

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Systematic Theology Series

ECCLESIOLOGY

The Doctrine of the Church

One Body, One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism, One God and Father of All

UNIT 7: THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Covenant Meal of the New Community

Lesson 21

VIEWS OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Transubstantiation, Consubstantiation, Spiritual Presence, and Memorialism

The question is not whether Christ is present at His Table — He promised to be. The question is in what sense He is present, and whether that presence is in the elements themselves or in the Spirit's work among the gathered community of faith.

“For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. ...

Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them,

You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.”

Leviticus 11:44; 19:2, NASB 1995

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 10:16–17; Matthew 26:26–29; Hebrews 10:10–14; John 6:53–58, 63

“I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:15, NASB 1995

Dr. Joshua Nichols

Pastor, Theologian, Author

faithfultotheword.com

Introduction

Lesson 20 established the theological foundation of the Lord's Supper: its institution on the night of betrayal, the Passover context, the words of institution, and its four dimensions of meaning, memorial, proclamation, covenant fellowship, and means of grace. This lesson turns to the most contentious theological debate surrounding the Supper: the question of how Christ is present in the ordinance, and what happens, if anything, to the bread and cup when the words of institution are spoken over them. This debate has divided the Western church since the ninth century and has produced four major positions that continue to distinguish the great Christian traditions from one another: transubstantiation, consubstantiation, spiritual presence, and memorialism.

The question of Christ's presence in the Supper is not a merely academic debate about the metaphysics of bread and wine. It is a question with deep practical consequences for how the church understands the Supper's efficacy, who may administer it, what posture of reverence the elements themselves deserve, and what kind of spiritual encounter the believer may expect when she comes to the Table. The Roman Catholic who kneels before the reserved Eucharist in the tabernacle is not performing an act of empty religious theater; she is acting on the conviction that the glorified body of Christ is physically present in the consecrated host and that the reverence appropriate to that presence demands precisely such adoration. The Baptist who receives the bread and cup without any particular reverence for the elements themselves is acting on the conviction that the grace of the Supper is mediated by the Spirit through faith in the enacted memorial, not by any physical transformation of the elements. These are genuinely different practices rooted in genuinely different theologies, and the differences deserve the most careful engagement available to this series.

The lesson proceeds through the four major views in historical sequence, transubstantiation (the medieval Catholic position), consubstantiation (Luther's response), spiritual presence (Calvin's more nuanced Reformed alternative), and memorialism (the Zwinglian and broadly Baptist position). Each view is described with genuine accuracy and genuine charity before it is assessed against the exegetical and theological criteria that this series has consistently applied. The lesson then defends the position of this ministry: a robust memorialism that takes the Supper's spiritual significance far more seriously than the caricature of memorialism suggests, while insisting that the grace of the Supper is located in the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception rather than in any transformation of the physical elements.

The tone of this lesson is the tone of a family argument, the most serious and sustained argument in the family of the Protestant Reformation, between traditions that share the apostolic deposit at its center even as they disagree profoundly about the form in which the new covenant's covenant meal should be understood and celebrated. The Baptist's disagreement with the Roman Catholic position is more fundamental than the disagreement with the Lutheran or Reformed positions; but even the disagreement with Rome is a disagreement between those who confess the same Lord, read the same Bible, and claim the same crucified and risen Christ as the ground of their redemption. That shared foundation does not dissolve the disagreement; but it does require that the disagreement be engaged with the respect and the theological seriousness that genuine family arguments demand.

I. TRANSUBSTANTIATION

The Roman Catholic Teaching

A. The Doctrine Stated

Transubstantiation is the Roman Catholic teaching that, in the celebration of the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine is literally and completely transformed into the substance of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, while the accidents (the outward appearances, the sensory properties) of bread and wine remain unchanged. The doctrine was formally defined at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and was given its most systematic philosophical exposition by Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, who grounded the doctrine in Aristotelian metaphysics: the substance of a thing is what it really is, independent of its sensory properties; the accidents are the sensory properties that inhere in the substance. In transubstantiation, the substances of bread and wine are entirely replaced by the substance of Christ's body and blood, while the accidents of bread and wine remain, making the consecrated host look, taste, and feel like bread and wine while being, in its inner metaphysical reality, the body and blood of Christ.

The practical consequences of transubstantiation are extensive and define much of Catholic sacramental practice. Because the consecrated host is the actual body of Christ, it must be treated with the reverence appropriate to the physical presence of the second person of the Trinity: it must be reserved in a consecrated container (the tabernacle), adored by the faithful (the practice of Eucharistic adoration), carried in solemn procession (Corpus Christi), and distributed only by ordained priests whose ordination confers the authority to perform the consecration. The Mass is simultaneously the memorial of the Last Supper, the sacrificial re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, and the actual bodily presence of the glorified Christ in the gathered community. The Catholic understanding of the Mass as a sacrifice, a re-presentation of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, not a new sacrifice but a making-present of the same sacrifice across time, is the most theologically significant and most theologically controversial element of the transubstantiation doctrine.

The genuine pastoral concern that underlies transubstantiation deserves acknowledgment before its assessment. The Catholic tradition is seeking to honor the real presence of Christ at His Table, the genuine efficacy of the Supper as the covenant meal of the new community, and the depth of the connection between the Supper and the cross that Christ's own words of institution suggest. These are genuine and important concerns; the Baptist who dismisses transubstantiation as obviously absurd without engaging the pastoral and theological motivations that produced it has not done justice to the tradition's serious intent. The disagreement is about whether the Catholic account of how Christ is present and how the Supper is efficacious is faithful to the New Testament; it is not a disagreement about whether Christ's presence at His Table is real or whether the Supper has genuine significance for the covenant community.

B. Four Protestant Arguments Against Transubstantiation

The Protestant Reformation's rejection of transubstantiation rests on four converging arguments. The first and most immediate is that transubstantiation contradicts the evidence of the senses. The bread that has been consecrated looks, tastes, smells, and feels exactly like bread; the wine that has been consecrated looks, tastes, smells, and feels exactly like wine. If the substance of the bread has been entirely replaced by the substance of

Christ's body, the only evidence we have that the change has occurred is the authority of the Catholic Church's definition and the authority of the priest's consecration. The Protestant appeal to the reliability of sense perception as a ground of theological judgment is not an anti-miraculous skepticism; it is an appeal to the criterion by which the Gospels themselves establish the reality of the resurrection (the disciples saw, touched, and ate with the risen Lord). The appeal to miracle to explain the discrepancy between the doctrine and the evidence of the senses requires an authority more compelling than the Church's definition.

The second argument is that transubstantiation requires an Aristotelian metaphysical framework, the substance-accident distinction, that is foreign to Scripture. The Bible does not use the categories of Aristotelian metaphysics to describe the nature of physical objects; the substance-accident distinction is a philosophical construct imported into biblical interpretation from the dominant intellectual framework of the thirteenth century. The Protestant objection is not that Aristotle was entirely wrong, but that a doctrine of the Lord's Supper that depends for its coherence on Aristotelian metaphysics has placed itself in a framework that the biblical authors themselves did not use and would not have recognized. When the philosophical framework is removed, the doctrine collapses, which suggests that the doctrine is grounded in the philosophy rather than in the Scripture.

The third and most decisive argument is that transubstantiation, understood as a sacrificial re-presentation of Christ's death, contradicts the once-for-all sufficiency of the cross that Hebrews 10:10-14 establishes with comprehensive clarity: 'By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.' The language of Hebrews is exhaustive: once for all, one offering, perfected for all time. The cross is not a sacrifice that requires perpetual re-presentation to sustain its efficacy; it is the final, complete, sufficient sacrifice that has accomplished everything required for the sanctification of all who are sanctified. The Mass, understood as a re-presentation of the sacrifice of Calvary, does not honor the cross's sufficiency; it implicitly questions it. The Catholic would respond that the Mass is not a new sacrifice but a making-present of the same once-for-all sacrifice; the Protestant responds that this distinction, however theologically refined, still attaches the efficacy of the Mass's grace to the performance of a priestly act rather than to the once-for-all finished work of Christ.

The fourth argument is that the language of institution is plainly figurative. When Jesus says 'This is My body,' He is present at the table in His own physical body, holding the bread, speaking to disciples who can see His body and hear His voice. The bread is not His body in any literal sense at the moment He speaks those words; it represents His body, which is about to be broken. The figurative reading is not a minimizing of the words; it is the reading that takes the physical context of the institution seriously. The same figure of speech ('is' meaning 'represents') is a common feature of Jesus' speech throughout the Gospels: 'I am the door' (John 10:9); 'I am the vine' (John 15:1); 'I am the bread of life' (John 6:35). None of these statements is taken literally; all of them are understood as the richest figurative identifications of Jesus with the realities He names. The words of institution belong in this pattern, not in a category of their own that requires a unique literal reading.

II. CONSUBSTANTIATION

Luther's Doctrine of Sacramental Union

A. Luther's Position Stated

Martin Luther's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is one of the most theologically creative and most historically consequential positions in the Reformation era, and it remains a living tradition in confessional Lutheranism. Luther rejected transubstantiation's Aristotelian substance-accident metaphysics, but he insisted with equal force on the literal reading of 'This is My body.' For Luther, the integrity of Scripture required that Christ's words mean what they plainly say: 'This is My body.' Luther's own image for the relationship between the bread and Christ's body was the union of iron and fire in a heated iron rod: the iron and the fire are not identical, but they are genuinely united, so that the heated iron is both iron and fire simultaneously. Similarly, in the consecrated host, the bread and Christ's body are genuinely united, so that what is received is both bread and the true body and blood of Christ.

Luther's doctrine is sometimes called 'consubstantiation', a term Luther himself did not use and that his followers often resist, or, more accurately, 'sacramental union': the bread and body of Christ are in a genuine sacramental union, so that wherever the bread is, the body of Christ is also present, 'in, with, and under' the elements. Luther grounded this insistence on the ubiquity of Christ's glorified human nature: because Christ's glorified body shares in the divine attribute of omnipresence (ubiquity), His body can be genuinely present wherever the Supper is celebrated. This is a theologically significant move: Luther's Eucharistic theology depends on a distinctive Christology, the communication of the divine attribute of omnipresence to the human nature of Christ, that the Reformed tradition rejected as a confusion of the two natures.

The Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper is preserved in the Lutheran confessions, specifically the Augsburg Confession (1530), the Apology of the Augsburg Confession, and the Formula of Concord (1577), and continues to define confessional Lutheranism's understanding and practice of the Supper. The Lutheran Eucharist is not identical to the Catholic Mass: there is no transubstantiation, no priestly sacrifice, no reserved sacrament for adoration. But there is a genuine real presence of Christ's body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, received by all who eat and drink, believers to their benefit and unbelievers to their condemnation. The Lutheran tradition takes the words of institution with a literalness that the Reformed and Baptist traditions resist, and it produces a practice of the Supper that honors the genuine spiritual weight of the elements as the genuine vehicles of Christ's body and blood.

B. The Baptist's Assessment of Consubstantiation

The Baptist's assessment of Luther's doctrine begins with genuine respect for the theological seriousness and the pastoral concern that motivate it. Luther was not simply being obstinate in his insistence on the literal reading of 'This is My body'; he was insisting on what he believed was the plain sense of Scripture against the rational harmonizations that his Reformed interlocutors were proposing. The famous story of Luther at the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, carving 'Hoc est corpus meum' (This is My body) into the table and covering it, then uncovering it at the crucial moment of the debate to insist on the plain text, captures the genuine theological conviction of a man who believed the Scripture said what it said and would not be explained away by philosophical finesse.

The Baptist's specific objections to consubstantiation focus on two points. The first is the Christological move required to sustain it: the communication of the divine attribute of ubiquity to Christ's glorified human nature. The New Testament's account of the ascension, that the bodily risen Christ was taken up into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father (Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12), establishes the glorified human nature of Christ as spatially located at the Father's right hand, not ubiquitous throughout creation. If Christ's human nature is specifically located at the Father's right hand, it cannot simultaneously be physically present in every Eucharist

celebrated in every church across the world. The communication of divine attributes to the human nature in the specific form Luther requires confuses the two natures in a way that the Reformed tradition identified as a return to the Eutychian error.

The second objection concerns the exegetical case for the literal reading. The Baptist and Reformed traditions agree in resisting Luther's literal reading of 'This is My body' on the grounds that the figurative reading is both contextually appropriate and consistent with Jesus' consistent use of the same grammatical construction in figurative senses throughout the Gospels. The Baptist goes further than the Reformed tradition in resisting any real presence in the elements; but on the specific question of the figurative reading, both traditions share the same exegetical judgment against Luther's literalism. The Baptist also notes that Jesus' further words, 'Do this in remembrance of Me', function as an interpretive key to the Supper's primary character: not the physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements, but the memorial and proclamation of the death that established the covenant. If Christ had intended to establish the Supper primarily as the vehicle of His real physical presence, the memorial language of verse 24-25 would be at best a strange emphasis.

III. SPIRITUAL PRESENCE

Calvin's Reformed Alternative

A. Calvin's Position Stated

John Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper represents the most theologically sophisticated Protestant account of the Supper's spiritual efficacy, and it occupies the position between Luther's real physical presence and Zwingli's pure memorialism that has defined the mainstream Reformed tradition from the sixteenth century to the present. Calvin agreed with Luther that the Supper is a genuine means of grace and that the believer truly feeds on Christ in the Supper; he disagreed with Luther about the mode of that feeding. For Calvin, Christ is not physically present in the elements; His glorified human body is at the right hand of the Father, as the Ascension establishes, and it cannot be simultaneously present in the physical substance of bread and wine. But Christ is genuinely and spiritually present by the power of the Holy Spirit, who lifts the believer's heart to the ascended Christ and enables her to feed on His body and blood by faith.

Calvin's formula is: the Spirit bridges the spatial distance between the believer and the ascended Christ. The body and blood of Christ are in heaven, at the Father's right hand; the believing community is on earth, gathered around the Table. The Spirit, who is not confined by spatial distance, lifts the believer's heart upward (*sursum corda*, the ancient liturgical invitation 'Lift up your hearts') to the ascended Christ and communicates to the believer the genuine nourishment of the body and blood given for her salvation. The physical elements on the Table are not mere symbols of an absent Christ; they are the Spirit's instruments for communicating the genuine presence of the ascended Christ to the believing heart. The believer truly feeds on Christ, not physically, because Christ's body is not in the elements, but spiritually and really, because the Spirit uses the enacted memorial to create the genuine communion between the believer and the ascended Lord.

Calvin's position is preserved in the Reformed confessions, the Westminster Confession (Chapter 29), the Heidelberg Catechism (Questions 75-80), and the Second Helvetic Confession (Chapter 21), and continues to define the mainstream Presbyterian and Reformed tradition's understanding and practice of the Supper. The

Reformed Supper is a high and solemn act: the elements are received with genuine reverence, the Spirit's work in the Supper is taken seriously as a genuine means of grace, and the believer's communion with Christ in the Supper is understood as a genuine spiritual reality rather than a mere commemorative gesture. The Reformed tradition's understanding of the Supper is far more robust than the caricature of memorialism that critics sometimes attribute to the broadly Protestant wing, and it deserves to be engaged on its own terms.

B. The Baptist's Assessment of Spiritual Presence

The Baptist's assessment of Calvin's position is the most nuanced of the four assessments in this lesson, because the spiritual presence doctrine is closer to the robust memorialism that this ministry holds than either transubstantiation or consubstantiation. Both the Calvinist and the Baptist agree that the grace of the Supper is not located in the physical substance of the elements, that the mode of Christ's presence in the Supper is spiritual rather than physical, and that the Supper is a genuine means of grace through which the Spirit works to nourish the believer's communion with the ascended Christ. The specific disagreement is about the locus of the Spirit's work: does the Spirit work through the elements as the specific vehicles of the spiritual feeding, or does the Spirit work through the act of faith-engaged reception in the enacted memorial?

The Baptist's concern about the spiritual presence doctrine is that it retains too close a connection between the Spirit's work and the physical elements, a connection that the New Testament's own account of the Supper does not specifically establish. The Reformed doctrine speaks of the elements as the Spirit's instruments for communicating Christ's presence; the Baptist prefers to speak of the Spirit's work through the whole act of faith-engaged participation in the covenant memorial. The distinction is subtle but theologically significant: in the spiritual presence doctrine, the elements have a specific instrumental role in the Spirit's communication of Christ's presence that they do not have in the memorialist account; in the memorialist account, the elements are the signs whose symbolic content is declared in the act of remembrance, and the Spirit's grace is located in the whole act of believing reception rather than specifically in the elements as its vehicles.

The Baptist also notes a practical concern about the spiritual presence doctrine: the tendency toward an inadvertent elevation of the elements that the doctrine's logic can produce. If the elements are the specific instruments through which the Spirit communicates the presence of the ascended Christ, the elements themselves take on a significance that can generate the kind of elemental reverence that the transubstantiation doctrine produces in a more extreme form. The Baptist's concern is not that Christ's presence at His Table is insufficiently honored in the spiritual presence doctrine, it is genuinely and richly honored there, but that the specific identification of the elements as the Spirit's instruments for communicating that presence creates a theological trajectory that the Baptist reads as moving in the direction of the element-focused piety that the New Testament's emphasis on 'Do this in remembrance of Me' is specifically designed to redirect toward the event the elements represent.

IV. MEMORIALISM

Zwingli, the Baptists, and the Robust Memorial

A. The Memorialist Position Stated

Memorialism, in its original Zwinglian form, is the position that the Lord's Supper is primarily a memorial of Christ's death, that the elements are symbols, and that the Supper's value lies in the act of corporate remembrance rather than in any spiritual transformation of the elements or any specific instrumentality of the elements in communicating Christ's presence. Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer who developed this position in opposition to Luther in the late 1520s, insisted that the words of institution must be read figuratively, 'This is My body' means 'This represents My body', and that the Supper is essentially a pledge of faith, a public declaration by the believing community that it trusts in the body and blood of Christ for its salvation.

Zwingli's position has often been caricatured as a bare, spiritually thin symbolism that reduces the Supper to an empty ceremony. The caricature is unfair to Zwingli, who understood the Supper as a significant public covenant act of the community; but it is fair to say that some expressions of memorialism in the broader evangelical tradition have reduced the Supper to something very close to this caricature: a brief, perfunctory observance that reminds the believer that Jesus died, then moves quickly to the next item on the worship service's agenda. This reductive form of memorialism is not what the Baptist tradition at its best has taught or practiced, and it is emphatically not the position of this ministry.

The Baptist tradition has generally held a form of memorialism, but the specifically Reformed Baptist tradition has typically held a more robust form than Zwingli's pure symbolism. The 1689 Confession's formulation is precise and theologically substantive: 'worthy receivers are not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.' The reception is by faith; the nourishment is spiritual and real; the benefit is genuine growth in grace. This is not the thin memorialism of a bare symbolic gesture; it is the rich memorialism of a covenant community that receives genuine spiritual nourishment through the Spirit's work in the act of faith-engaged participation in the enacted memorial. The distinction between this position and Calvin's spiritual presence doctrine is subtle but real: the 1689 places the nourishment in the receiving by faith, while Calvin places it in the Spirit's communication through the elements.

B. The Position of This Ministry: Robust Memorialism

The position of this ministry is the robust memorialism that the 1689 Confession describes: the Lord's Supper is a memorial, the anamnesis of the covenant community's regular, active, covenant-renewal re-appropriation of the death of Christ, that is also a proclamation, a covenant renewal, and a genuine means of grace. The elements are signs, not sacraments: the bread and cup represent the body and blood of Christ, they do not contain them. The grace of the Supper is located in the Spirit's work through the whole act of faith-engaged reception, through the believing community's active engagement with what the enacted memorial represents, not in any physical transformation of the elements or in the elements as specific instrumental vehicles of Christ's presence.

The 'robust' in robust memorialism is the critical qualifier. This position is not the bare, thin memorialism that reduces the Supper to a quarterly religious reminder that Jesus died. It is the theologically full, spiritually serious, pastorally intentional memorialism that Lesson 20 described across four dimensions: a genuine memorial (the anamnesis of the covenant community's active re-appropriation of the cross's continuing significance), a genuine proclamation (the visible sermon of the Lord's death until He comes), a genuine covenant fellowship (the koinonia of the community's shared participation in the body and blood of Christ), and a genuine means of grace (the Spirit's real work through faith-engaged reception to strengthen faith, deepen communion, renew covenant commitment, and nourish the soul). Every one of these dimensions is affirmed, valued, and practically honored.

What is denied is only that the grace of the Supper is communicated through the physical substance of the elements rather than through the Spirit's work in the whole act of faith-engaged covenantal remembrance.

The practical application of robust memorialism is that the congregation's engagement with the Supper should be the opposite of thin and perfunctory. The memorialist who comes to the Table with genuine preparation, genuine self-examination, genuine engagement with the memorial's content, and genuine expectation that the Spirit will work in the act of remembrance to strengthen faith and deepen communion with Christ is a memorialist who is drawing on the full range of the Supper's grace. The memorialist who comes routinely, without preparation, without engagement, and without expectation is not practicing robust memorialism; she is practicing the thin memorialism that the caricature describes. The position of this ministry calls the congregation to the robust form: to take the Supper as seriously as the covenant memorial of the new covenant community deserves to be taken, to prepare for it with the theological depth that its meaning requires, and to receive it with the faith-engaged attention that the Spirit uses to produce its genuine benefits.

V. THE EXEGETICAL CASE FOR MEMORIALISM

The Texts Examined

A. The Words of Institution Revisited

The exegetical case for the memorialist reading of the Supper begins where the debate has always begun: the words of institution. 'This is My body... This is My blood of the covenant.' The Baptist, following both Zwingli and Calvin against Luther, reads these words as figurative: the bread represents My body; the cup represents My blood of the covenant. The exegetical arguments for the figurative reading are multiple and mutually reinforcing. First, the physical presence of Jesus' intact body at the moment of institution makes the literal reading impossible as a description of what was happening at the moment: the bread in His hands was not His body; it was the sign of the body about to be broken. Second, Jesus' consistent use of the same grammatical construction in figurative senses throughout His teaching establishes the figurative reading as the default for this specific pattern: 'I am the door,' 'I am the vine,' 'I am the bread of life.' Third, the memorial language ('Do this in remembrance of Me') functions as a contextual interpretive key: memorials are signs of absent realities, not the realities themselves. 'In remembrance of Me' points away from the physical presence of Christ in the elements and toward the enacted memorial of the historical event the elements represent.

The most important single text for the memorialist reading of the Supper is 1 Corinthians 11:26: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.' Three exegetical features of this verse support the memorialist position. First, Paul continues to call the elements 'bread' and 'cup' after the words of institution have been cited in verses 23-25, if the elements had been transformed into Christ's body and blood in the institution, it would be incoherent to continue to refer to them as 'bread' and 'cup.' Second, the proclamation language, 'you proclaim', treats the Supper as a declarative act of the community, not as the reception of Christ's physical body and blood from the priest. Third, the 'until He comes' establishes the Supper's eschatological character as the covenant community's anticipation of the Lord's return, an anticipation that makes most sense if the Lord is currently absent in His physical body (at the Father's right hand) and will be physically present only at His return.

Hebrews 10:10-14 provides the most theologically comprehensive argument against any interpretation of the Supper that requires the ongoing sacrifice or the ongoing physical presence of Christ's body in the ordinance: 'By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.' The exhaustive language, once for all, one offering, perfected for all time, establishes the absolute sufficiency and finality of the cross. The cross is not supplemented by the Mass, not extended by the Eucharist, and not re-presented in any sense that requires a further priestly act for its efficacy. The Supper proclaims the once-for-all sacrifice; it does not re-present it, extend it, or require a priestly mediation for its benefits. The benefits of the cross are received by faith; the Supper enacts and declares the same faith that receives them.

B. John 6:53-63 and the Spiritual Feeding

John 6:53-58 presents the most extended New Testament text about feeding on Christ: 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.' These words have been used by the Catholic and Lutheran traditions to support the real presence doctrine: Jesus says that eating His flesh and drinking His blood is necessary for eternal life; therefore, the Supper, in which His flesh and blood are truly present, is the primary means by which the believer receives eternal life. The memorialist responds with John 6:63: 'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.' The Spirit gives life; the flesh profits nothing. Jesus explicitly disambiguates the feeding of John 6:53-58: the 'eating' that gives eternal life is not the physical consumption of flesh but the spiritual reception of the words that are spirit and life, which is to say: the faith that receives Christ as the bread of life (verse 35).

The context of John 6 further supports the memorialist's reading: the discourse is not primarily about the Lord's Supper at all. It is addressed to a crowd that has just eaten miraculously multiplied physical loaves and is seeking Jesus for more physical bread (verse 26). Jesus redirects them from the physical bread to Himself as the true bread of life (verse 35), and the 'eating' He describes throughout the discourse is the metaphorical eating of faith, the personal appropriation of Christ as the ground of the believer's life. The crowd's response in verse 52 ('How can this man give us His flesh to eat?') and Jesus' response in verse 63 ('the flesh profits nothing') both confirm that Jesus is not speaking of physical consumption but of spiritual reception. The application of John 6 to the Lord's Supper through the real presence doctrine imports into the discourse a physical-presence claim that John 6:63 specifically forecloses.

The memorialist's position on John 6 is that the discourse provides the spiritual-feeding background for the Supper's grace dimension without providing the real-presence doctrine. The spiritual nourishment that the Supper provides is real, the Spirit works through the act of faith-engaged reception to strengthen the believer's trust in Christ, the true bread of life, but it is the nourishment of faith receiving Christ through the Spirit's work, not the nourishment of physically consuming Christ's flesh and blood in the elements. The grace of John 6 and the grace of the Supper are the same grace; they are both produced by the Spirit through faith; and neither requires the physical presence of Christ's body and blood in the elements to be genuine and effectual.

VI. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ROBUST MEMORIALISM

How Theology Shapes the Table

A. *What Robust Memorialism Requires of the Congregation*

The position this ministry holds, robust memorialism, carries specific practical implications for how the congregation prepares for, administers, and receives the Lord's Supper. The first implication is that the quality of the congregation's Supper observance depends entirely on the quality of the faith-engaged participation it brings to the Table, not on the physical transformation of the elements. In the sacramental traditions, the efficacy of the Supper has an objective dimension that is independent of the recipient's faith: the grace is in the elements, or is communicated through the elements, in a way that does not depend on the quality of the recipient's engagement. In robust memorialism, the efficacy of the Supper is entirely faith-mediated: the Supper is as nourishing as the faith with which it is received. This is not a deficiency of the memorialist position; it is a theologically important insistence that the Spirit works through faith, not through the physical substance of food and drink.

The second practical implication is the importance of theological preparation for every observance. If the Supper's grace is mediated through faith-engaged reception, then the congregation's preparation for the Supper is the primary determinant of its spiritual quality. The congregation that comes to the Table after careful preparation, after prayer, after self-examination, after meditation on the death of Christ and its meaning for the covenant community, is a congregation that is positioned to receive the full grace of the Supper. The congregation that comes routinely, without preparation, without attention to what is happening, is a congregation that is eating bread and drinking wine without drawing on the ordinance's grace. The pastoral exhortation to prepare for the Supper is not a Catholic-influenced elevation of the elements; it is a memorialist insistence on the quality of the faith that the Spirit uses to produce the Supper's benefits.

The third practical implication is the importance of the explanation and pastoral word that precedes the administration of the elements. In a sacramental framework, the elements do the theological work; the priest's words of consecration activate the sacramental machinery. In robust memorialism, the elements are signs whose meaning must be declared and received by faith; the pastoral explanation that connects the bread and cup to the death of Christ, the new covenant, the eschatological anticipation, and the covenant koinonia is not a preliminary to the real act but the teaching dimension of the visible sermon's administration. The preacher who prepares carefully for the audible sermon should prepare with equal care for the visible sermon of the Lord's Supper; the congregation that is theologically formed by both proclamations is a congregation that is receiving the full benefit of the means of grace that Christ appointed for its formation.

B. *Reverence, Joy, and the Character of Memorialist Worship*

The memorialist position is sometimes caricatured as producing a Supper that is observed without reverence, a casual, low-ceremony affair that lacks the solemnity appropriate to the covenant meal of the new community. The caricature is sometimes accurate; the thin memorialism of some evangelical practice is indeed too casual, too brief, and too theologically shallow to honor the Supper's full significance. But the robust memorialism that this ministry holds is not a low-ceremony, theologically thin affair; it is a high-meaning, high-engagement observance

that honors the full theological weight of the ordinance precisely because it insists on the faith-engaged reception through which that weight is received.

The reverence appropriate to the Lord's Supper in a memorialist framework is not the physical reverence that the real presence doctrine requires, kneeling before the elements, adoring the reserved host, treating the bread and cup as the physical body and blood of Christ. It is the covenantal reverence of a community that knows what it is doing and why: that it is gathering to proclaim the death of Jesus Christ, to renew the covenant that His death established, to commune with the Lord who promised to be present wherever two or three are gathered in His name, and to anticipate the feast at which He will receive His community as His own. This covenantal reverence produces a Supper that is at once deeply serious and genuinely joyful, the combination of weight and gladness that the covenant community owes to the Table of the Lord who purchased it.

The practical goal for this congregation's observance of the Lord's Supper is the Supper that Calvin's phrase most evocatively describes, though the Baptist arrives there by a slightly different theological route: a Supper in which the congregation's heart is genuinely lifted up to the ascended Christ, in which the Spirit is genuinely at work in the act of faith-engaged reception, and in which the bread and cup are received as the signs of the body and blood that purchased the covenant under which the community gathers. Whether one arrives at this quality of Supper observance through the Reformed doctrine of spiritual presence or through the Baptist doctrine of robust memorialism, the practical experience of genuine spiritual benefit, genuine communion with Christ, and genuine covenant renewal at the Table is the experience that both traditions seek and that the Spirit genuinely provides to the faith-engaged community gathered in the Lord's name.

VII. CHARITABLE ENGAGEMENT AND FIRM CONVICTION

The Supper Debate in the Family of Faith

A. *What the Traditions Share*

The four traditions described in this lesson share more than their differences suggest. All four confess that the Lord's Supper was instituted by Christ on the night of His betrayal; all four understand the Supper as a memorial of His death; all four connect the Supper to the new covenant established in His blood; all four acknowledge the Supper as the covenant community's regular act of corporate worship; and all four, including the Catholic tradition, for all its theological divergence from the others, confess that the Supper was instituted by the Lord who died and rose again for the salvation of sinners. These shared convictions are the foundation from which the family argument proceeds; they are the ground of the genuine respect and genuine charity that the argument deserves, even in its most vigorous forms.

The specific distinction that separates the Baptist's robust memorialism from the three traditions that acknowledge some form of real presence or instrumental efficacy in the elements is a distinction that the Baptist holds with genuine conviction and genuine exegetical confidence. The Baptist is not uncertain about whether the figurative reading is correct, whether Hebrews 10's once-for-all language forecloses the sacrificial re-presentation of the Mass, or whether John 6:63's 'the flesh profits nothing' applies to the real presence doctrine. The Baptist has reached his position through careful attention to the biblical evidence and through genuine engagement with

the alternative traditions, and the position he holds is the position he holds because he believes it is most faithful to the whole counsel of God.

At the same time, the Baptist recognizes that the Reformed Christian who holds the spiritual presence doctrine, the Lutheran who holds the sacramental union doctrine, and even the Catholic who holds transubstantiation are all, in different ways and with different degrees of faithfulness to the New Testament, seeking to honor the genuine significance of the Supper and the genuine presence of Christ at His Table. The specific form in which that presence is understood differs, and the Baptist holds his own form with conviction, but the underlying desire to honor Christ at His Table is a desire the Baptist shares with all of them. The Lord's Supper is the covenant community's most theologically charged regular act; the fact that it has produced the most sustained theological controversy in the history of Christianity is itself testimony to the weight of theological significance it carries.

B. The Supper as the Gift of the Lord Who Instituted It

The lesson closes with the conviction that the Lord's Supper, understood as the Baptist understands it, observed as the Baptist observes it, and received with the faith and the theological engagement that this ministry calls for, is one of the greatest gifts that the risen Lord has given to His church. The bread and the cup that the community shares week by week or month by month are the enacted declaration that the community's entire existence is grounded in the death of the One who gave His body and shed His blood for its sake; that the covenant under which it gathers is the new covenant in His blood; that the Lord whose death it proclaims is the Lord who will come again to receive it as His own; and that the Spirit who works in the act of faith-engaged reception is the Spirit of the risen Christ, who is present among His people wherever two or three are gathered in His name.

The practical exhortation of this lesson is the same exhortation that the robust memorialist position always carries: come to the Table with the faith and the preparation that the Supper's significance requires. Come having examined yourself, having renewed your covenant commitment, having engaged with the death of Christ that the bread and cup represent. Come expecting the Spirit to work, not in the elements, but in the act of faith-engaged reception, to strengthen your faith, deepen your communion with the ascended Christ, and renew your commitment to the covenant community that shares the one bread and the one cup with you. Come as a member of the new covenant community that proclaims the Lord's death until He comes, and as one who genuinely longs for the coming that makes the proclamation unnecessary, the coming of the Lord at whose Table you now sit, and at whose eschatological feast you will one day sit forever.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

1 Corinthians 11:26, NASB 1995

Theological Terms and Definitions

Transubstantiation	The Roman Catholic doctrine that in the celebration of the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine is literally transformed into the substance of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, while the accidents (sensory properties) remain unchanged. Defined at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215); systematized by Thomas Aquinas using Aristotelian metaphysics. Rejected by Protestants on four grounds: it contradicts sense perception; it requires extra-biblical Aristotelian categories; it conflicts with Hebrews 10's once-for-all sacrifice; and the language of institution is figurative.
Mass	The Roman Catholic term for the Eucharistic celebration, understood as both the memorial of the Last Supper and the sacrificial re-presentation of the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The Catholic distinction between a new sacrifice and a making-present of the same sacrifice is the most theologically significant element of Catholic Eucharistic theology. Protestant objection: Hebrews 10:10-14's exhaustive once-for-all language forecloses any priestly act that attaches ongoing efficacy to a performance of the Supper rather than to the finished work of Christ.
Consubstantiation	A term (not used by Luther himself) for Luther's doctrine of sacramental union: the bread and wine remain bread and wine in the Supper, but Christ's body and blood are genuinely present 'in, with, and under' the elements. Grounded in Luther's literal reading of 'This is My body' and in a distinctive Christology (the glorified human nature shares the divine attribute of ubiquity). Reformed objection: the ascension establishes Christ's human body as specifically located at the Father's right hand, not ubiquitous; the glorified human nature cannot be simultaneously present in every Eucharist worldwide.
Spiritual Presence	Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper: Christ is not physically present in the elements, but He is genuinely and spiritually present by the power of the Holy Spirit, who lifts the believer's heart to the ascended Christ (<i>sursum corda</i>) and enables her to feed on His body and blood by faith. The Spirit bridges the spatial distance between the earthly community and the ascended Christ. More robust than Zwinglian memorialism; less physical than Lutheran or Catholic real presence. Preserved in the Westminster Confession (Ch. 29), Heidelberg Catechism (Q. 75-80), and Reformed confessional tradition.
Memorialism	The position, originating with Zwingli and broadly held by Baptists, that the Lord's Supper is primarily a memorial of Christ's death, that the elements are symbols, and that the Supper's value lies in the act of corporate remembrance rather than in any physical transformation of the elements or any specific instrumental role of the elements in communicating Christ's presence. Distinguished from the sacramental traditions by locating the grace in the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception rather than in the elements themselves.
Robust Memorialism	The position of this ministry: a theologically full and spiritually serious memorialism that affirms the genuine significance of the Supper across all four dimensions (memorial, proclamation, covenant fellowship, means of grace) without locating Christ's presence in the physical elements. The 1689 Confession's formulation: worthy receivers are 'by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.' Contrasted with thin memorialism (bare symbolic gesture) by its insistence on faith-engaged preparation, theological depth, and expectation of genuine spiritual benefit.
Sacramental Union	Luther's preferred term for his doctrine of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper: the bread and body of Christ are in a genuine sacramental union, so that wherever the bread is, the body of Christ is also present. Distinguished from transubstantiation (no transformation of the elements' substance) and from spatial presence (the body is not enclosed in or confined

	to the elements) by the category of sacramental union. Grounded in Luther's insistence on the literal reading of 'This is My body' and in his doctrine of Christ's glorified body's ubiquity.
Sursum Corda	Latin for 'Lift up your hearts,' the ancient liturgical invitation that precedes the Eucharistic prayer in many traditions. Central to Calvin's doctrine of spiritual presence: the Supper's grace is received not by the descent of Christ's body into the elements but by the ascent of the believer's heart to the ascended Christ, facilitated by the Holy Spirit. The phrase captures the direction of the Supper's spiritual movement in Calvin's account: upward to the ascended Lord, not downward into the physical elements.
Eucharistic Adoration	The Catholic practice of adoring the reserved consecrated host outside of Mass, based on the transubstantiation doctrine that the physical body of Christ is genuinely present in the consecrated bread. Includes the practice of Benediction (blessing with the reserved host), Corpus Christi processions, and extended periods of silent adoration before the tabernacle. Protestant objection: if the elements have not been transformed into the physical body of Christ, the adoration is directed at bread, not at Christ. The practice presupposes and expresses transubstantiation.
Hebrews 10:10-14	The most comprehensive New Testament statement of the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice: 'By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.' The exhaustive language (once for all, one offering, perfected for all time) is the primary Protestant argument against the Mass as a sacrificial re-presentation and against any view of the Supper that requires ongoing priestly mediation or attachment of efficacy to the performance of the ordinance rather than to the finished work of Christ.
John 6:63	Jesus' interpretive key to the John 6 bread-of-life discourse: 'It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.' The verse establishes that the 'eating' of John 6:53-58 (eating Christ's flesh, drinking His blood) is spiritual reception by faith, not physical consumption. The flesh profits nothing, physical eating of Christ's literal flesh would accomplish nothing spiritually. The memorialist uses this verse to foreclose the real presence doctrine's application of John 6 to the Lord's Supper: the nourishment John 6 describes is produced by the Spirit through faith, not by physical consumption.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the question of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper is a genuine and important theological question that has been answered differently by serious, Scripture-reading Christians across the traditions of the Western church. The differences are real, they have practical consequences, and they deserve the theological seriousness that this lesson has attempted to bring to them. The Baptist who has not seriously engaged the question of Christ's presence in the Supper, who simply assumes that memorialism is correct without engaging the genuine exegetical and theological arguments on all sides, has not done justice to the significance of the question or to the seriousness of the traditions that hold alternative positions.

We must believe that the robust memorialism this ministry holds is the most faithful available reading of the New Testament's account of the Lord's Supper. The figurative reading of the words of institution, the memorial character of the anamnesis, the once-for-all sufficiency of the cross against the sacrificial re-presentation doctrine, and John 6:63's 'the flesh profits nothing' all converge on the memorialist position. The Baptist holds this position with genuine exegetical conviction, not merely as an inherited tradition, and is prepared to defend it with the theological seriousness that the exegetical case warrants.

We must believe that the genuine spiritual significance of the Supper, its character as a means of grace, is fully honored by the robust memorialist position. The Supper is not thin, empty, or spiritually insignificant in the memorialist account; it is genuinely nourishing, genuinely grace-producing, and genuinely formative of the covenant community, through the Spirit's work in the act of faith-engaged reception. The congregation that receives the Supper with the theological preparation and the faith-engaged attention that this ministry calls for is a congregation that is drawing on the full range of the Supper's genuine spiritual benefit.

B. For the Heart: What Must We Feel and Desire?

We should feel a renewed sense of the spiritual seriousness with which the Lord's Supper should be approached. The lesson has surveyed four traditions, all of which insist in different ways on the genuine significance of the Supper; the robust memorialist position insists on that significance as emphatically as any of them, while locating the significance in the right place, in the Spirit's work through faith, not in the physical substance of the elements. Let the survey of the traditions deepen the congregation's own appreciation for the significance of the act it regularly performs, even as it confirms the specific theological account of that significance that this ministry holds.

We should feel a genuine desire to receive the Lord's Supper with the quality of faith-engaged attention that the robust memorialist position requires. If the grace of the Supper is mediated through faith, then the quality of our faith-engagement at the Table is the primary determinant of the spiritual benefit we receive. The exhortation is simple and practical: come prepared, come attentive, come expecting the Spirit to work. The theology of robust memorialism demands exactly the kind of engaged, expectant, covenantally serious reception that the Supper was designed to produce.

We should desire for this congregation's practice of the Lord's Supper to reflect the theological depth of the robust memorialist position in every dimension of its observance: the preparation of the congregation, the explanation that precedes the administration, the mode of reception, and the spirit of covenant renewal and eschatological anticipation that the Supper's full meaning requires. The congregation that practices robust memorialism with

theological seriousness and pastoral joy is a congregation that honors the ordinance as fully as any tradition that observes it.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Before the next Lord's Supper observance, read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11:17-34 together as the most sustained Pauline treatment of the Supper's significance and its abuse. Note the serious warning of verses 27-30 alongside the positive account of the Supper's koinonia in 10:16-17. Let both passages shape your approach: the Supper is serious enough to produce judgment when received unworthily; it is rich enough to produce genuine spiritual nourishment when received with faith.
- Read Hebrews 10:1-18 this week as the most comprehensive New Testament statement of the once-for-all sufficiency of Christ's sacrifice. Note the contrast between the old covenant's repeated sacrifices (verses 1-4, 11) and Christ's single offering (verses 10, 12, 14). How does this passage inform your understanding of the Lord's Supper as a memorial and proclamation of the once-for-all sacrifice, rather than a re-presentation of it? Bring one specific insight from this reading to the next study session.
- Engage honestly with the strongest form of one of the alternative positions examined in this lesson. Choose either Calvin's spiritual presence doctrine or Luther's sacramental union and read a brief statement of that position from its most persuasive advocate. Identify the specific argument you find most compelling and formulate the Baptist response to it. Bring both the argument and the response to the study session as a contribution to the group's engagement with the theological debate.
- Reflect on how this congregation's current practice of the Lord's Supper reflects, or fails to reflect, the robust memorialism that this lesson has described. Is the preparation theologically substantive? Is the explanation that precedes the elements connected to the Supper's four dimensions of meaning? Is the reception faith-engaged and expectant, or routine and passive? Identify one specific, constructive improvement and bring it as a recommendation to an elder.
- Pray specifically this week for the Lord's Supper's observance in this congregation: that the elders would prepare and administer it with theological seriousness; that the congregation would receive it with faith-engaged attention; and that the Spirit would work through the act of covenantal remembrance to strengthen faith, deepen communion with the ascended Christ, renew covenant commitment, and nourish the soul of every member who receives the bread and cup. This is the prayer of robust memorialism: not that the Spirit would transform the elements, but that the Spirit would transform the receiving hearts of the community gathered at the Table.

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 10:16–17; Matthew 26:26–29; Hebrews 10:10–14; John 6:53–58, 63

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- Before this lesson, how much had you thought about the question of Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper? Was your understanding of the memorialist position a robust or a thin one? Has this lesson changed the way you understand either the position this ministry holds or the alternative traditions it has examined?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read Matthew 26:26-29. What are the exact words Jesus speaks over the bread (verse 26)? What does He say over the cup (verse 28)? What is the eschatological promise of verse 29? How does the physical context of the institution, Jesus' body present and intact, affect the plausibility of the literal reading of 'This is My body'?
- Read John 6:48-63. What does Jesus say about eating His flesh and drinking His blood in verses 53-56? What response does this produce (verse 60)? What interpretive key does Jesus provide in verse 63? How does 'the flesh profits nothing' specifically address the real presence doctrine's claim that physically eating Christ's flesh in the Supper communicates eternal life?
- Read Hebrews 10:1-14. What contrast does the author draw between the old covenant's repeated sacrifices (verses 1-4, 11) and Christ's single offering (verses 10, 12, 14)? What does 'once for all' mean in verse 10? What does 'perfected for all time' mean in verse 14? How do these phrases specifically address the Catholic doctrine of the Mass as a sacrificial re-presentation of Christ's sacrifice?
- Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. How does Paul ground the authority of his account (verse 23)? What does Christ say over the bread (verse 24), and what command does He attach? What does He say over the cup (verse 25)? In verse 26, what does Paul call the elements AFTER the words of institution have been cited? What is the significance of his continued use of 'bread' and 'cup' rather than 'body' and 'blood'?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. What does Paul call the cup and bread in verse 16 (the 'sharing in' language)? What does verse 17 conclude from the unity of the bread? What contrast does Paul draw in verses 20-21 between the Lord's Table and the table of demons? How does this contrast illuminate the covenant exclusiveness of the Lord's Supper and the seriousness with which participation is to be approached?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson presents four exegetical arguments against the literal reading of 'This is My body': the physical context, the consistent figurative use of the same construction, the memorial language, and the continued use of 'bread' and 'cup' after institution. Which of these four arguments do you find most compelling? How would a Lutheran or Catholic respond to the argument you find most compelling?
- The lesson describes Calvin's spiritual presence doctrine as 'closer to the robust memorialism that this ministry holds than either transubstantiation or consubstantiation.' What specifically does Calvin's position share with robust memorialism? What specifically distinguishes them? Is the Baptist's disagreement with Calvin more about the theology or about the practical consequences of the two positions?
- The lesson argues that the 'robust' qualifier in robust memorialism is the critical qualifier, distinguishing this position from the thin, spiritually shallow memorialism that the caricature describes. What specific theological claims make robust memorialism genuinely robust rather than merely a dressed-up version of

the bare symbol position? Is the distinction between robust and thin memorialism primarily theological or primarily practical?

- The lesson uses Hebrews 10:10-14 as the primary argument against the Mass as a sacrificial re-presentation. The Catholic response is that the Mass is not a new sacrifice but a making-present of the same once-for-all sacrifice. Does Hebrews 10's exhaustive language foreclose this distinction, or is the Catholic response a genuinely adequate reply to the Protestant objection? What would need to be true for the Catholic distinction to be a successful response to Hebrews 10?
- The lesson distinguishes the Baptist's location of the Supper's grace in 'the Spirit's work through the whole act of faith-engaged reception' from Calvin's location of it in 'the Spirit's work through the elements as specific instruments of Christ's presence.' Is this a genuinely significant theological distinction or a distinction without a practical difference? What specific consequences follow from each location of the Spirit's work?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that in robust memorialism, the Supper is 'as nourishing as the faith with which it is received.' What does this mean for the congregation's preparation for the Supper? If the grace is entirely faith-mediated, what specific practices of preparation most directly cultivate the kind of faith that draws on the Supper's full grace?
- The lesson describes the reverence appropriate to the Lord's Supper in a memorialist framework as 'covenantal reverence' rather than 'physical reverence.' What is the practical difference between these two kinds of reverence? How should covenantal reverence shape the congregation's posture, attention, and participation during the Supper's administration?
- This lesson has described four traditions' understanding of the Supper. If you were to explain the robust memorialist position to a member of a Lutheran congregation who held the sacramental union doctrine, what would you say? How would you affirm what you share in common with her, clarify the specific disagreement, and make the Baptist's exegetical case for the memorialist reading without dismissing the genuine theological seriousness of her tradition?
- The lesson closes by describing the Supper as 'one of the greatest gifts that the risen Lord has given to His church.' Does your current experience of the Lord's Supper in this congregation correspond to this description? What would need to change, in the congregation's preparation, in the administration, in the pastoral explanation, in your own personal engagement, for the Supper to become the gift that the lesson's closing describes?

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 aloud one more time, slowly: 'For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.' This lesson has been about the theology behind the bread and cup, the contested, historically significant, practically consequential question of how Christ is present at His Table. But at the end of all the theology, there is a Lord who took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and said: This is My body. For you. Do this in remembrance of Me. Let the simplicity and the weight of His command ground the prayers that follow.

Pray for theological clarity about the Lord's Supper in this congregation. Pray that the members would understand the robust memorialist position that this ministry holds, not merely as an inherited Baptist tradition, but as a theologically grounded, exegetically supported reading of the New Testament's account of the Supper that honors both its genuine significance and the once-for-all sufficiency of the cross. Pray that the congregation would be equipped to engage the alternative traditions with the theological seriousness and the genuine charity that the family argument deserves, neither dismissing the Catholic, Lutheran, or Reformed traditions as obviously wrong, nor capitulating to the pressure of ecumenical accommodation by softening the specific exegetical convictions that distinguish the memorialist position from the others.

Pray for the Spirit's genuine work in this congregation's observance of the Lord's Supper. The memorialist position locates the Supper's grace in the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception; so pray specifically for the quality of the faith-engaged reception through which that work is communicated. Pray for each member's preparation for the next observance: for genuine self-examination, for genuine covenant renewal, for genuine engagement with the memorial of Christ's death, and for genuine expectation that the Spirit will work through the act of remembrance to strengthen faith and deepen communion with the ascended Christ. Pray that the congregation's Supper observance would demonstrate, to the watching community and the watching world, that the memorialist position is not a theologically thin, spiritually shallow approach to the covenant meal but a theologically rich, spiritually serious, pastorally intentional engagement with the most significant regular act of the covenant community's worship.

Pray for the broader church's engagement with the question of Christ's presence in the Supper. Pray for the Roman Catholic priest who celebrates the Mass with genuine devotion, believing that the body of Christ is present in the consecrated host; for the Lutheran pastor who administers the Supper with the conviction that Christ's body and blood are truly present in, with, and under the elements; for the Reformed elder who leads the congregation in the spiritual feeding that Calvin describes, lifting their hearts to the ascended Christ by the Spirit's work. Each of these is a servant of the Lord who instituted the Supper; each is trying to honor the presence and the significance of the Lord at His Table. Pray that the Spirit would grant to all of them the grace of the Supper they administer, and pray that the genuine exegetical case for the memorialist position would be heard, received, and appropriated by those in these traditions who are willing to test it against Scripture with Berean diligence.

Close with a prayer of genuine, joyful anticipation for the eschatological feast to which every earthly Lord's Supper points. Pray Matthew 26:29 as a prayer: Lord Jesus, You promised that You would not drink of this fruit of the vine

until You drink it new with us in Your Father's kingdom. We are drinking it now, in the ordinance that proclaims Your death until You come. Come, Lord Jesus. Come and receive the community that Your death purchased, and seat it at the feast that Isaiah saw and John described. Until then, we break this bread and lift this cup in remembrance of You, with genuine faith, with genuine expectation of the Spirit's work, and with the genuine longing of a covenant community that knows its Lord is coming. To Him alone be the glory.

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20–21, NASB 1995

Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 10:16–17; Matthew 26:26–29; Hebrews 10:10–14; John 6:53–58, 63

Soli Deo Gloria

To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

Dr. Joshua Nichols

josh@faithfultotheword.com | faithfultotheword.com