

# 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*

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### UNIT 7: THE ORDINANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*The Covenant Meal of the New Community*

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#### Lesson 22

## THE PRACTICE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*Who, When, and How — Practical and Pastoral Questions About the Table*

*The Table is neither so narrow that it becomes a tool of pastoral gatekeeping nor so wide that it becomes indifferent to the covenant commitments that the Supper enacts. It is the Table of the Lord — set by Him, for His people, according to His Word.*

*“But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.”*

*1 Corinthians 11:28–29, NASB 1995*

*Key Texts: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; 10:16–21; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; Matthew 26:26–29*

*“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**

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## Introduction

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The theology of the Lord's Supper is most fully honored when it shapes the practice of the Lord's Supper. Lessons 20 and 21 established the theological and historical foundations of the Supper: its institution on the night of betrayal, its fourfold meaning (memorial, proclamation, covenant fellowship, and means of grace), and the comparative theology of the four major traditions' accounts of Christ's presence. This final lesson of Unit 7 turns from theology to practice, addressing the specific pastoral questions that every congregation must answer about its own regular observance of the covenant meal: Who may come to the Table? How often should the Supper be observed? How should it be received? What warning accompanies unworthy participation, and what does worthy participation look like in the concrete life of the covenant community?

These are not secondary questions. The way a congregation answers them reveals what it actually believes about the Supper, about the church, and about the covenant community's life together, regardless of what it may profess in its doctrinal standards or confess in its statement of faith. The congregation that holds a high theology of the Lord's Supper but administers it carelessly, infrequently, without preparation, and without self-examination has allowed its practice to contradict its profession. The congregation that holds a formally modest theology of the Supper but administers it with genuine preparation, genuine pastoral explanation, genuine self-examination, and genuine covenant awareness has allowed its practice to embody a richness that its theology has not fully articulated. Practice and theology must correspond; the test of a congregation's actual doctrine of the Supper is visible in how it actually gathers at the Table.

The questions this lesson addresses have generated significant controversy within the Baptist tradition itself, and they deserve honest engagement with the genuine disagreements that exist. The communion question, open, close, or closed, is a question on which serious Reformed Baptists have disagreed for centuries, and the series does not pretend that the answer is obvious or that those who hold different positions are simply failing to think carefully. The frequency question, weekly, monthly, quarterly, is a question on which the New Testament's silence gives genuine latitude, and this lesson argues for a frequency practice from the principles of the apostolic pattern without pretending that a specific frequency is mandated by Scripture. The self-examination question is the one question whose answer is least contested: Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:28 is explicit, its rationale is clear, and the warning that follows in verse 29 is among the most sobering in the New Testament. On this question, the lesson speaks with the clarity that the apostle's own words demand.

The lesson also addresses the connection between the Lord's Supper and the church discipline that Unit 8 will examine: the Table and the discipline process are inseparable in Paul's theology of the covenant community. The Corinthian letters address both in close proximity precisely because the integrity of the Table depends on the integrity of the community that gathers at it, and the integrity of the community requires the discipline that maintains its covenant fidelity. The Lord's Supper is the covenant meal of the covenant community; the discipline that maintains the community's covenant character is the institutional protection of the Table's integrity. Together they form the pastoral framework within which the covenant community's life is sustained, renewed, and protected from the threats that every generation of the church must navigate.

# **I. WHO MAY COME TO THE TABLE**

## *The Proper Participants in the Lord's Supper*

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### **A. The New Testament's Account of the Supper's Participants**

The New Testament's account of who participated in the Lord's Supper in the apostolic community establishes the baseline for answering the question of who may come to the Table. The institution narrative of 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and the Synoptic accounts describe the institution as occurring with the Twelve, men who had followed Jesus through His earthly ministry, who had confessed Him as the Christ, and who were committed disciples, however imperfectly, of the One who instituted the meal. The apostolic community's description in Acts 2:42, 'They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer', presents the breaking of bread as one of four characteristic practices of the community constituted by baptism and by the reception of the apostolic teaching. The breaking of bread is a practice of the baptized community: those who have received the word, been baptized, and been added to the community (Acts 2:41) are the ones who devote themselves to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42).

First Corinthians 10:16-17 grounds the Supper's participation in the community's shared participation in the body and blood of Christ: 'Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.' The 'we' of this passage is the covenant community that shares the one bread, the community constituted by its shared participation in the body and blood of the One who purchased it. The passage implies a defined community with a defined participation; not everyone who happens to be present may participate, but those who share in the one body constituted by Christ's sacrifice. First Corinthians 10:21 adds the covenant exclusiveness that defines the Table's boundaries: 'You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.' The Table of the Lord is exclusive: participation in it requires a genuine covenant commitment to the Lord at whose Table the community gathers.

The Corinthian abuses that 1 Corinthians 11:17-22 describes provide further clarification of the community that the Table belongs to: Paul addresses 'you' (the baptized, covenanted members of the Corinthian congregation) about the manner in which 'you come together as a church' (verse 18). The Lord's Supper is not a meal open to any person who happens to be in the vicinity; it is the covenant community's gathering at its own table, in the context of its own assembled worship, for the specific purpose of proclaiming the Lord's death and renewing the covenant that His blood established. The proper participants are those who belong to this covenant community: the baptized believers who have been formally received into the membership of a local congregation, who profess faith in Jesus Christ, and who are living in covenant fidelity with the community and with the Lord at whose Table they gather.

### **B. Three Positions on Communion**

The question of who specifically may come to the Table, and whether the Table is restricted to members of a specific congregation, to members of congregations of like faith and order, or to all professing believers, has been answered in three different ways in the Baptist tradition. Open communion holds that the Table is open to all genuine believers, regardless of whether they have been baptized as believers by immersion or are members of

any specific congregation. The ground for this position is that the Supper is the Table of the Lord and that the Lord's people, all who genuinely trust in Him, are welcome at His Table regardless of the specific denominational or baptismal form of their covenant profession. Many evangelical congregations, including many that would broadly identify as Baptist, hold open communion as the expression of their desire to welcome all genuine believers to the Lord's Table without requiring the specific Baptist form of baptism as a precondition of participation.

Closed communion holds that the Table is restricted to the baptized members of the specific local congregation. The ground for this position is that the Supper is the covenant meal of the specific covenant community of the local church, administered by the elders of that congregation for the members who have entered that covenant through baptism and formal reception into membership. The local congregation is the body that has examined and affirmed the candidate's profession, that has received the new member through baptism, and that bears the covenantal responsibility for her spiritual welfare. The Table is the meal of that specific covenant body, and participation in it is participation in the specific covenant commitment of that specific community. The 1689 Confession's description of the Supper as the ordinance of 'the church' (not of the broader Christian community) and the connection between membership, baptism, and the Table in the New Testament pattern support the closed communion position.

Close communion (the medial position, spelled with an 'e' to distinguish it from the more restrictive closed communion) holds that the Table is open to the baptized members of congregations of like faith and order, that is, to members of congregations that hold the same baptismal convictions (believers' baptism by immersion) and the same congregational polity. The ground for this position is that while the Table belongs to the local congregation, the covenant community is not entirely bounded by the specific membership roll of a single church; it includes the broader community of those who share the same covenant sign and the same covenant commitments. The close communion position was the dominant position of the earlier Reformed Baptist tradition and continues to be held by many who take both the integrity of Baptist baptismal convictions and the catholicity of the new covenant community seriously.

## II. THE PRACTICE OF SELF-EXAMINATION

### *Coming to the Table with Honest Hearts*

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#### **A.** *First Corinthians 11:28 and the Command to Examine*

Whatever position a congregation holds on the communion question, there is one aspect of the Table's practice on which the New Testament speaks with unambiguous clarity: the requirement of self-examination before participation. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:28 is direct and imperative: 'But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.' The self-examination is not optional, not a recommendation for the particularly scrupulous, and not a practice reserved for the most theologically serious members of the community. It is a universal requirement for every member who comes to the Table, expressed in the imperative mood, *must examine*, that signals its obligatory character for the whole community.

The examination Paul calls for is not an examination of personal worthiness in the sense of meeting a spiritual standard that entitles the examiner to participate. Paul's logic in the immediate context makes clear that the

examination is not about achieving worthiness but about discerning, honestly, clearly, with spiritual seriousness, the significance of what the Supper is and what it declares. The question the self-examiner must answer is not 'Am I good enough to come to the Table?', no one is good enough in that sense, and the Supper is precisely the declaration of the grace that covers the unworthiness of all who belong to Christ. The question is rather: 'Am I coming to the Table as one who understands and genuinely appropriates what the Supper declares? Am I coming with a genuine faith in Christ whose death the bread and cup represent? Am I coming as one who has genuinely examined my conscience, acknowledged my sin, renewed my repentance, and am approaching the Table with the honest, covenant-serious engagement that the enacted memorial of the Lord's death deserves?'

The content of the self-examination has several specific dimensions. The first is doctrinal: does the examiner genuinely believe the gospel that the Supper proclaims? Is her faith in the death of Jesus Christ for her sins a genuine and present faith, not merely a formal profession untethered from actual trust? The second is relational: is the examiner at peace with the covenant community in whose company she is receiving the Supper? The Table is the meal of the covenant community; coming to it while harboring unresolved conflict with a fellow member, or while in a state of discipline-worthy unrepentance, is a contradiction of the covenant fellowship the Supper enacts. The third is moral: is the examiner aware of any specific pattern of sin or specific unrepented transgression that she needs to bring to the Lord before approaching His Table? The self-examination is not a comprehensive moral audit that must achieve perfection before participation; it is the honest, prayerful, conscience-engaging work of a believer who is bringing her actual spiritual condition to the Lord's actual Table with the honesty that genuine covenant renewal requires.

### ***B. First Corinthians 11:29 and the Warning Against Unworthy Participation***

The warning of 1 Corinthians 11:29 is among the most sobering statements in the New Testament regarding the Lord's Supper: 'For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.' The word translated 'judgment' (krima) refers to God's discipline or condemnation; the one who eats and drinks without discerning the body rightly is eating and drinking divine judgment. Paul explains the specific consequences in verse 30: 'For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.' The failure of the Corinthian community to discern the body, to recognize and honor the significance of the Lord's body in the covenant meal, has produced specific, observable, disciplinary consequences in the community's physical welfare.

The phrase 'judge the body rightly' (or 'discern the body') has been interpreted in two ways. Some understand 'the body' as referring to the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper, the physical representation of the body given for us that the bread represents. On this reading, the failure is the failure to recognize the theological significance of the bread as the sign of Christ's body, and the judgment is the consequence of treating the Lord's Supper as an ordinary meal without covenant significance. Others understand 'the body' as referring to the body of Christ as the covenant community, the failure to recognize the communal, covenantal, body-of-Christ significance of the shared meal and the consequent failure to honor the covenant relationships that the Supper enacts. On this reading, the Corinthian failure is specifically their division and their treatment of the poorer members of the community at the meal (described in verses 17-22), and the judgment is the consequence of partaking in the covenant meal of the body of Christ while simultaneously dishonoring the body of Christ by treating some members as less significant than others.

Both readings are theologically coherent, and both may be simultaneously present in Paul's warning. The Corinthian failure involved both a failure to honor the significance of the elements (treating the common meal as if it were not the Lord's Supper) and a failure to honor the covenant community that gathered at the meal (treating the poorer members with contempt). The warning is comprehensive: the one who comes to the Table without discerning its full significance, the significance of the body and blood it represents and the significance of the covenant community it constitutes, is coming to judgment rather than to blessing. The self-examination of verse 28 is precisely the discipline designed to prevent this: the member who genuinely examines herself before coming is the member who is preparing to discern rightly the body of Christ in both the theological and the communal senses.

### III. THE FREQUENCY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

#### *As Often as You Come Together*

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#### *A. The New Testament's Evidence on Frequency*

The New Testament does not prescribe a specific frequency for the Lord's Supper's observance, and the honest exegete acknowledges this freedom before arguing from the apostolic pattern toward a specific practice. First Corinthians 11:26's 'as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup' does not establish a specific interval; it establishes a principle (every observance proclaims the Lord's death until He comes) without specifying how often the observance should occur. Acts 2:42 mentions 'the breaking of bread' as a characteristic practice of the apostolic community without specifying its frequency. Acts 2:46 adds that 'day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart', the phrase 'day by day' suggests a very frequent practice in the earliest Jerusalem community, though whether the breaking of bread in verse 46 refers to the Lord's Supper or to ordinary meals eaten together is debated.

Acts 20:7 provides the most specific single reference to the frequency of the Lord's Supper in the apostolic community: 'On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to leave the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight.' The first day of the week, the Lord's Day, is the gathering day for the breaking of bread. This is consistent with the early church's practice of weekly Supper observance, attested also in Justin Martyr's Apology (c. A.D. 155), which describes the Sunday gathering of the Christian community as including both the reading of Scripture and preaching and the distribution of the Eucharist. The early church's practice was clearly weekly; the reduction of the Lord's Supper's frequency to monthly or quarterly observance in many Protestant traditions is a post-Reformation development, not a recovery of the apostolic pattern.

The argument for weekly communion is not simply historical; it is theological. The Lord's Supper is the covenant meal of the new covenant community, the community's regular enacted memorial of the death that established the covenant under which it gathers. If baptism is the entry into the covenant and the Supper is the ongoing renewal of the covenant, the question of frequency is related to the question of how often the covenant community needs the enacted renewal that the Supper provides. The congregation that observes the Supper quarterly is a congregation that renews its covenant four times a year; the congregation that observes it weekly

is a congregation that renews its covenant every time it gathers for corporate worship. The argument from the covenant's ongoing renewal, and from the Supper's character as the community's most regular, most direct enacted proclamation of the gospel, supports frequent observance without mandating a specific frequency that the New Testament itself does not prescribe.

### ***B. Pastoral Considerations on Frequency***

The pastoral argument against very frequent observance is the concern about routinization: if the Supper is observed every week, does it become so familiar that it ceases to be received with the attention and the theological seriousness that its meaning requires? The concern is real; the history of the church includes many examples of frequent Eucharistic observance that has become routine, perfunctory, and spiritually thin. But the solution to routine observance is not infrequent observance; it is the sustained pastoral investment in the quality of preparation, explanation, and faith-engaged reception that transforms the Supper from a routine into a genuine encounter with the covenant of grace. The congregation that observes the Supper frequently but without theological preparation and pastoral explanation is a congregation that has solved nothing; the congregation that observes the Supper frequently with genuine preparation, genuine explanation, and genuine expectation of the Spirit's work is a congregation that is drawing regularly on one of the richest means of grace in the Christian life.

The pastoral argument for frequent observance is the argument from the Christian life's daily need for the renewal that the Supper provides. Every member of the congregation comes to worship each week carrying the weight of the week's specific sins, specific discouragements, specific spiritual battles, and specific reminders of the fragility of the new life that the gospel has begun in her. The Supper, observed at the conclusion of the preached Word that has addressed those same battles with the gospel's resources, is the enacted gospel, the visible, physical, embodied declaration that the death of Jesus Christ is the ground of the mercy that covers her sins, the love that sustains her in the battles, and the hope that anchors her in the discouragements. The congregation that denies its members this weekly embodied proclamation of the gospel in favor of a monthly or quarterly observance has chosen institutional convenience over the community's most regular spiritual need.

The practical recommendation of this lesson, consistent with the apostolic pattern, the early church's practice, and the theological argument from the Supper's character as the covenant community's most regular enacted proclamation of the gospel, is frequent observance. Whether a congregation moves from quarterly to monthly, or from monthly to weekly, the direction is toward more frequent observance rather than less, and the pace of the movement should be governed by the congregation's readiness to invest the pastoral preparation that more frequent observance requires if it is to be received with genuine spiritual benefit rather than routine indifference. Frequent and thin is worse than infrequent and rich; the goal is frequent and rich, and the path to frequent and rich runs through the sustained pastoral investment in the quality of the Supper's administration that the covenant meal of the new covenant community deserves.

## **IV. THE CORPORATE AND COVENANTAL CHARACTER OF THE SUPPER**

### *The Gathered Church at the Table*

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#### ***A. Why the Supper Cannot Be Private***

The Lord's Supper is an inherently corporate act. It cannot be administered to an individual in private, administered to a person alone, without the gathered covenant community, in the context of an individual devotional practice, without violating its most fundamental ecclesiological character. The Supper is the covenant community's meal; it requires the covenant community's presence to be what it is. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 11:18, 'For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you', and his instruction in verse 33, 'So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another', both present the assembled gathering of the church as the necessary context for the Supper's observance. The 'coming together' of the covenant community is not a pleasant supplement to the real act of the Supper; it is the constitutive context without which the Supper is not the Supper.

The corporate character of the Supper also means that the manner of the community's gathering at the Table communicates something about its covenant health. The Corinthian failures of verses 17-22 are failures not merely of individual piety but of covenant community: the divisions that Paul identifies, the treatment of the poorer members that verse 21 describes ('one is hungry and another is drunk'), and the failure to 'wait for one another' of verse 33 are all failures of the community's covenant life together, expressed at the Table where that covenant life is most directly enacted. The Table is the community's most direct covenant statement about itself; what the community does at the Table reveals what the community actually is. The congregation that gathers at the Table with genuine mutual attention, genuine waiting for one another, and genuine covenant awareness of the body they share is a congregation that is enacting at the Table the covenant life that the Supper is meant to sustain and renew.

The practical implications of the Supper's corporate character include the importance of administering it in the context of the gathered assembly, not in hospital rooms to isolated individuals, not in private homes to small groups apart from the congregation, not in a manner that separates individual reception from the covenant community's common act. The elder who visits a homebound or hospitalized member can bring the comfort of the gospel in prayer, Scripture, and pastoral conversation without administering the Lord's Supper; the Supper waits for the gathered community, and the member who cannot be present at the Table receives the pastoral care of the elder's visit rather than the covenant meal that belongs to the assembled body. Extraordinary circumstances may require pastoral wisdom in specific cases, and the elders' discretion in such cases should be honored; the general principle is that the Supper is the gathered church's act and belongs to the gathered assembly.

### ***B. The Supper and the Discipline Connection***

The inseparability of the Lord's Supper and church discipline in the New Testament's account of the covenant community's life is one of the most theologically significant and most practically important features of the Supper's practice. First Corinthians 5 and 11 stand in close literary and theological proximity in Paul's Corinthian correspondence: the failure to exercise discipline over the incestuous member in chapter 5 and the failure to observe the Supper with covenant integrity in chapter 11 are two aspects of the same covenant failure. The congregation that tolerates unrepentant, flagrant sin in its membership without exercising the discipline that the covenant community's integrity requires is also the congregation that comes to the Lord's Table with the defilement that the absence of discipline produces.

First Corinthians 5:7-8 makes the connection explicit by using the Lord's Supper imagery to address the discipline failure: 'Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our

Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' The celebration of the feast, the Lord's Supper as the new covenant's Passover, requires the cleansing of the leaven that the unrepentant member's presence introduces into the community. The discipline of 1 Corinthians 5:13 ('Remove the wicked man from among yourselves') is the prerequisite for the faithful celebration of the feast of 1 Corinthians 5:8. The Table and the discipline are inseparable: the Table belongs to the disciplined community, and the disciplined community belongs to the Table.

The positive vision that emerges from the Supper-discipline connection is the vision of a covenant community whose Table integrity and whose membership integrity are mutually reinforcing. The congregation that genuinely practices discipline, that pursues its members in pastoral accountability, that addresses unrepentant sin through the Matthew 18 process, that maintains the regenerate membership standard of Unit 4, is the congregation that gathers at the Table with the covenant integrity that the Supper's enacted covenant renewal requires. The congregation that treats both its membership and its Table casually, receiving members without adequate examination and receiving the Supper without adequate self-examination, has allowed the two most direct expressions of the covenant community's covenant seriousness to become the two most visible expressions of its covenant indifference. Unit 8's treatment of church discipline will address the discipline side of this connection; this lesson addresses the Table side: the Supper is the covenant meal of the covenant community, and the quality of the community's covenant life is directly expressed in the quality of its gathering at the Lord's Table.

## V. THE ELEMENTS REVISITED

### *Bread, Cup, and Pastoral Wisdom*

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#### **A.** *What the New Testament Specifies*

The New Testament's account of the elements used in the Lord's Supper is specific enough to establish the basic form but flexible enough to leave room for pastoral judgment on the details. Jesus uses bread and the cup at the institution; Paul refers to 'bread' and the 'cup' in his account of the institution in 1 Corinthians 11; and the early church's practice as described in Acts uses the phrase 'the breaking of bread' as a shorthand for the Supper's practice. The two elements, bread and cup, are specified; the specific form of the bread (leavened or unleavened) and the specific content of the cup (fermented wine or unfermented grape juice) are not specified with the precision that would settle the question for all contexts and all congregations.

The case for unleavened bread at the Passover is historically strong: the Passover meal used unleavened bread (matzah), and Jesus instituted the Supper in the context of the Passover, so the bread He used was almost certainly unleavened. But the New Testament's instructions for the Supper's ongoing observance do not specify unleavened bread, and Paul's references to 'bread' in 1 Corinthians 10-11 use the generic Greek word *artos* rather than any term specifically indicating unleavened bread. The theological argument for unleavened bread, that the absence of leaven symbolizes the purity of the new covenant community, as Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8 suggests, is consistent with the Passover typology but not binding on the form of the ongoing observance. Most Baptist congregations use ordinary leavened bread without perceiving any theological deficiency, and the New Testament's own instructions do not require the correction of this practice.

The question of fermented wine versus unfermented grape juice is a pastoral question with genuine arguments on both sides, as Lesson 20 briefly noted. The case for fermented wine is historically strong: the Passover used the fruit of the vine (oinos, wine), and the 'cup of blessing' that Paul uses to describe the Supper's cup in 1 Corinthians 10:16 is a specific reference to one of the cups of the Passover seder. The case for unfermented grape juice is pastorally strong: the concern for members who are in recovery from alcohol dependency, and the desire to remove any potential stumbling block from the Table, are genuine pastoral motivations that deserve respect. This lesson does not mandate either form; it commends the kind of prayerful, elder-led, congregationally discerned pastoral wisdom that the New Testament's own flexibility on this question invites, and it notes that the theological significance of the Supper is fully present in either form of the cup.

### ***B. The Mode of Distribution***

The mode of distributing the elements, whether by passing them through the congregation, by having members come forward to receive them, or by some other form, is another question on which the New Testament provides no explicit instruction and on which pastoral wisdom must guide the congregation's practice. The historical variety of communion distributions in the church's long practice, passing common cups, receiving from the priest's hand, dipping the bread into the cup (intinction), receiving individual cups, reflects the genuine freedom the New Testament's silence allows. What the New Testament does specify is the communal character of the reception: 'we all partake of the one bread' (1 Corinthians 10:17), 'wait for one another' (1 Corinthians 11:33). The distribution form should honor the communal character of the act, whatever specific form it takes.

The use of individual small cups, which became common in many Baptist and evangelical congregations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for hygienic reasons, is a significant departure from the 'one cup' imagery of the institution narrative and Paul's 'one cup' and 'one bread' language in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. The practical rationale for individual cups is compelling; the theological loss is real: the common cup shared by the whole community is a visible declaration of the community's shared participation in the blood of Christ, and the individual cup is a more individualistic symbol that does not as vividly enact the communal koinonia that the Supper is designed to declare. The recovery of some form of common participation in the elements, whether through a common loaf broken and distributed, through a common cup, or through some other form that emphasizes the shared character of the community's reception, is worth pastoral consideration and congregational discernment.

The posture of reception, seated, standing, kneeling, is another area where the New Testament provides no prescription and where pastoral wisdom must govern. The Reformed Baptist tradition has historically practiced seated reception, consistent with the table-fellowship character of the ordinance and with the rejection of the physical reverence for the elements that the kneeling associated with the Roman Catholic Eucharist implies. Standing reception is practiced in some traditions as a reminder of the eschatological urgency of the Passover's standing meal and as an expression of the community's readiness for the Lord's return. The specific posture matters less than the spirit of covenant awareness and faith-engaged attention that the posture should express; the congregation that debates posture while neglecting preparation has inverted the priorities that the Supper's practice requires.

## **VI. THE UNIT IN RETROSPECT**

## *Unit 7 Completed*

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### **A.** *The Three Lessons of Unit 7*

Unit 7 has addressed the Lord's Supper across three lessons that together constitute a complete Baptist theology of the covenant meal. Lesson 20 established the institution and fourfold meaning: the night of betrayal and the Passover context, the words of institution and their figurative interpretation, and the four dimensions of the Supper's meaning, memorial (the anamnesis of the covenant community's active re-appropriation of the cross's continuing significance), proclamation (the visible sermon of the Lord's death until He comes), covenant fellowship (the koinonia of the community's shared participation in the body and blood of Christ), and means of grace (the Spirit's genuine work through faith-engaged reception). Lesson 21 addressed the four major traditions' accounts of Christ's presence in the Supper and defended the position of this ministry: a robust memorialism that takes the Supper's spiritual significance with complete seriousness while insisting that the grace is located in the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception rather than in the physical substance of the elements.

This lesson has addressed the practical questions of who may come to the Table (baptized believers in covenant membership, with the three positions on open, close, and closed communion described and the arguments for each presented), how frequently the Supper should be observed (the New Testament's pattern suggesting frequent observance, with the apostolic evidence for weekly Supper and the theological argument from the covenant's ongoing renewal supporting more frequent practice), how the Supper should be received (through genuine self-examination, honest discernment of the body, and the faith-engaged attention that the Spirit uses to produce the Supper's genuine benefits), and what elements and modes of distribution best serve the Supper's theological and communal character. Together the three lessons provide both the theological foundation and the practical guidance that a congregation needs to observe the Lord's Supper with the full weight of its meaning.

The practical challenge that Unit 7 leaves with every congregation is the challenge that the unit began with: the way a congregation answers the practical questions of the Table reveals what it actually believes about the Supper, the church, and the covenant community's life together. The congregation that takes seriously the unit's theological findings, and that allows those findings to reform its practice of the Supper toward greater frequency, greater preparation, greater self-examination, and greater covenant awareness, is a congregation that is honoring the Lord's Supper with the fullness of theological weight and pastoral joy that the Lord who instituted it intended.

### **B.** *Looking Forward to Unit 8*

Unit 8 addresses the discipline of the church, the most neglected and most misunderstood practice in the contemporary evangelical church. The connection between Unit 7's Lord's Supper and Unit 8's discipline is the connection that this lesson has noted: the Table belongs to the disciplined covenant community, and the disciplined covenant community belongs to the Table. The congregation that practices the Lord's Supper with covenant seriousness, that maintains the membership standards established in Unit 4, that exercises the discipline that Matthew 18 prescribes, and that guards the Table's integrity by guarding the community's covenant integrity, is the congregation that most faithfully embodies the vision of the covenant community that this entire series has been building.

Unit 8 will address church discipline across three lessons: the biblical mandate for discipline (Lesson 23), the restoration of the penitent (Lesson 24), and the reasons why contemporary churches fail to practice discipline and why they must recover it (Lesson 25). These three lessons will bring the same theological seriousness, the same pastoral wisdom, and the same commitment to the apostolic pattern that the previous units have demonstrated. The church that governs itself according to Unit 5, that practices baptism according to Unit 6, that observes the Lord's Supper according to Unit 7, and that exercises discipline according to Unit 8 is the church that is most fully ordered according to the apostolic pattern, and the church that is most fully prepared to fulfill the mission that Unit 9 and Unit 10 will address.

*“Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.”*

**1 Corinthians 10:16–17, NASB 1995**

## **VII. THE TABLE AND THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION**

### *A Summons to Worthy Reception*

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#### **A. The Invitation and the Warning**

The Lord's Table is both an invitation and a warning, the two together constituting the pastoral context in which Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 11 are to be understood. The invitation is the most gracious available to human beings: the covenant community of the redeemed is invited to gather at the Table of the Lord who purchased it with His own blood, to enact the memorial of His death, to renew the covenant that His blood established, to commune with the Spirit of the ascended Christ, and to anticipate the eschatological feast at which the Lord Himself will receive His community. This is not a private religious activity; it is the most cosmically significant regular gathering that takes place on earth, the redeemed community of the triune God, gathered around the bread and cup that declare the death of the second person of the Trinity for the sins of those who receive it by faith.

The warning is equally serious: those who come to this Table without genuine faith, without genuine self-examination, without genuine discernment of the body they share, and without genuine covenant commitment to the Lord at whose Table they sit are eating and drinking judgment to themselves. The same Supper that is the richest means of grace available to the genuinely believing, genuinely self-examining, genuinely covenant-committed participant is the instrument of judgment for the one who receives it without the faith and the discernment that worthy participation requires. The pastoral responsibility to prepare the congregation for the Supper is therefore one of the most serious pastoral responsibilities the elders bear: they must invite the genuinely believing to come, and they must warn the formalist, the unexamined, and the covenant-indifferent that coming without genuine faith and genuine self-examination is to come to judgment rather than to grace.

The practical administration of the invitation and the warning together, the 'fencing of the Table,' as the Reformed tradition has called it, is one of the most theologically rich and pastorally important acts the presiding elder performs. The words that accompany the breaking of the bread and the passing of the cup should both extend

the genuine invitation to all who genuinely believe and genuinely examine themselves, and should clearly communicate the warning to those whose participation would be unworthy. The congregation that receives both the invitation and the warning together is the congregation that is best prepared to receive the Supper with the combination of genuine welcome and genuine seriousness that the covenant meal of the new covenant community deserves.

### ***B. A Worthy Reception Described***

What does a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper look like in the concrete life of a specific member of this congregation? The self-examination of 1 Corinthians 11:28 begins before the assembly: the member who is preparing for the Supper brings to her preparation the specific realities of her recent spiritual life, the specific sins that need to be acknowledged and repented of, the specific discouragements that need to be brought to the cross, the specific mercies that need to be received with gratitude, and the specific covenant commitments that need to be renewed. She comes to the Table not as one who has achieved the worthiness that entitles her to participate but as one who knows her unworthiness before God and whose only ground of approach is the body and blood that the bread and cup represent, the same body and blood that established the covenant under which she comes.

During the administration of the Supper, the pastoral explanation, the breaking of bread, the lifting of the cup, the worthy recipient is genuinely present to what is happening. She is engaging with the words being spoken, hearing in them the memorial of the Lord's death and the declaration of the covenant's ground. She is receiving the bread and the cup with the awareness that she is enacting in her own body, in the act of eating and drinking, the personal appropriation of the death of Jesus Christ that the gospel calls for. She is aware of the community around her: the one bread they share, the one body they constitute, the one covenant they renew together at the Table of the one Lord. She is conscious of the eschatological dimension, that she is proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes, and that the coming is the horizon toward which this meal is pointing.

After the Supper, the worthy recipient carries with her the renewed covenant commitment that the Supper has enacted. She has publicly declared, in the most embodied and most communally enacted form available to her, that the death of Jesus Christ is the ground of her existence, the blood of Christ is the foundation of the covenant under which she lives, and the Lord at whose Table she has sat is the Lord who is coming to receive her as His own. This declaration is not merely the theological proposition she assented to in the pastoral explanation; it is the covenant act she performed in the breaking of bread and the lifting of the cup. The Supper's renewal of her covenant commitment is as real as the bread that entered her body and the cup that she drank, real in the specific, physical, embodied, covenantally enacted sense that the robust memorialist understanding of the Lord's Supper describes. To this worthy, faithful, covenant-serious, Spirit-expectant reception of the Lord's Supper, week by week, in the gathered assembly of the covenant community of the redeemed, belongs the full grace that the Lord who instituted it intended.

*“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

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| <b>Open Communion</b>      | The practice of welcoming all genuine believers to the Lord's Table regardless of whether they have been baptized as believers by immersion or are members of any specific congregation. The ground: the Supper is the Lord's Table and all who genuinely trust in Him are welcome. Critique from the closed or close position: this severs the New Testament's connection between baptism, church membership, and the Supper, and admits to the covenant meal those who have not entered the covenant community through the covenant sign.                                      |
| <b>Close Communion</b>     | The medial position: the Lord's Table is open to the baptized members of congregations of like faith and order, those who share the same baptismal convictions (believers' baptism by immersion) and the same congregational polity. Distinguished from closed communion by allowing participation by members of other Baptist congregations. The dominant practice of the earlier Reformed Baptist tradition.                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Closed Communion</b>    | The most restrictive position: the Lord's Table is restricted to the baptized members of the specific local congregation. The ground: the Supper is the covenant meal of the specific covenant community of the local church, administered by the local elders for the members of that specific body. Consistent with the New Testament's connection between church membership, baptism, and the Supper; the 1689 Confession's description of the Supper as the ordinance of 'the church.'                                                                                       |
| <b>Self-Examination</b>    | The practice required by 1 Corinthians 11:28 ('a man must examine himself') before participation in the Lord's Supper. Not an examination of personal worthiness in the sense of achieving a spiritual standard, but a prayerful, conscience-engaging assessment of one's present faith (genuine trust in Christ), covenant relationships (at peace with the community), and moral condition (no unrepented sin requiring address before approaching the Table). The pathway to worthy, faith-engaged reception.                                                                 |
| <b>Discerning the Body</b> | The requirement of 1 Corinthians 11:29 ('if he does not judge the body rightly'). Interpreted as (1) discerning the theological significance of the bread as the sign of Christ's body given for us, or (2) discerning the communal significance of the Lord's Supper as the covenant meal of the body of Christ (the covenant community), or (3) both simultaneously. The failure to discern rightly, treating the Supper as an ordinary meal without covenant significance, or coming to it while dishonoring the covenant community, results in eating and drinking judgment. |
| <b>Fencing the Table</b>   | The pastoral practice, associated primarily with the Reformed tradition, of preceding the administration of the Lord's Supper with a pastoral explanation that both extends the genuine invitation to all who genuinely believe and examine themselves, and warns those whose participation would be unworthy. The 'fence' is the pastoral word that distinguishes worthy from unworthy reception and guards the integrity of the covenant meal by communicating its genuine requirements before the elements are administered.                                                  |
| <b>Acts 20:7</b>           | The most specific New Testament reference to the frequency of the Lord's Supper's observance: 'On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them.' The first day of the week (the Lord's Day) is the gathering day for the breaking of bread, consistent with the early church's weekly Supper practice attested in Justin Martyr's Apology (c. A.D. 155). Supports the argument for weekly Supper observance as the apostolic norm.                                                                                       |
| <b>1 Corinthians 5:7-8</b> | Paul's connection between the Lord's Supper and church discipline: 'Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.' The cleansing of the leaven (the discipline of the unrepentant member in 1 Corinthians 5) is the                                                                                                                                                                                               |

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|                               | prerequisite for the faithful celebration of the feast (the Lord's Supper). Establishes the inseparability of the Table and the covenant community's discipline in Paul's theology.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>1 Corinthians 11:17-22</b> | Paul's description of the Corinthian abuses at the Lord's Supper: divisions (verse 18), the rich eating and the poor going hungry (verse 21), and the consequent failure to honor the covenant community's shared meal as the Lord's Supper rather than an ordinary communal meal. The corporate and covenant failures of verses 17-22 are the specific context of the self-examination command in verse 28 and the warning against unworthy participation in verse 29. The Corinthian failure is both theological (failing to discern the body of Christ in the elements) and communal (failing to honor the body of Christ as the covenant community). |
| <b>Weekly Communion</b>       | The practice of observing the Lord's Supper every Lord's Day (weekly), consistent with the early church's attested practice (Acts 20:7; Justin Martyr's Apology, c. A.D. 155). Supported by the theological argument from the Supper's character as the covenant community's most regular enacted proclamation of the gospel and the covenant's ongoing renewal. Contrasted with less frequent observance (monthly, quarterly) that developed in some Protestant traditions after the Reformation, not from the apostolic pattern.                                                                                                                       |

## Practical Application

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### **A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?**

We must believe that the practical questions of who may come to the Table, how often the Supper should be observed, and how it should be received are genuine theological questions with genuine theological answers that flow from the full theology of the Lord's Supper that the three lessons of Unit 7 have established. The practical decisions a congregation makes about its Supper observance are not merely organizational preferences; they are theological confessions, visible in practice, about the nature of the church, the character of the covenant community, and the significance of the covenant meal that Christ instituted.

We must believe that self-examination before the Lord's Supper is not an optional discipline for the especially scrupulous but a universal requirement for every member who comes to the Table, grounded in the apostolic imperative of 1 Corinthians 11:28. The self-examination is not a search for personal worthiness that entitles the examiner to participate; it is the faith-engaged, conscience-honest, covenant-serious preparation that enables the member to come to the Table as one who understands what she is doing and why, and who receives the bread and cup as the genuine covenant renewal that the robust memorialist understanding of the Lord's Supper describes.

We must believe that the Lord's Supper is a corporate act of the gathered covenant community that cannot be adequately observed in private or in the absence of the assembled church. The communal dimension of the Supper, the one bread shared by the one body, the waiting for one another, the covenant koinonia of the body gathered at its Lord's Table, is constitutive of the Supper's meaning and cannot be separated from the ordinance without diminishing what the ordinance is.

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

We should feel a genuine and specific anticipation for the next Lord's Supper observance in this congregation. Not as a routine religious obligation but as the covenant meal of the community to which we belong, the most direct, most embodied, most communally enacted proclamation of the gospel that this community regularly performs. The member who comes to the Supper with genuine anticipation has already begun the preparation that the Supper's worthy reception requires.

We should feel a pastoral concern for any member of this congregation who comes to the Table without genuine self-examination, without genuine faith-engaged attention, or without genuine covenant awareness of the body they share. The warning of 1 Corinthians 11:29 is a pastoral warning that belongs to every member of the congregation: eating and drinking judgment is not a theoretical risk for the deliberately unbelieving; it is a real risk for the habitually careless, the routinely unexamined, and the covenantally indifferent. The pastoral love of a member for her fellow members includes the willingness to encourage one another toward the preparation that worthy reception requires.

We should desire for this congregation's practice of the Lord's Supper to reflect, in every observable dimension, the theological richness that the three lessons of Unit 7 have described: a frequent observance that honors the covenant's need for regular renewal; a thorough preparation that enables the faith-engaged reception through which the Spirit works; a clear pastoral explanation that extends both the genuine invitation and the necessary

warning; and a corporate reception that honors the communal koinonia of the one body gathered at the one Table of the one Lord.

### **C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?**

- Establish a personal practice of preparation for each Lord's Supper observance that includes the three specific dimensions of self-examination identified in this lesson: (1) doctrinal, renewing your genuine faith in Christ whose death the Supper proclaims; (2) relational, examining whether you are at peace with the covenant community in whose company you will receive the Supper; (3) moral, honestly acknowledging any specific pattern of sin or unrepented transgression that needs to be brought to the Lord before approaching His Table. This preparation need not be lengthy; it must be genuine.
- Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in full before the next Supper observance, paying specific attention to the abuses Paul identifies in verses 17-22 and to the self-examination command and warning of verses 28-30. Come to the Table prepared by this reading to receive the elements with the theological seriousness and the covenant awareness that Paul's instruction envisions. If this preparation reveals a specific spiritual issue that needs to be addressed before coming to the Table, address it, through prayer, through repentance, through pastoral conversation, before approaching the bread and cup.
- Reflect on the frequency with which this congregation currently observes the Lord's Supper and on the quality of preparation and explanation that accompanies each observance. If the frequency seems too low given the theological argument this lesson has made, bring the question to an elder in a constructive, pastorally framed conversation. If the frequency seems adequate but the quality of preparation and explanation seems insufficient, identify one specific improvement that would most enrich the congregation's encounter with the Supper and bring it as a recommendation.
- Pray for the members of this congregation by name in connection with the next Lord's Supper observance. Pray specifically that each member would come to the Table prepared, having examined herself, having renewed her repentance, having engaged her faith with the memorial of the Lord's death, and that the Spirit would work through the whole community's act of covenant remembrance to strengthen faith, deepen communion with Christ, renew covenant commitment, and nourish the souls of all who partake. This is the community of the Lord's Supper praying for itself; it is the covenant community interceding for the quality of its own covenant meal.
- As a concluding exercise for Units 6 and 7 together, write a brief account (two to three paragraphs) of what the two ordinances of the new covenant community, baptism and the Lord's Supper, mean to you personally, and how the theology of these two units has deepened, refined, or changed your understanding of the ordinances you have received. Bring the account to the next study session as a contribution to the group's reflection on the two ordinances that Christ has appointed as the enacted proclamations of the gospel in the life of the covenant community.

**Key Texts:** 1 Corinthians 11:17–34; 10:16–21; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; Matthew 26:26–29

## Study and Discussion Questions

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### ***Opening Question***

- How frequently does this congregation currently observe the Lord's Supper? Is the current frequency a deliberate theological decision, a pastoral practice inherited from earlier church leadership, or simply the result of institutional convention? Has this lesson changed how you think about the appropriate frequency for the Supper's observance?

### ***Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)***

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. What specific problems does Paul identify in verses 17-22 about the Corinthian community's practice of the Lord's Supper? What instruction does Paul give in verse 28, and what does the word 'must' signal about the character of the instruction? What is the warning of verse 29, and what consequence does verse 30 describe? What practical instruction does verse 33 give for the manner of the Supper's observance?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. What two questions does Paul ask about the cup and bread in verse 16, and what do the answers establish about the Supper's participation? What does verse 17 conclude from the unity of the bread? What contrast does verse 21 draw between the Lord's Table and the table of demons? What does this contrast establish about the covenant exclusiveness of participation in the Lord's Supper?
- Read Acts 2:41-46. What four characteristic practices does verse 42 describe for the apostolic community? What is the sequence of events in verses 41-42 (receiving the word, baptism, addition to the community, breaking of bread)? What does this sequence establish about the relationship between baptism, church membership, and the Lord's Supper? What does verse 46's 'day by day' suggest about the frequency of the early community's fellowship?
- Read Acts 20:7. What day does Paul and the community gather for the breaking of bread? What does 'the first day of the week' indicate about the regularized, worship-context character of the Supper's observance? How does this single reference, alongside the other evidence, support the argument for weekly Supper observance as the apostolic norm?
- Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-8. What is the discipline failure Paul addresses in verses 1-5? How does Paul use the Passover/feast imagery in verses 7-8 to connect the discipline issue to the Lord's Supper? What does 'let us celebrate the feast... with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth' imply about the relationship between the covenant community's discipline and the integrity of its Supper observance?

### ***Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)***

- The lesson describes three positions on communion (open, close, closed) and presents arguments for each. Which position do you find most exegetically compelling, and on what specific grounds? What is the most important argument on each side, and how do you assess the relative weight of those arguments?
- The lesson argues that 'unworthy participation' in 1 Corinthians 11:29 is not about personal unworthiness (the sense in which no one is worthy) but about the failure to discern the body rightly. What is the specific content of 'discerning the body rightly,' and how does the double interpretation (theological: the body of Christ in the elements; communal: the body of Christ as the covenant community) illuminate Paul's concern in the Corinthian context?

- The lesson argues that the New Testament's pattern suggests frequent observance of the Lord's Supper and that weekly observance is most consistent with the apostolic precedent. What is the strongest argument against frequent observance (the routinization concern), and what is the best response to that concern? Does the concern about routinization point toward less frequent observance or toward better quality of preparation and administration?
- The lesson argues that the Lord's Supper's corporate character means it cannot be administered in private without violating its most fundamental ecclesiological character. Is this a persuasive argument? Are there pastoral situations (serious illness, homebound membership, isolation due to persecution) in which the pastoral need for a privately administered Supper might override the general principle? How should the elders exercise wisdom in such cases?
- The lesson presents the Supper and the discipline as inseparably linked in Paul's theology of the covenant community (1 Corinthians 5 and 11 in close literary proximity). What is the specific theological connection between the Table and the discipline that makes them inseparable? How does the Table's integrity depend on the community's discipline, and how does the community's discipline serve the Table's integrity?

### ***Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)***

- This lesson has presented a vision of worthy Supper reception that includes genuine self-examination, genuine faith-engaged attention during the administration, and a renewed covenant commitment carried out afterward. How does your current personal practice of the Lord's Supper compare to this vision? Which dimension of worthy reception is most developed in your current practice, and which most needs cultivation?
- The lesson identifies the 'fencing of the Table', the pastoral explanation that extends both the invitation and the warning, as one of the most theologically rich and pastorally important acts the presiding elder performs. Does the current pastoral explanation that accompanies the Supper's administration in this congregation adequately communicate both the invitation (to all who genuinely believe and examine themselves) and the warning (to those whose participation would be unworthy)? What specific language or theological content would most strengthen the fencing of the Table as currently practiced?
- The lesson connects the Supper's integrity to the community's practice of discipline: the Table belongs to the disciplined covenant community. In light of this connection, how does this congregation's current practice of membership and discipline either support or undermine the integrity of its Table observance? What is the most significant single improvement to the congregation's membership or discipline practice that would most directly strengthen its Table integrity?
- The lesson closes with a description of a worthy reception of the Lord's Supper from the perspective of a specific member of the congregation. How closely does this description correspond to your own experience of the Supper? What would change in your preparation, your attention during administration, and your post-Supper life if you received every Supper with the combination of theological seriousness, faith-engaged attention, and covenant renewal that the description envisions?

## Prayer Focus

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Begin by reading 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 aloud: 'Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.' Paul asks two rhetorical questions whose expected answer is yes. Yes, the cup is a sharing in the blood of Christ. Yes, the bread is a sharing in the body of Christ. And therefore: we who are many are one body. The Lord's Supper is the covenant meal of the one body; and the one body that shares the one bread at the one Table is the community that Christ purchased with His own blood and that the Spirit has gathered into covenant fellowship with one another and with Him. Let that reality, the one body at the one Table, ground every prayer that closes this unit.

Pray for this congregation's practice of the Lord's Supper with the specificity that this final lesson of Unit 7 has demanded. Pray for the question of who comes to the Table: that the congregation's practice, whatever specific communion position the elders have discerned as most faithful, would be governed by a genuine theology of the covenant community rather than by institutional convention or pastoral convenience. Pray for the frequency of the Supper's observance: that the congregation would move in the direction of the apostolic pattern, toward more frequent rather than less frequent observance, and that the increased frequency would be accompanied by the increased pastoral investment in preparation and explanation that frequent observance requires. Pray for the quality of the self-examination that precedes each observance: that every member would come to the Table prepared, having examined herself, having renewed her repentance, having engaged her faith with the memorial of the Lord's death, and that no one would come to judgment because the pastoral preparation was insufficient or the member's own preparation was neglected.

Pray for the elders who administer the Lord's Supper in this congregation. Pray for the pastoral explanation they give before the elements are administered: that it would be theologically substantive, pastorally warm, and practically clear about both the invitation and the warning that the Table requires. Pray that the elders would invest in the Supper's administration the same quality of preparation and the same theological seriousness that the preached word receives, because the Supper is the visible word of the same gospel that the preached word declares audibly, and it deserves the same quality of pastoral investment. Pray for the congregation's corporate reception: that the one body would receive the one bread with genuine awareness of the covenant they share, the community they constitute, and the Lord at whose Table they sit.

Pray in anticipation for Unit 8's treatment of church discipline. Pray for the elders as they prepare to teach and lead the congregation through the most difficult and most necessary pastoral practice in the church's governance of itself. Pray for the congregation's openness to receive the teaching on discipline with the same theological seriousness and the same pastoral commitment that it has brought to Units 5, 6, and 7. Pray for the specific members of this congregation who may be in need of the pastoral accountability that genuine discipline requires, not in a spirit of condemnation but in the spirit of Galatians 6:1: 'Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.' The discipline that Unit 8 will describe is not the enemy of the community's love; it is the expression of it, and the congregation that prays now for the courage and the compassion to exercise it is the congregation that is most likely to do so faithfully when the moment comes.

Close with the final doxology that has closed every lesson of this series, and receive it not as a formulaic ending but as the genuine, theology-grounded, covenant-celebrating expression of the community that has spent this series learning what it is, how it is governed, how it worships, and how it lives: '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.' The glory is in the church, the covenant community of the redeemed, gathered at the Table of the Lord who purchased it, sustained by the governance of the officers He appointed, declared in the ordinances He instituted, and formed by the discipline He commanded. 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 11:17–34; 10:16–21; Acts 2:42, 46; 20:7; Matthew 26:26–29

***Soli Deo Gloria***  
*To God Alone Be the Glory*

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## **FAITHFUL TO THE WORD**

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