that we might be rich in him (2 Corinthians 8:9).

If we were to construct a service of worship from the material we have studied above, what would it look like? There is, obviously, a lot of flexibility. As we have said, the New Testament gives us a liturgical core, but not a complete liturgy in the usual sense of the word. But here is a reasonable order including all that is commanded and modeled for us by Christ, and his apostles.

Greeting and word of peace

Confession of sins and assurance of forgiveness

Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs

Scripture readings

Sermon

Collection for the poor

Lord's prayer and other prayers

Lord's supper

Dismissal and word of peace

If this outline seems very traditional, it is because the worship of the Church grew out of the same apostolic instruction that we have just surveyed. The earliest examples of Christian worship services confirm this. Justin Martyr, for example, gives us this description of worship as he experienced it in the early second century.

*And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers*

*and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succors the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning with us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need. But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. (First Apology, Chapter LXVII)*

We also have another interesting witness to the worship of the ancient Church in a document called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles. This document gives us the sample wording of prayers at the supper, and exhorts its reader to use of the Lord's prayer (sections 8, 9). Again we see that the meeting of Christians on the Lord's Day was a meeting to do the Lord's supper.

*On the Lord's own day gather together and break bread and give thanks, having first confessed your sins so that your sacrifice may be pure. (section 14)*

We also note here the concern for confession of sins as a preparation for participation in the supper. Our sacrifice of praise, which is the Lord's supper, can only be done with a true heart. As John teaches us, if we say we have no sin God's truth is not in us, but if we confess our sins to our Father he will forgive and cleanse us (1 John 1:9-10).

These two documents we have quoted do not form a rule for our worship. They do, however, confirm that our interpretation of what the New Testament requires as worship is essentially the same understanding as the early Church. This cannot be said of most American evangelical churches. Most evangelical churches do the Lord's supper only occasionally. The Lord's prayer is seldom used. The biblical psalms, hymns and spiritual songs are present only as a verse or two at a time in so-called "scripture songs." We need desperately to reform our worship by the Word of God. We need to return to Christ's instructions, to the examples of the New Testament, and to their faithful echoes in the worship of the Ancient Church.

What is worship according to the Word of God? Worship is the gathering of God's people in the presence of the Lord, on the Day of the Lord, around the Table of the Lord, to hear the Word of the Lord, to do the supper of the Lord, to pray the Lord's prayer, to sing the psalms, hymns and spiritual songs of the scriptures, and to share with the poor of Christ. This is the worship that is acceptable to the Lord. And this is the worship that will nurture and nourish our faith through all the troubles of this life to eternal life.

# Lord's Day Supper

## How Often Do We Eat?

Jesus Christ on the night that he was betrayed took bread and wine, gave thanks, and gave them to his disciples with the words: "Take, eat; this is my body" and "This is my blood of the New Covenant..." (Matthew 26:26, 28). This simple meal of bread and wine, received with thanks and accompanied by our Lord's words of self-offering, is the one thing Jesus himself commanded his disciples to do when they gathered together. Today when most Reformed Christians gather together, we do not do the one thing that Jesus told us to do. We do many good and necessary things in our church assemblies. We listen to God's Word read and preached. We sing psalms, hymns, and songs. We offer our prayers. We take a collection of our tithes and gifts. These are all things that we should do. It would not be a proper service of worship without the Word, prayer, praise, and offering.

Why, then, do we leave out the Lord's Supper? What is the biblical basis for having the Lord's Supper only four times a year? Or every other month? Or even every month? If we are truthful, the frequency of our celebration of the Supper has become a matter of tradition. It varies from congregation to congregation based upon each congregation's traditional practice or the preference of the pastor who is serving that congregation. But as Reformed Christians we ought to be asking the question, what does the Bible say? What is the biblical basis for celebration of the Supper four times a year? Or every other month? Or every month?

## Westminster And The Supper

It is the very nature of the Supper that determines whether it ought to be included in the regular Lord's Day worship of the church. This is obviously the case for the other sacrament, baptism. Because baptism is the sign and seal of our inclusion in Christ and the New Covenant, it is to be administered only once to any person. The Bible never says in so many words, "only baptize a person once." It is the nature of baptism, as the sign and seal of our union with Christ, of regeneration, of justification, and of the gift of the Holy Spirit, that makes its repetition a contradiction of its meaning. To repeat baptism is to repeat the unrepeatable, namely, to repeat regeneration, justification, and the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. Since baptism by its very nature is only to be administered once to a person at his entrance into the Church, baptism must be an occasional element in worship. It will be celebrated only when there are infants or new converts to be admitted.

The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, is not the sign of our initial inclusion, but of our continuance and growth in Christ and the New Covenant. Its very nature as a meal requires a repeated observance. One does not eat and drink but once in life. It would be as wrong to have the Lord's Supper only once in the lifetime of each baptized Christian as it would be wrong to administer baptism to a Christian more than once. The nature of baptism forbids its repetition. The nature of the Supper requires its repetition. The Larger Catechism summarizes this difference.

*Wherein do the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ?*

*The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper differ, in that baptism is to be administered but once, with water, to be a sign and seal of our regeneration and ingrafting into Christ, and that even to infants; whereas the Lord's Supper is to be administered often in the elements of bread and wine, to represent and exhibit Christ as spiritual nourishment to the soul, and to confirm our continuance and growth in him... (177)*

This, however, leaves us with the question "How often is often?" But the question is now clearly focused on the nature of the Supper. If the Supper is to be celebrated often because it is a sign and seal of our spiritual nourishment in Christ and a confirmation of our continuance and growth in Christ, how often do we feed upon Christ?

The church normally gathers for worship once a week on the Lord's Day. There may be times, of course, when the church in a given locality will gather more frequently because of the special circumstances. We see this with the church in Jerusalem following Pentecost. Then the Christians were gathering together daily for the teaching of the Apostles, the breaking of bread, the sharing of goods, and prayer. Normally, however, the pattern is weekly. This weekly pattern is not optional for the Church but is required by the fourth commandment.

So then, what ought the Church to do when it gathers together on the Lord's Day? According to the Westminster confession these (along with prayer) are the ordinary parts of religious worship.

*The reading of the Scriptures with godly fear, the sound preaching and conscionable hearing of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, singing of psalms with grace in the heart, as also, the due administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God... (XXI/5)*

In the Reformed faith, the sacraments are an ordinary part of religious worship. Baptism and the Lord's supper are, confessionally speaking, ordinary. Baptism, however, can only be administered when there is someone to be baptized. It is the nature of baptism that makes its administration occasional. (Let us pray to God that the time will come when baptism will be administered weekly because of the great ingathering of God's elect!) But there is nothing in the nature of the Lord's Supper that makes it occasional. Every Lord's day there are objectively worthy recipients in the pews. That is to say, there are Christians who desire to feed upon Christ, to continue and grow in him. (The question of being subjectively prepared will be treated later.)

The Westminster Standards do not specify whether we should celebrate the Supper weekly, monthly, or quarterly. However, the doctrine of the Supper found in the standards does not preclude a weekly celebration. Indeed, the idea of the Supper as spiritual nourishment seems to imply the propriety of a weekly participation. The Supper is explicitly said to be an ordinary part of religious worship. Therefore, the proposal for the weekly celebration of the Supper does not involve changing the standards. Let us turn,

then, to the biblical arguments for weekly communion.

### **Do This In Remembrance Of Me**

The Lord's Supper is the memorial of Christ's sacrificial death. Jesus said to do this "in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24, 24; Luke 22:19). This phrase can be simply and accurately translated "in memory of me." To do something in memory of someone is a memorial. Jesus did not say "do this in order to remember me." He said to "do this in my memory." The idea of doing something in remembrance of a great event was common in the Old Covenant. Throughout the Old Covenant God appointed various signs to be memorials. The rainbow, the stones at the crossing of the Jordan, the inscribed jewels on the High Priests garments, and the passover were all memorials. They set forth and proclaimed the great redemptive events of God. They served as a public witness of what God had done. Some (rainbow, jewels) were a memorial that even God himself said he would see and remember. So too, the Lord's Supper is **the** memorial of the New Covenant that proclaims the great redemptive event of the New Covenant - the death of Christ. Let us not miss the point. It is not merely that the Lord's Supper causes us to remember and think about Christ's death for us. In that case the Lord's Supper would simply be an aid to our devotion. It would be a psychological prop. It is rather that the Lord's Supper is the public, visible, and objective memorial of Christ's death. When Americans visit the Vietnam Memorial their memories of that conflict are stirred. But the Vietnam Memorial is more than an aid to remembering. It is a visible and public acknowledgment of the sacrifice of Americans in the Vietnam conflict. So too, the Lord's Supper not only spurs our personal reflections on the death of Christ, it is the visible memorial of his sacrifice for us. Therefore, we must say with the Apostle, not merely that the Lord's Supper stimulates our reflection, but that it proclaims Christ's death.

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)*

The Lord's Supper is the objective memorial of Christ's death in which the proclamation is made by the actions of eating and drinking. Such an objective memorial necessarily requires of its participants a subjective understanding and reflection. God is not honored if our actions are correct but our hearts are far from him. (See Larger Catechism 171, 174, 175) Yet we cannot allow the necessity of subjective faith, repentance, love, and joy on the part of the participants to abolish the words of Scripture. "For as often as you **eat** this bread and **drink** this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death till He comes." The Lord's Supper is not merely a subjective remembering, but an objective memorial, that is, a proclamation of the death of Christ.

No meeting of church should be on any other basis than the once for all death of Christ. No meeting should take place without proclaiming and remembering his death. The Lord's Supper is Christ's appointed means for doing this very thing. Can you imagine a Christian church gathering for worship and not proclaiming the death of Christ? Yet we regularly gather for worship and do not use Christ's appointed means of proclaiming and remembering his death. Does this not violate the regulative principle that we are to worship God, not as we devise, but as God appoints? Can we not break this principle as much by deletion as by addition?

This is the first reason why the Lord's Supper should be celebrated each Lord's Day. It is also the reason that weekly celebration does not become routine. If the Lord's Supper were primarily a means to remind us of Christ's death, then a good hymn like "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" would be just as effective. But the Lord's Supper is an objective covenant memorial. It is an action, not that reminds, but that proclaims. It sets forth the death of Christ as the only basis of the Christian's life. It focuses our worship on Jesus crucified and risen. However, the Lord's Supper not only proclaims Christ death as an objective and once for all event in history, but also as that which Christ shares with us. It is memorial, but because it is a meal that is eaten, it is also communion.

### **The Communion Of His Body And Blood**

The Lord's Supper is our communion with the body and blood of Christ. In the Lord's Supper we are made partakers of Christ, of his body crucified for us, and of his blood shed for us. We eat that which Jesus called his body, and we drink that which Jesus called his blood. In terms of the symbolism, we eat his body and drink his blood. The idea of communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ is inherent in the very nature of the Lord's Supper. Precisely because the Lord's Supper is a meal that we eat, the idea of communion or participation in what Jesus called his body and blood is inescapable.

Our Lord himself taught that it is necessary to eat his body and drink his blood in order to have eternal life. He explained the true significance of the feeding of the five thousand this way:

*I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever: and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world . . . Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down from heaven -- not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever. (John 6:51-58)*

Jesus is the life. He is the resurrection. The food that gives eternal life is his body and blood. Only if we partake of him can we have life and resurrection. This doctrine that Jesus taught in the above passage, he also taught in ordaining the Supper. For the Supper says to us exactly the same thing. We must eat and drink of Jesus if we are to live. Jesus said that he who eats of his body and blood, lives in him and he in them. In the same way the Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ. The meaning of the Lord's Supper and of the John 6 passage quoted above are the same. We must find our life in Jesus. We must have communion with him in his incarnate nature. We must eat his body and drink his blood. Whether or not John 6 refers to the Supper, it is clear that both refer to the same spiritual reality of feeding upon Christ.

Throughout the writings of the Apostles, salvation is described as sharing in Christ, in his death and in his resurrection. In baptism we have died with Christ. (See Romans 6:1ff; Colossians 2:11ff, 3:1ff) Our life is hidden with Christ and when Christ appears, our life will appear. Our old man was crucified with Christ. We are raised up and seated with Christ in the heavenly places. In all these ways, the Apostles teach that salvation is sharing in Christ. It is communion with him. It is participation in his incarnate experience of death and resurrection. Paul sums this all up by saying that God has called us into communion with his Son.

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)*

The Apostle Paul describes the Lord's Supper with this same word that in the above quotation is translated "fellowship." This word means communion, participation, and sharing. Paul declares by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the true interpretation of the Lord's Supper is that it is a communion with the incarnate Christ who was sacrificed for us, that is to say, a communion with his body and blood.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16)*

Paul asks a rhetorical question of his readers. This makes the point all the more emphatic. Paul could simply have asserted that the cup is the communion of the blood of Christ in order to teach the Corinthians. But the Corinthian Christians already knew this. And it was not an obscure idea that only the more gifted would understand. It was common knowledge. It was unchallenged doctrine. Thus Paul could say rhetorically, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" Bear in mind that in the context Paul is not concerned to teach about the Lord's Supper. His concern is to keep the Corinthians from the idolatry of eating communion meals at pagan temples. So he reminded the Corinthians of what they already believed: that the Lord's Supper is a communion of the body and blood of Christ. He does so that he may make the further point that Christians cannot have communion both with Christ and with demons.

*Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices **participate** in the altar? Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be **participants** with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too: you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. (1 Corinthians 10:18-21 NIV)*

For the Apostle the Lord's supper is a communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ. Therefore, he says that those who share this meal ought not to share in the meal of demons.

### **The Nature Of Our Communion**

How did disciples at the Last Supper eat the body of Jesus? In what sense do we have communion with his body and blood in the Lord's supper? The disciples at the Last

Supper ate of Christ's body in the sense that they were made participants in his body. They were incorporated into his flesh so that his death on the cross was their death, and his resurrection was their resurrection. They were joined to him in his incarnate existence and experience. This remains the sense for us. When we in faith eat the bread and drink the cup, we share in Christ's body crucified for us and in Christ's blood shed for us. We are united to the incarnate Jesus so that what happened to him, death and resurrection, is also communicated to us.

The bread and cup are the body and blood of Christ in the sense that they represent and convey Christ. They are "the communion" of the body and blood of Christ. The bread becomes Christ's body, not by being changed in its material substance, but by being transformed in its function. Ordinarily, bread is nourishment for bodily life. In the Lord's Supper the bread becomes "the communion of the body of Christ" and hence is spiritual nourishment for eternal life. In other words, the bread signifies and communicates the body of Christ to the believer. It does not just signify. It also communicates.

If we take Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 10:16, and add in this idea of signifying and conveying, the verse makes perfect sense. "The cup of blessing (which signifies and conveys the blood of Christ), is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" The Reformed doctrine of the Supper as spiritual communion with the body and blood of Christ is consistent with the Apostle's words.

This idea that the bread is the communion with Christ's body is, as we have said above, inherent in the institution of the Lord's Supper. While Jesus was bodily present, he called the bread his body and the cup his blood. Jesus added that his body was given for his disciples and his blood was shed for them. So the natural interpretation is that by eating the bread and drinking the cup, the disciples would be made sharers in the body and blood of Christ, that is to say, in the sacrifice of Christ. His death would be their death. The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares to us that this is the true meaning when he calls the cup a "communion" or "participation" in Christ's blood and the bread a "communion" or "participation" in Christ's body.

The biblical idea is not that we need to share in Christ's body and blood as mere material existence in order to be saved. What we need is to have his death count as our death, and his resurrection guarantee our resurrection. In other words, we need to share in the incarnate Christ in his death and in his resurrection. Eating the bread in faith means sharing in his dying. It is communion with Christ in his self-oblation. And if we share in his death, we must also share in his resurrection. Is it possible to share in his death, and not also to share in his resurrection? How can we be united to Christ, who was crucified and risen, and not be united both to his death and his resurrection? As the Apostle says, we are

*...always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. (2 Corinthians 4:10)*

In baptism we are buried with Christ, that we might also rise with him. Baptism is the sacrament of our initiation into Christ. It is a sharing in his death as the Supper is a sharing in his death. In baptism we share in his death that we might also share in his



resurrection.

*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:4)*

So too, in the Supper we share in his death that we might also share in his resurrection. This is inherent in the nature of the Supper as a meal. We eat in order to live. So in the Supper we eat in order to live forever. We eat of his death that we might, as a result, share in his life. After all, the Christ with whom we have communion is no longer dead.

*I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forever. (Revelation 1:18)*

When we eat of his death, we do so, not unto death, but unto life. His death is spiritual food. Sharing in his death means sharing in his resurrection as well. We are joined to Christ in his life experience of suffering, death, burial, and therefore also resurrection and ascension. To have communion with the death of Christ and its benefits, is to have communion with the first and chief benefit - resurrection. This is the fundamental doctrine of salvation in the New Testament. And it is the central significance of both the sacraments: we are united to Christ in his death, that we might also be united to Christ in his resurrection.

*...they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed... (Larger Catechism 168)*

We do not mean that the only time we share in Christ's body and blood, that is, his death is during the Lord's Supper. No. We have a continual communion with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through faith.

*God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. (1 Corinthians 1:9)*

The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of that communion. In the Lord's Supper our communion with Christ is made the conscious focus. It is given a tangible form. We are called upon to believe that we, in truth, are united to Christ our savior. His death is our death. His resurrection is our resurrection. Therefore, we are saved. The proper response to the words, "This is my body, given for you," is not "How can this be?", but "Yes, Lord, I believe!" Since every meeting of the church is a meeting to be with Jesus, why then should the church gather without the sign and seal of her communion with Christ? Salvation is communion with Christ and every meeting of the church is a meeting to have communion with him. The Lord's Supper is the means by which that communion is made the focus of the church's gathering. Should we not each week feed upon Christ in the manner he has appointed? Should we seek communion with him while we neglect the ordinance he has established for the manifestation of that communion? Are we not despising the grace of God when we neglect the outward means by which Christ communicates his grace to us?

### **The Meal Of Unity**

The Lord's Supper, because it is our communion with Christ, is also a sign of our communion together as common sharers in Christ. It is the bond that unites the church for it unites us to Christ. We cannot be in Christ without being in his church, which is his body.

*For we, being many, are one bread and one body: for we all partake of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)*

According to Paul the eating of the bread makes us to be one body even though we are many individuals. It is not that we are not already one body by the work of the Holy Spirit who unites us to Christ. But in the Lord's Supper our unity is made manifest. We are signified and sealed as one body. And let us not take this lightly for the Apostle told the Corinthians that many were sick, and some had died because they tried to eat the Lord's Supper in disunity. Eating in disunity was sinning against the body and blood of Christ. Notice that Paul's advice was not to have the Lord's Supper less frequently, as if God were fooled by such a subterfuge, but to examine or prove ourselves before we eat.

*Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own Supper ahead of others: and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you... Therefore **whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. (1 Corinthians 11:17-30)*

The Corinthians tried to have the Lord's Supper despite their divisions. The result was an unworthy manner of eating and drinking. That unworthiness was not the result of private sin on the part of a few in the congregation. It was an unworthiness that stemmed from their public factions. As a result, they sinned against the body and blood of the Lord.

As the communion of the body and blood of Christ, the Supper is also the sign of the unity of the church. This is inherent in the fact that we all eat of the one loaf and drink of the one cup. Whenever the church gathers for worship, it gathers as the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of that reality. It signifies and conveys to us that we are one body. It marks us as the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper, therefore, is essential to a proper gathering of the church. Indeed, we may say, that it is the celebration of the Supper that makes a gathering to be a distinctly ecclesiastical gathering. The Word may be preached on all sorts of occasions not only to Christians, but also to outsiders. Preaching on the street is every bit as much preaching as from behind a pulpit. Prayers may be offered anytime, by all Christians. But the Supper alone can be celebrated only in the assembly of the saints by a minister of the Word. So it is the sign and seal of that assembly.

### **The Thanksgiving Meal**

Finally, the Lord's Supper is the great thanksgiving of the church for the gift of Christ. Paul speaks of the "the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks." The ancient church understood this, and took the Greek word that means "to give thanks" as a name for the Lord's Supper. They called the Lord's Supper "the Eucharist" (literally "the Thanksgiving"). When we give thanks for the cup and the bread, we do not give thanks for them merely as food and drink. We do that at every meal. Rather, in the Lord's Supper we give thanks for the bread that Jesus called his body and the cup that Jesus called the New Covenant in his blood. Thus the Lord's Supper is the church's great offering of thanks to God for the gift of Christ, his body given of us and his blood shed for us.

In the Old Covenant, God's people were required to bring a sacrifice whenever they came to the Lord. Indeed, to worship and to sacrifice were virtually interchangeable concepts. Now in the New Covenant we no longer are to offer animal sacrifices. Christ has himself offered the one and only sacrifice on the cross. We can add nothing to his sacrifice. It needs no augmentation. All we can and need do is to receive his sacrifice and give thanks. The Lord's Supper is the sacrament of our receiving Christ's sacrifice for it is the communion of his body and blood. But the Lord's Supper is also the sacrament of thanksgiving. Through the faithful doing of the Lord's Supper (as well as all forms of prayer and praise), the church brings to fulfillment what the prophet said:

*From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and pure offering... (Malachi 1:11)*

The incense of the New Covenant is the prayers of God's people, and the pure offering is the sacrifice of praise.

*Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. (Hebrews 13:15)*

Our confession does not separate the Supper from this sacrifice of praise, but rather call the Supper "a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God, for the same..."

Why would the church, then, meet to give thanks to God for our Lord Jesus Christ, without doing so in the way that Jesus commanded? If it is normal and right of the church when it gathers to give thanks for Christ, then it is normal and right for the church to do so in the way that Christ appointed with bread and wine. Otherwise, we violate the regulative principle by deletion. We offer our worship to God, not in the form God sets forth in his Word, but according to what we regard as appropriate.

So then, according to the Bible, the Lord's Supper is: (1) the memorial of Christ by which we proclaim his death till he comes; (2) a communion or participation in his body and blood; (3) an offering of thanksgiving to God for Jesus Christ; and (4) a bond of the unity of the church. These are things that belong to every meeting of the church. Hence it is the very nature of the Supper that requires its celebration each Lord's Day.

The church meets on the basis of Christ's once for all death, to give thanks to God for Christ, to have communion with Christ, not merely as individuals, but as the one body of Christ. This is what the Lord's Supper is all about. This is why the Lord's Supper is a necessary part of Lord's Day worship.

### Weekly Communion In The Apostolic Church

So far we have seen that it is the very nature of the Supper as memorial, communion, and thanksgiving that requires the weekly celebration of the Supper as an indispensable element in worship. But we can also see in the New Testament the historical fact that the Supper was celebrated whenever the church gathered together as the church. From the Book of Acts we learn that the Jerusalem church celebrated the breaking of bread whenever they gathered together.

*They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. (Acts 2:42)*

Here are the four main parts to Christian worship: 1) the Apostles' teaching, 2) fellowship [which was sharing with the poor, not a social hour], 3) the breaking of bread [the Lord's supper], and 4) prayer. We can do no better than to imitate this Apostolic pattern. We would never think of holding a worship service without Apostolic teaching, offering, and prayer. Why, then, should we neglect the fourth element - the breaking of bread?

When the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper, it is clear from his language that the Corinthian church, like the Jerusalem church, ate the Lord's Supper whenever they gathered together. The only difference was that the Corinthians gathered once a week, and not daily. (Probably the Jerusalem church was also on a weekly schedule by the time Paul wrote to Corinth.)

*In the first place, I hear that when you **come together as a church**, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it...When you come together, it is not the **Lord's Supper you eat**, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20)*

Whenever the Corinthians came together as a church, they intended to eat the Lord's Supper. Notice that Paul says "when you come together as a church...it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat..." The Corinthians gathered together to eat the Lord's Supper, but because of their divisions, they were not really eating the Lord's Supper. Rather they were abusing the Supper and sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

In the verses quoted above Paul describes the Corinthians' church meeting as "when you **come together as a church**." In verse 33 of the same chapter, Paul says "So then, my brothers, when you **come together to eat**, wait for each other." For Paul, "to come together as a church" and to "come together to eat" are the same thing. Likewise Luke in the Book of Acts describes a Christian gathering as

*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7)*

Luke uses the phrase "to break bread" as a technical designation of the Christian assembly. This is because the Christian assembly began historically for the purpose of celebrating the Lord's Supper, that is, of breaking bread. After Pentecost the church regularly gathered in the temple precincts to listen to the teaching of the Apostles. They

also continued in attendance at the synagogues throughout Jerusalem on the Sabbath. These gatherings were not exclusively Christian gatherings. But the Jerusalem church also gathered in homes in order to break bread. (Acts 2:46) These communal meals were both full meals and the Lord's Supper. (Even by the time of Paul's first letter to Corinth the Supper was still celebrated as a whole meal.) The point is that Jesus' command to do the Supper required the institution of a distinctly Christian gathering separate from both Temple and Synagogue. The need to break bread as Jesus commanded necessitated and actually created the first uniquely Christian assemblies. These assemblies were in houses of Christians since the Jerusalem church did not yet possess a building of its own. For many years the church would continue to gather in the homes of members to celebrate the Supper.

Jesus never said, *per se*, to have a church assembly. He said to do what he did concerning the bread and the cup. This is the origin of distinctly Christian or New Covenant worship. When the Lord's Supper is not celebrated in the worship assembly, the very nature of worship is distorted. Its historical origins are confused, and its proper pattern is missed.

### **Conclusion**

Reformed Christians continue to come together on the first day of the week, but because of human tradition, we often do not do what the Apostolic church did, namely, eat the Lord's Supper. We ought to celebrate the Lord's Supper each week because it, like the sermon, preaches Christ to us and invites us to receive him. Calvin explains that Christ is offered to us "through the gospel but more clearly through the sacred supper, where he offers himself with all his benefits to us, and we receive him by faith." (*Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5) It is time for the Reformed churches to reform their practice according to the Word. "We celebrate communion four times a year...but please God, we might base more frequent celebration of it. For we see by Luke in the book of Acts that the early church had it more often...by this we must confess it our own fault in not following the example of the Apostles." (John Calvin, Letter to Senate of Berne, 1555)

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## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 46.
- <sup>2</sup> The Council of Trent was the 16<sup>th</sup> Century Roman Catholic response to the criticism that set forth by the Reformers.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Orthodox Liturgy: The Development of the Eucharistic Liturgy in the Byzantine Rite*, St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York @1990, p. 19.
- <sup>4</sup> Didache is a transliteration of the Greek word for teaching.
- <sup>5</sup> For a summary of the dating and locale issues, see Cheslyn Jones, et al, *The Study of Liturgy*, pp. 84-86.
- <sup>6</sup> If an early dating of the *Didache* is adopted, this would be the earliest example of the term Eucharist as a name for the Lord's supper.
- <sup>7</sup> 9:1-10:6, pp. 153-155 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, Second Edition, translated by J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer, edited and revised by Michael W. Holmes.
- <sup>8</sup> 14:1, 3., p. 157 in *The Apostolic Fathers*.
- <sup>9</sup> 4:14., p. 152 in *The Apostolic Fathers*.
- <sup>10</sup> In Ignatius' day a bishop was the head of a local church. He was surrounded by a counsel of presbyters (elders) and assisted by deacons. The idea of a bishop as the head of a regional church would not arise for some time yet.
- <sup>11</sup> To the Ephesians 13:1, 20:2; To the Romans 7:3; To the Philadelphians 4:1; To the Smyrnaeans 6:2, 8:1-2.
- <sup>12</sup> To the Ephesians, 20:2, p. 93 in *The Apostolic Fathers*.
- <sup>13</sup> To the Smyrnaeans, 8:1, p. 112 in *The Apostolic Fathers*.
- <sup>14</sup> Note that the the pairing of Eucharist and prayer in Ignatius parallels with the pairing of breaking bread and prayer in Acts 2:42. It would appear that Ignatius took the reference to breaking bread in Acts 2:42 as the equivalent of Eucharist.
- <sup>15</sup> To the Smyrnaeans, 6:2, p. 112 in *The Apostolic Fathers*.
- <sup>16</sup> First Apology, Chapter LXVII in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 1, page 186, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson.
- <sup>17</sup> J. J. Von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice*, 1965, p. 124.
- <sup>18</sup> Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy*, p. 37.
- <sup>19</sup> Quoted in Anthony M. Coniaris, ed., *Daily Readings from the Writings of St. John Chrysostom*, Light and Life Publishing Co., Minneapolis, Minn., © 1988, p. 24.
- <sup>20</sup> For a review of this shift, see Wybrew, *The Orthodox Liturgy*, pp. 34-37.
- <sup>21</sup> Canon XXI quoted in John H. Leith, ed., *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, Revised Edition, John Knox Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1977, pp. 58-59.
- <sup>22</sup> *Calvini opera*, X, 1, 213, quoted in William D. Maxwell, *A History of Christian Worship*, p. 118.
- <sup>23</sup> *Institutes* 4.17.44
- <sup>24</sup> This conjunction of "to break" with "bread" occurs in Acts 2:42, 2:46, 20:7, 20:11 and 27:35.
- <sup>25</sup> *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 14-15. See also, Ernest F. Kevan, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 10 and F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 100, where the matter is dealt with in just a few sentences.
- <sup>26</sup> This opinion is not found so much in Reformed literature on the topics of worship and the Lord's supper as in the conversations between ministers at meetings of Presbyteries and General Assemblies. For an expression of such doubts by scholars in the field of liturgical studies, see Jones, *The Study of the Liturgy*, pp. 198-199.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Presbyterian Advocate*, Volume 2, Numbers 7&8, September and October 1992, p. 25.
- <sup>28</sup> As quoted by Mr. Sherwood in the above article.
- <sup>29</sup> κυριακον δειπνον 1 Corinthians 11:20.
- <sup>30</sup> τραπεζης κυριου 1 Corinthians 10:21.
- <sup>31</sup> Technically speaking we do not have a standardized phrase "to break bread" but a use of the verb "to break" with the noun "bread" in several varying grammatical constructions. However for the sake of simplicity of expression, we will call it a phrase.
- <sup>32</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:21-22 "For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?" We cannot, therefore, image a liturgy like we see in Justin for the Christian assembly in this early period included a meal of sustenance

during which the bread and the cup were blessed as the Lord had instituted. Only after the meal had been reduced to just the bread and the cup could a liturgical order like we see in Justin arise. All subsequent liturgies are of this type.

<sup>33</sup> Apparently as a result of the truncating of the meal, the separate prayers before the bread and cup collapsed into one prayer as we see it in Justin's account and all latter liturgies. In contrast the Didache has separate prayers (and mentions the cup first).

<sup>34</sup> F. F. Bruce sees a third possibility that this is a reference to an Agape feast. That this is not plausible will be evident from the analysis of Luke's usage. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> For a more thorough treatment of the evidence for Lukan authorship, see John Wenham, *A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem: Redating Matthew, Mark & Luke*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1992, pp. 183ff.

<sup>36</sup> Regrettable, Presbyterian observances of the Lord's supper rarely involve an actual breaking and distributing of a loaf of bread. Instead, the custom is to have neatly cut, decently in order little pieces of bread. There is no theological justification for this current practice.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16.

<sup>38</sup> Greek: φαγειν (εσθιω in the present tense).

<sup>39</sup> Luke 14:1.

<sup>40</sup> Greek: φαγε ται

<sup>41</sup> Luke 14: 15.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 9:16.

<sup>43</sup> Luke 9:12

<sup>44</sup> The Septuagint is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Greek word is ερημος. For an example of its use in the books of Moses, see Deuteronomy 8:15.

<sup>45</sup> Numbers 1:52ff.

<sup>46</sup> Greek: εκλασεν

<sup>47</sup> Luke 22:19.

<sup>48</sup> The major verbal difference is that Luke uses bless (ευλογεω) at the feeding of the five thousand and give thanks (ευχαριστω) at the last supper.

<sup>49</sup> Note that at both the feeding of the five thousand and the last supper Jesus gives the bread to his disciples. The small detail that Jesus gave the bread to his disciples who then gave it to multitudes strengthens the connection to the last supper where Jesus also gives the bread to his disciples.

<sup>50</sup> ωσαυτως και το ποτηριον μετα το δειπνησαι λεγων

<sup>51</sup> The verb "break", obviously, is not applicable to the cup.

<sup>52</sup> και λαβων το ποτηριον και ευχαριστησας εδωκεν αυτοις λεγων

<sup>53</sup> The main difference is that Matthew uses λεγων (saying), while Mark uses και επιον (and said).

<sup>54</sup> Both Matthew and Mark have ευλογησας (blessed) in the critical text, but Matthew in the majority text has ευχαριστησας (gave thanks).

<sup>55</sup> From the standpoint of liturgical studies, what is suggested here is that the differences between Luke and Matthew/Mark in the institution narrative are not necessarily the result of differences in liturgical practices in their varying communities, but rather could be the result of Luke's literary skill in altering the narrative of the cup for purely literary reasons. An argument against this is that Paul also has "likewise." 1 Corinthians 11:25.

<sup>56</sup> Deuteronomy 8:3.

<sup>57</sup> Luke 22:15.

<sup>58</sup> Hughes Oliphant Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 107.

<sup>59</sup> Luke 24:13-29

<sup>60</sup> The literary parallel is obvious although the words used for this fourfold action are not identical.

However, the pattern is constant, and the actions (ideas) are the same. The following is a chart of the terms.

	Took	Blessed	Broke	Gave
<b>Luke 9:16</b>	λαβων	ευλογησεν	κατεκλασεν	εδιδου
<b>Luke 22:19</b>	λαβων	ευχαριστησας	εκλασεν	εδωκεν
<b>Luke 24:30</b>	λαβων	ευλογησεν	κλασας	επεδιδου

The only significant difference is that at the last supper Luke uses εὐχαριστῶ when in the other instances he has used εὐλόγησεν. These terms are synonyms in the Greek of the New Testament and are used interchangeably. Paul, for example, uses εὐλόγησεν in 10:16 for the cup but then uses εὐχαριστῶ in 11:24 for the bread. But he says that Jesus took the cup in the same manner as the bread. Thus Paul saw no real difference between the two terms. Matthew and Mark reverse the pattern and use εὐλόγησεν at the bread and εὐχαριστῶ at the cup. The other two differences are the use of the intensified versions of the same root: ἐπιδίδωμι instead of δίδωμι and κατὰκλαω instead of κλαω. Took, blessed, broke and gave is clearly the same pattern as took, gave thanks, broke and gave.

<sup>61</sup> Luke 24:30-31

<sup>62</sup> In John's gospel, Mary Magdalene does not at first recognize him either. John 20:15.

<sup>63</sup> Since the Lukan version of the last supper is so close to Paul's, and the fullest "resurrection meal" is also in Luke, it is unlikely that there is the tension between a joyous resurrection feast in the synoptics and a mournful Pauline Lord's supper as is often assumed. For such a viewpoint, see Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 14-20 and *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, pp. 5-16, and Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, pp. 25-26.

<sup>64</sup> Luke 24:35.

<sup>65</sup> The idea, not uncommon in evangelical and Reformed circles, that the Lord's supper is narrowly focused on his death to the exclusion of his resurrection is incompatible with the theology of "breaking bread" in Luke's Gospel. For Luke the memorial of his death is the also the revelation of Jesus as the risen Lord.

<sup>66</sup> Regrettably, such "proof texting exegesis" is far too common in evangelical circles. It is useful to remember that a text out of context can be made a pretext for almost anything.

<sup>67</sup> Acts 2:41-47.

<sup>68</sup> or shared. Greek: μετὰ λαμβάνον. This is a different word than Luke uses at the Sabbath meal at the Pharisee's house.

<sup>69</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:34.

<sup>70</sup> Perspicuity is the classic theological term for the truth that the essential message of the Bible is clear to both the scholar and the average reader. This writer has always thought that perspicuity was a perfectly imperspicuous way of saying what should be perspicuous to the average reader.

<sup>71</sup> Teaching - 14:26ff; sharing of wealth - 16:2; breaking bread - 10:16; and prayers - 14:16-17.

<sup>72</sup> Qahal is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for assembly used for the gathering of the nation at Mt Sinai." See Deuteronomy 5:22.

<sup>73</sup> Acts 3:1-4:22.

<sup>74</sup> Greek: καθ' οἶκον.

<sup>75</sup> Oscar Cullman argues that this is not a reference to several simultaneous smaller gatherings, but to a common gathering. He also says that the reason for this gathering in houses was lack of space at the temple. But the size of the community makes it highly unlikely that any private house had adequate space for a gathering in excess of three thousand people. On the other hand, the Temple precincts could accommodate large crowds. *Early Christian Worship*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>76</sup> Luke does not hint at the reasons so all sorts of speculations are possible. The most plausible seems to be that since the breaking of bread was still in the context of a full meal, smaller gatherings in homes would have been a practical necessity. This would also favor taking καθ' οἶκον in the sense of house to house. On the other hand, it is possible that these gatherings in houses reflect a concern to keep the holy supper private, a sort of prelude to the developed *disciplina arcani* of the fourth and fifth centuries. See, *The Study of Liturgy*, pp. 141-142/

<sup>77</sup> Hebrews 10:25.

<sup>78</sup> Old sees this statement as "in effect Jesus' interpretation of the fourth commandment." *Guides to the Reformed Tradition*, p. 111.

<sup>79</sup> Acts 20:7-12. See also Acts 27:35-36. Here, after his shipwreck, Paul has a meal that also alludes back to the last supper using the language both of blessing and breaking. The unbelievers also ate as well, but not the bread Paul broke. It may seem strange that Luke would connect this meal with the last supper, but he does. Paul, as the only Christian in that place, offered thanks for their deliverance in the distinctly New Covenant manner of the supper.

<sup>80</sup> Greek: συναγωγή.

<sup>81</sup> Both Luke 24:1 and Acts 20: 7 use the same date designation: *μια των σαββατων*. There is some debate as to whether the reference in Acts 20:7 refers to Saturday evening meeting that continued into Sunday morning or a Sunday evening meeting that continued into Monday morning. The confusion arises from the fact that there were three different ways for measuring a day in this era. Jews counted a day from sunset to sunset. Hence Saturday evening would be the first day of the week. Greeks counted a day from sunrise to sunrise (as we do informally in our culture). Romans counted a day from midnight to midnight (as we do officially in our calendars). See Tally, *Origins of the Liturgical Year*, pp. 14-15.

<sup>82</sup> It also involved apostolic teaching. These two passages in Acts also show that preaching the gospel was always a part of church assembly. But that is not an issue in dispute among Presbyterians.

<sup>83</sup> Acts 20:7, 9 *διαλογομα*

<sup>84</sup> Acts 17:2, Acts 17:17, Acts 18:4, Acts 18:19, Acts 19:8, Acts 19:9.

<sup>85</sup> The ordinary verb “to eat” are *εσθιω* (*φαγε* in the infinitive). Luke instead uses *γευομαι*. For the use of *γευομαι* in the sense of sip, see John 2:9.

<sup>86</sup> Luke 9:27, Luke 14:24, Acts 10:10, Acts 23:14.

<sup>87</sup> The verb *γευομαι* is followed by the prepositional phrase *εφ ικανον* which in such a construction would mean “enough” or “sufficient.” This favors the idea that Luke is just saying that Paul ate or had his fill.

<sup>88</sup> *Commentary on The Acts of the Apostles* 20:7.

<sup>89</sup> Greek: *ομιλω*.

<sup>90</sup> Matthew 26:26ff, Mark 14:22ff, Luke 22:15ff.

<sup>91</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.

<sup>92</sup> John Wenham, *Redating Matthew, Mark, and Luke: A Fresh Assault on the Synoptic Problem*, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, © 1992.

<sup>93</sup> *εις την εμην αναμνησιν*.

<sup>94</sup> *τουτο ποιειτε οσακις αν πινητε εις την εμην αναμνησιν*.

<sup>95</sup> *συνερχομαι* is used in 11:17, 18, 20, 33 & 34 and in 14:23 & 26. In each case the form of the verb is second person plural, i.e., when you come together. Paul also uses the verb in 7:5 for a very different sort of coming together.

<sup>96</sup> *εν εκκλησια*. The phrase could also be rendered "in church."

<sup>97</sup> *επι το αυτο*.

<sup>98</sup> 14:23, *συνελθη η εκκλησια ολη επι το αυτο*.

<sup>99</sup> It was also a gathering for prophesying, teaching and praying as 1 Corinthians 14:23ff makes clear.

<sup>100</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.

<sup>101</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16.

<sup>102</sup> This text is crucial for any discussion of the efficacy of the sacrament. Paul certainly did not subscribe to an *ex opera operata* understanding of the sacrament as would later become church doctrine.

<sup>103</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:20-21. See Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament*, p. 75 on the dining customs of the day and how they are illustrated in the meal problem at Corinth. Kodell believes the Lord's supper was held after a common meal at Corinth. It is probably safer to say that the Lord's supper was held as an aspect of the full meal.

<sup>104</sup> The English word schism is derived from the Greek word meaning division used in verse 18: *σχισμα*.

<sup>105</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:33-34a.

<sup>106</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:25

<sup>107</sup> *οσακις αν*

<sup>108</sup> “It is rather so; in the early Church there are only two celebrations or services – the common meal, within the framework of which proclamation of the Word has always a place, and Baptism.” Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship*, p. 31.

<sup>109</sup> See above for the full citation.

<sup>110</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:1.

<sup>111</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:2. Perhaps we should call the contemporary free sex movement the Corinthian heresy!

<sup>112</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:4-5.

<sup>113</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:9.

<sup>114</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:6.

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- <sup>115</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7.
- <sup>116</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:11.
- <sup>117</sup> Colossians 3:5-6.
- <sup>118</sup> 1 Corinthians 5:7-8.
- <sup>119</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:17.
- <sup>120</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2.
- <sup>121</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24.
- <sup>122</sup> Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year*, p. 4.
- <sup>123</sup> *πάσχα* or transliterated into English “Pascha.” This is the older designation of what in English we call “Easter.”
- <sup>124</sup> Colossians 2:16-17.
- <sup>125</sup> The word Paul uses is *σῶμα*. This passage pictures the New Covenant in Christ as a body which has cast a shadow, the Old Covenant and its forms.
- <sup>126</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:1-13.
- <sup>127</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:15-16.
- <sup>128</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:9.
- <sup>129</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:18.
- <sup>130</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:19.
- <sup>131</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:20-22.
- <sup>132</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:15.
- <sup>133</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:17.
- <sup>134</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26.
- <sup>135</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2.
- <sup>136</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:33.
- <sup>137</sup> Revelation 3:20.
- <sup>138</sup> “Now when this epistle is read among you, see that it is read also in the church of the Laodiceans, and that you likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.” Colossians 4:16. cf., Colossians 2:1, 4:13, 15.
- <sup>139</sup> Revelation 3:19.
- <sup>140</sup> Malachi 1:7, 12.
- <sup>141</sup> It is also possible that “altar” is a metaphor for the crucifixion. On such an interpretation, the allusion to the Lord’s supper would remain since it was the supper by which believers ate of the sacrifice of Christ.
- <sup>142</sup> Hebrews 10:14.
- <sup>143</sup> Hebrews 13:13
- <sup>144</sup> *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*. p. 117.
- <sup>145</sup> The allusion, of course, is to the dictum that the rule of prayer is the rule of faith.
- <sup>146</sup> We may also point to baptism’s role as the fulfillment of circumcision in this regard (Colossians 2:11-12). The nature of circumcision also precluded its repetition except in the ironic sense of Philipians 3:2.
- <sup>147</sup> Chapter IV, Section A, Paragraph 2.
- <sup>148</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:26.
- <sup>149</sup> “Till he comes” is a foreshadowing of the theme he will deal with in chapter 15. Each of the references to the supper in 1 Corinthians anticipates an issue Paul will take up later. Both in chapter 5 (leaven of malice), and in chapter 10 (one bread, one body), Paul hints at the theme of unity he will develop in chapter 11.
- <sup>150</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:18-21; Ephesians 2:11-18.
- <sup>151</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:2.
- <sup>152</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:24.
- <sup>153</sup> *καταγγελλετε*
- <sup>154</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:1-3.
- <sup>155</sup> 1 Corinthians 9:14.
- <sup>156</sup> Paul uses *καταγγελλω* for the preaching of the gospel in Philipians 1:16, 18 and Colossians 1:28. The only other occurrence of the verb in Paul’s writings is Romans 1:8.
- <sup>157</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:1-5.

<sup>158</sup> It is an error to place a tension between a supposedly mournful Pauline Lord's supper and the joyous resurrection appearance meals in the synoptics. The Corinthians were not mournful. Some were a bit too joyous, as in "drunk!" And Paul does not counsel mournfulness but meaningfulness. He in effect says to the Corinthians "think about what you are doing, and do it right."

<sup>159</sup> *Larger Catechism* #168.

<sup>160</sup> *Larger Catechism* # 177. If the supper exhibits Christ as spiritual nourishment, it must first exhibit him as crucified and risen. The historical must undergird the metaphorical.

<sup>161</sup> Biblically speaking, if the people do not eat and drink, there is no proclamation of his death till he comes. From this perspective, all the branches of the church are in need of reform.

<sup>162</sup> *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chapter XXIX, Paragraphs II and VI.

<sup>163</sup> For example, the prayer "Holy Father... accept this unblemished sacrificial offering... so that it may save us" is anathema to the Reformed. Thompson, *Liturgies of the Western Church*, p. 65.

<sup>164</sup> τουτο ποιειτε εις την εμην αναμνησιν.

<sup>165</sup> οσακις αν πινητε

<sup>166</sup> The absence of such rubric-like phrases as "do this in my memory" does not support the current opinion that the accounts in Matthew and Mark reflect a liturgical usage in the communities from which those accounts supposedly arose. On the contrary, the form of the accounts in Matthew and Mark suggest a historical concern rather than a liturgical one. In contrast, Paul's version is clearly intended to re-establish a liturgical usage abused at Corinth. Luke's version reflects that liturgical pattern in the Pauline churches.

<sup>167</sup> A similar rendering can be found in *Springtime of the Liturgy*, p. 131.

<sup>168</sup> αναμνησις

<sup>169</sup> Hebrews 10:1-3.

<sup>170</sup> εις

<sup>171</sup> For example, see the usage of εις in Romans 1:5, 16.

<sup>172</sup> *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 101.

<sup>173</sup> *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 111.

<sup>174</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:26ff.

<sup>175</sup> *Larger Catechism* #168.

<sup>176</sup> Chapter XXIX, Paragraphs I and II.

<sup>177</sup> *Larger Catechism* #s 171, 174, 175.

<sup>178</sup> Exodus 12:14.

<sup>179</sup> Exodus 12:24-27.

<sup>180</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16.

<sup>181</sup> κοινωνια. This term transliterated into English as koinonia has become a commonplace of evangelical vocabulary.

<sup>182</sup> εις κοινωνιαν του υιου αυτου; 1 Corinthians 1:9.

<sup>183</sup> See for example Colossians 2:11-14, 3:1-4; Romans 6:1-11; and Ephesians 1:3-14. For an exposition of this theme in Paul see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., *The Centrality of the Resurrection: A Study in Paul's Soteriology*, and Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, pp. 57-64.

<sup>184</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 11.

<sup>185</sup> Commentary on 1 Corinthians 11:14 as quoted in *Calvin's Doctrine of the Word and Sacrament*, p. 151.

<sup>186</sup> Colossians 2:11-12.

<sup>187</sup> Romans 1:4, 4:24, 8:11, 2 Corinthians 4:14. See Gaffin, *The Centrality of the Resurrection*, pp. 62-66.

<sup>188</sup> Colossians 2:13-14.

<sup>189</sup> Romans 6:4-6.

<sup>190</sup> See *Larger Catechism* #s 65, 66, 69, 168.

<sup>191</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XXIX, Paragraph VI. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraphs 26ff.

<sup>192</sup> Cullmann, Oscar & Leenhardt, F.J., *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, p. 54.

<sup>193</sup> *Essays on the Lord's Supper*, p. 47.

<sup>194</sup> Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 107.

<sup>195</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 1.

<sup>196</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XXIX, Paragraph VII.

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- <sup>197</sup> John 6:51-58.
- <sup>198</sup> John 11:25, 14:6; 1 John 1:2, 5:20.
- <sup>199</sup> John 5:26.
- <sup>200</sup> John 1:4, 14.
- <sup>201</sup> John 6:51.
- <sup>202</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5.
- <sup>203</sup> No one in Christendom really disputes this. No church has ever taught that we receive Christ unto eternal life by a mere outward eating of the supper even if inwardly we do not believe.
- <sup>204</sup> John 6:28-33.
- <sup>205</sup> John 6:47-48.
- <sup>206</sup> John 6:57.
- <sup>207</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5.
- <sup>208</sup> *Larger Catechism* # 168.
- <sup>209</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5.
- <sup>210</sup> That this is not the case is probably the best explanation of why so many Reformed Christians are more Zwinglian than Reformed in their private views of the supper.
- <sup>211</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:17.
- <sup>212</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:13.
- <sup>213</sup> The practice of using cut up pieces of bread and little individual cups has nothing theological to offer us. But it is doubtful that this custom (which has no theological justification) can be changed to the use of an actual loaf and a common cup.
- <sup>214</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28-30.
- <sup>215</sup> The concern for worthy reception in the history of the Reformed churches has been dominated by the issue of individual immorality. What if a notoriously wicked person eats the supper? 1 Corinthians 11 has been used so often in that regard that the Reformed tend to forget that such an issue is not the focus of the passage. Eating in unity and love is the concern in 1 Corinthians 11. The issue of the unrepentant sharing in the supper was the concern of Paul in chapter 5.
- <sup>216</sup> Chapter XXIX, Paragraph 1.
- <sup>217</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XXIX, Paragraph 3; *Larger Catechism* #s 169 and 176.
- <sup>218</sup> *Westminster Confession*, Chapter XXVII, Paragraph 2.
- <sup>219</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16 NIV; The work “thanksgiving” translate ευλογια not ευχαριστια.
- <sup>220</sup> ευχαριστια.
- <sup>221</sup> Malachi 1:11.
- <sup>222</sup> Hebrews 13:15.
- <sup>223</sup> Old, *Guides to the Reformed Tradition: Worship*, p. 117.
- <sup>224</sup> 14:1.
- <sup>225</sup> 9:1.
- <sup>226</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Creeds of the Sixteenth Century*, p. 316.
- <sup>227</sup> Ronald S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of the Word and the Sacraments*, p. 140. The Calvin quotation imbedded in the above quotation is from his Commentary on Second Corinthians, 5:19.
- <sup>228</sup> Cochrane, *Reformed Creeds of the Sixteenth Century*, p. 318.
- <sup>229</sup> Chapter XXIX, paragraph I.
- <sup>230</sup> Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, p. 34.
- <sup>231</sup> Hageman, *Pulpit and Table*, p. 112.
- <sup>232</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 5.
- <sup>233</sup> *Institutes*, Book IV, Chapter XVII, Paragraph 46.