

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 20

THE INSTITUTION AND MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

This Do in Remembrance of Me

At the Table the church does not look back on a dead memory. She looks across at a living Lord who gave His body and blood to establish the covenant under which she now gathers, and she looks forward to the feast at which He will receive her as His bride.

“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.”

1 Corinthians 11:23–24, NASB 1995

Key Texts: Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Luke 22:14–23; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

“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

The Lord's Supper is the most regularly repeated, most communally central, and most theologically dense act in the covenant community's regular worship. Every time the church gathers around the bread and the cup, it performs the most direct available enacted proclamation of the gospel's central mystery: that the Lord Jesus Christ gave His body and shed His blood on the night He was betrayed, that this sacrifice established the new covenant in which the church lives, and that He will come again to receive the community He has purchased as His own. The Supper is simultaneously a memorial, a proclamation, a covenant renewal, a communion, and an eschatological anticipation, and the congregation that understands all of these dimensions receives the ordinance with the full weight of meaning that Christ intended when He instituted it.

Unit 7 addresses the Lord's Supper across three lessons that follow the same pattern as Unit 6's treatment of baptism. This lesson examines the institution of the Supper and its foundational meaning, what it is, what it declares, and why the church observes it. Lesson 21 will conduct a comparative study of the four major views of Christ's presence in the Supper, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, spiritual presence, and memorialism, and will defend the position that this ministry holds. Lesson 22 will address the practical and pastoral questions of who may come to the Table, how frequently it should be observed, and the posture of self-examination with which it should be received. Together the three lessons constitute a complete theology of the Lord's Supper that is theologically rigorous, historically informed, and pastorally practical.

The Lord's Supper and baptism are the two ordinances that Christ has given His church as the enacted proclamations of the gospel, the two visible words that accompany the audible word of preaching in the full ministry of the means of grace. Lesson 19 closed Unit 6 by pointing toward this connection: if baptism is the gospel written in water at the entry into the covenant life, the Lord's Supper is the gospel proclaimed in bread and cup throughout the covenant life. The relationship between the two ordinances is complementary and structural: baptism is administered once, as the public declaration of the new believer's covenant entry; the Supper is administered repeatedly, as the covenant community's regular renewal of the covenant that baptism established. One declares the beginning; the other sustains and renews the life that the beginning inaugurated.

The night of institution is the proper starting point for any theology of the Lord's Supper, because the ordinance's meaning is anchored in the specific historical context in which Christ instituted it: the night He was betrayed, in the upper room, at the close of the Passover meal, with His twelve disciples gathered around Him. The Passover context is not incidental; it is theologically constitutive. Christ is instituting the new covenant's memorial and renewal meal at precisely the moment when the old covenant's defining redemptive event, the Exodus, was being commemorated. The Supper is the Passover fulfilled, the new covenant's covenant meal replacing the old covenant's, the blood of the true Lamb providing what the blood of the lamb in Egypt could only point toward. Understanding the institutional context is the beginning of understanding the ordinance's deepest meaning.

I. THE NIGHT OF INSTITUTION

The Upper Room and the Passover Context

A. *The Four Accounts of the Institution*

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in four New Testament texts: Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-23, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. The presence of four accounts, three from the Synoptic Gospels and one from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, establishes the institution as one of the best-attested events in the New Testament. Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 11 is particularly significant because it is the earliest written record of the Supper's institution, predating the composition of the Synoptic Gospels, and because Paul explicitly grounds his account in direct dominical transmission: 'For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.' Paul is not presenting his own theological interpretation of an earlier tradition; he is transmitting what the Lord Himself communicated to him, either through direct revelation or through the apostolic tradition that traced directly to Christ's own instruction.

The accounts agree on the essential elements of the institution: the context (the Passover meal, the night of betrayal), the elements (bread and cup), the words of institution ('This is My body... This is My blood of the covenant'), and the command to continue the practice ('Do this in remembrance of Me'). The variations among the four accounts are minor and complementary rather than contradictory: Luke and Paul include the explicit command of repetition ('Do this in remembrance of Me') after both the bread and the cup, while Matthew and Mark include it in a more condensed form. Luke and Paul include the phrase 'new covenant' in Christ's words over the cup ('This cup is the new covenant in My blood'), while Matthew's account has 'My blood of the covenant.' These variations reflect the same event reported from different vantage points, and the convergence of the four accounts on the same essential institution is the most reliable possible basis for the church's understanding and practice of the ordinance.

The institutional setting, the Passover meal, provides the theological context within which the Supper's meaning must be understood. The Passover was Israel's most significant covenant meal: the annual commemoration of the Exodus, the event by which God had redeemed His people from slavery in Egypt and constituted them as His covenant community. The lamb's blood on the doorposts had caused the angel of death to pass over the houses of the Israelites; the meal eaten in haste in the shadow of imminent redemption was the covenant community's annual re-enactment of the night on which the old covenant community had been born. By instituting the new covenant's meal at the conclusion of the Passover, Jesus is performing a typological fulfillment of the most dramatic kind: the true Passover Lamb, whose blood will cause the eternal death to pass over all who shelter under it, is establishing the new covenant's meal at the very moment when the old covenant's defining redemptive event is being commemorated. The Supper is the Passover fulfilled; the new covenant meal that replaces, fulfills, and surpasses the old covenant's most sacred memorial.

B. *The Words of Institution*

The words Christ speaks over the bread and the cup are among the most theologically significant sentences in the entire New Testament, and they have been the subject of intense theological dispute across the history of the church. Matthew 26:26-28 records them: 'While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing,

He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.' The two parallel declarations, 'This is My body' and 'This is My blood of the covenant', are the words around which the entire theological debate about the Supper's nature revolves.

The Baptist tradition's reading of these words is that they are figurative rather than literal: Jesus is saying, in effect, 'This bread represents My body; this cup represents My blood of the covenant.' The figurative reading is supported by the standard features of Jesus' own speech: He regularly uses predicate-nominative constructions in figurative senses ('I am the door'; 'I am the vine'; 'I am the bread of life') without anyone inferring that He claims to be a literal wooden door, a literal grapevine, or a literal loaf of bread. The context of the institution also strongly supports the figurative reading: Christ is bodily present at the table with His disciples when He speaks these words; it is His physical body, still alive and intact, that is holding the bread while He says 'This is My body.' The disciples who were present at the institution did not believe they were being handed Christ's literal body; they understood the bread as the sign and representation of the body that was about to be broken for them.

The theological significance of 'My blood of the covenant' is equally important. The phrase echoes Exodus 24:8, where Moses sprinkles blood on the people and declares 'Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.' The old covenant was ratified with blood; the new covenant is ratified with blood, but with the blood of the Mediator Himself rather than with the blood of animal sacrifices. Luke's account adds the 'new covenant' language that makes the connection explicit: 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood' (Luke 22:20). The cup at the Lord's Supper is the enacted declaration that the blood of Jesus Christ is the ground of the new covenant into which the participants have entered, the blood that, shed once for all on the cross, establishes and seals the covenant relationship between God and His people that the Supper regularly renews.

II. THE MEMORIAL DIMENSION

Do This in Remembrance of Me

A. *The Command to Remember*

The most explicit interpretive key to the Lord's Supper's meaning is the command that Jesus attaches to its institution: 'Do this in remembrance of Me' (1 Corinthians 11:24-25; Luke 22:19). This command establishes the Supper as, in the first and most direct sense, a memorial, a regular act of corporate remembering in which the covenant community collectively calls to mind the death of Jesus Christ, the event on which the entire covenant relationship and the entire gospel hope are founded. The Greek word for 'remembrance' (anamnesis) carries a richer sense than the English 'memory' suggests: it does not describe merely the cognitive recall of a past event but the active, participatory, covenant-renewal appropriation of a past event's continuing significance. When Israel observed the Passover each year, the anamnesis was not merely a historical recollection that the Exodus had happened centuries earlier; it was the covenant community's regular re-appropriation of the redemption that the Exodus had accomplished and that continued to define Israel's identity and relationship with God.

The anamnesis of the Lord's Supper carries the same covenant-renewal force: when the church observes the Supper 'in remembrance of Me,' it is not merely conducting an annual historical commemoration of an event that

happened once. It is regularly, actively, covenantally re-appropriating the significance of the death of Jesus Christ for the community's ongoing life, renewing the covenant that His blood established, acknowledging the ground of the community's existence, and declaring before God and the watching world that the community's entire life is dependent on the sacrifice of the One whose death the Supper proclaims. The memorial is not passive; it is the active, participatory, corporate act of a community that knows its entire existence depends on the event it is remembering.

The memorial character of the Supper also establishes its relationship to the preached Word: both are proclamations of the same gospel truth, addressed to the same covenant community, producing the same faith-strengthening, covenant-renewing effect in the hearts of those who receive them. The Word addresses the ear through the spoken sermon; the Supper addresses the eye and the body through the enacted memorial. Together they constitute the full proclamatory ministry of the means of grace that the church's regular worship is designed to provide: the audible proclamation of the preached Word and the visible proclamation of the ordinance. Neither is complete without the other; the congregation that has the Word without the Supper lacks the enacted memorial; the congregation that has the Supper without the Word lacks the doctrinal foundation that gives the enacted memorial its meaning.

B. The Passover Typology and the New Covenant Memorial

The command to remember in 1 Corinthians 11:24-25 places the Lord's Supper in direct typological relationship to the Passover's own memorial function. Exodus 12:14 establishes the Passover as a permanent memorial: 'Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it as a permanent ordinance.' The Passover was Israel's regular enacted reminder that it was a redeemed community, that its existence as the people of God was grounded in the specific, historical event of the Exodus, in which God had passed over the houses of the blood-marked and had brought His people out of slavery. Every year, at the Passover table, Israel renewed its covenant identity as the community of those whom God had redeemed.

The Lord's Supper is the new covenant's Passover: the regular enacted reminder that the church is a redeemed community whose existence is grounded in the specific, historical event of the cross, in which God passed over the guilt of the blood-covered and brought His people out of the slavery of sin and death. Every time the church gathers at the Lord's Table, it renews its covenant identity as the community of those whom Christ has redeemed. The Passover lamb pointed forward to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29); the blood on the doorpost pointed forward to the blood of the new covenant shed for the forgiveness of sins; and the annual memorial meal of the old covenant community finds its fulfillment in the regular memorial meal of the new covenant community gathered around the bread and cup that Christ appointed as the new Passover.

Paul makes the typological connection explicit in 1 Corinthians 5:7-8: '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 feast that the redeemed community celebrates is the feast of the new Passover, the Lord's Supper observed by those who have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb who is Christ. The typological connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper is not a later theological imposition; it is embedded in the institutional context that Jesus chose for the Supper's institution and in Paul's own explicit identification of Christ as the Passover sacrifice.

III. THE PROCLAMATORY DIMENSION

Proclaiming the Lord's Death Until He Comes

A. *First Corinthians 11:26 and the Three-Tense Proclamation*

First Corinthians 11:26 provides what is, in some respects, the most theologically comprehensive single statement about the Lord's Supper in the New Testament: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.' The verse is remarkable for the three temporal dimensions it packs into a single sentence. The Supper is simultaneously backward-looking (it proclaims the Lord's death, the past, historical, once-for-all event of the cross), present-tense (it proclaims His death now, not merely as a historical recollection but as a present, active proclamation of the continuing significance of the death for the community's life), and forward-looking (until He comes, the Supper points toward the eschatological future, the return of the Lord whose death it proclaims). Every observance of the Lord's Supper stands at the intersection of past, present, and future in a way that no other act of Christian worship does.

The backward-looking dimension, the proclamation of the Lord's death, is the Supper's most direct connection to the memorial character established by the words of institution. What the community is proclaiming in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup is the death of Jesus Christ: the specific, historical, once-for-all event in which the body was broken and the blood was shed for the sins of the community gathered around the Table. The proclamation is not general; it is specific. It is not a proclamation of the concept of atonement; it is a proclamation of the death of this specific Lord, at this specific moment in history, for the specific people who are gathered at His Table. The Supper's memorial character is inseparable from its proclamatory character: to remember the Lord's death is to proclaim it; to proclaim it is to remember it in the full anamnesis sense of covenantal re-appropriation.

The forward-looking dimension, the 'until He comes', gives the Supper its eschatological urgency and its covenant anticipation. The Supper is not merely a backward-looking memorial; it is a forward-leaning anticipation. Every observance is preceded by the awareness that this may be the last observance before the Lord returns; every breaking of bread and lifting of the cup is an enacted prayer, 'Come, Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22:20). The eschatological dimension connects the Lord's Supper to the great banquet imagery of the prophets (Isaiah 25:6-8), the wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9), and the promise Jesus Himself makes in Matthew 26:29: 'I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.' The Lord's Supper is the covenant community's regular anticipation of the eschatological feast at which the Bridegroom will receive His bride, the feast that every earthly observance of the Supper is pointing toward and longing for.

B. *The Supper as Visible Sermon*

The proclamatory character of the Lord's Supper gives it a significance for the church's evangelistic witness that goes beyond the community's internal covenant renewal. First Corinthians 11:26's 'you proclaim' is addressed to the covenant community, but the proclamation is public and visible, a visible sermon performed before the watching world as well as before the gathered community. When the church breaks bread and lifts the cup, it is performing the most visually immediate enacted proclamation of the cross available to it. The watching world that

is present when the Lord's Supper is observed, whether as invited guests, as family members accompanying members of the congregation, or as visitors exploring what the Christian community is, witnesses the community's most direct enacted declaration that its entire existence is grounded in the death of Jesus Christ.

The visible-sermon character of the Lord's Supper parallels the visible-sermon character of baptism that Lesson 19 established. If baptism is the gospel enacted in the body of a specific person at the entry into the covenant life, the Lord's Supper is the gospel enacted in the bread and cup at the regular renewal of the covenant life. Both ordinances are proclamations; both declare the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; both are performed before the watching community and the watching world. The difference is in the form: baptism is performed once, in the body of a specific individual, as the declaration of that person's personal entry into the covenant community; the Supper is performed regularly, in the shared elements of the gathered community, as the declaration of the whole community's ongoing dependence on the death that established the covenant they share.

The pastoral implication of the Supper's visible-sermon character is the same as the pastoral implication of baptism's: both ordinances deserve the theological seriousness and the pastoral intentionality that their character as enacted gospel proclamations requires. The Lord's Supper that is administered hurriedly, perfunctorily, or without theological preparation and pastoral explanation is a visible sermon that has been preached without preparation, an enacted proclamation that communicates something less than the full gospel truth it is designed to declare. The Lord's Supper that is administered with the same seriousness of preparation, the same clarity of theological content, and the same pastoral intentionality as the best preaching is a visible sermon whose proclamation adds to the audible proclamation of the Word the enacted, embodied, communally shared dimension that only the ordinance can provide.

IV. THE COVENANT DIMENSION

The Family Table of the New Covenant Community

A. *First Corinthians 10:16-17 and the Covenant Fellowship*

First Corinthians 10:16-17 provides the most theologically compressed account of the Supper's covenant character: '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 word translated 'sharing' is the Greek *koinonia*, the same word translated 'fellowship' in Acts 2:42's description of the apostolic community's four characteristic practices ('they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer'). The Supper is *koinonia*, the deepest form of participatory, mutual, covenant-shared community life, expressed in the specific act of sharing the bread and cup that represent the body and blood of the Lord who established the community.

The double *koinonia* of verse 16, the cup as a sharing in the blood of Christ and the bread as a sharing in the body of Christ, establishes the Supper's dual fellowship dimension: communion with Christ and communion with one another. These two dimensions are inseparable; the community's fellowship with one another is grounded in and flows from the community's fellowship with Christ, which is declared and renewed in the sharing of the elements that represent His body and blood. The congregation gathered at the Lord's Table is not merely a group of people who happen to be eating together; it is the community constituted by its shared participation in the body and

blood of the Lord who purchased them, and the Table is the regular, enacted declaration of that shared constitution.

Verse 17's 'since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread' grounds the community's unity in the unity of the bread: the many members who share the one loaf are declaring, in the act of sharing, that they belong to the one body of Christ. This is one of the most direct statements in the New Testament about the connection between the Lord's Supper and the church as the body of Christ. The unity of the church is not a sociological fact to be achieved by consensus-building or institutional management; it is the theological reality of the one bread shared by the one body, the covenant community united by its shared participation in the death of the One who purchased it. Every observance of the Lord's Supper is simultaneously a declaration of the community's unity in Christ and a renewal of the covenant obligations that unity entails.

B. The New Covenant Meal and Its Old Testament Background

The covenant meal tradition of the Old Testament provides the deepest background for understanding the Lord's Supper as a covenant meal. In the ancient Near East, the sharing of a meal was one of the primary forms in which a covenant relationship was enacted and renewed; to eat together was to declare that the parties were in a relationship of mutual obligation and mutual commitment. The Old Testament's most significant covenant meals reflect this pattern: Abraham and Melchizedek sharing bread and wine after Abraham's defeat of the kings (Genesis 14:18-20); Moses and the elders of Israel eating and drinking in God's presence on the mountain after the covenant at Sinai (Exodus 24:9-11); the Passover meal as the annual covenant renewal of Israel's redemption from Egypt. In each case, the meal is the enacted expression of the covenant relationship, the visible, communal, embodied declaration of the covenant's reality.

The Lord's Supper stands in this covenant-meal tradition as its eschatological fulfillment. Jesus takes the Passover meal, the old covenant's defining covenant meal, and transforms it into the new covenant's defining covenant meal. The bread that was broken for the sake of Israel in the wilderness becomes the body that will be broken for the sake of the world on the cross; the cup of redemption in the Passover seder becomes the cup of the new covenant in Christ's blood. The covenant meal that Israel observed annually to remember its redemption from Egypt becomes the covenant meal that the church observes regularly to remember its redemption from sin, death, and the wrath of God in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The continuity is typological and theological; the discontinuity is the radical newness of the new covenant's better Mediator and the infinite sufficiency of the new covenant's better sacrifice.

The eschatological dimension of the covenant meal tradition also has Old Testament roots. Isaiah 25:6-8 envisions the eschatological banquet that the Lord will prepare for all peoples: 'The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; a banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, and refined, aged wine. And on this mountain He will swallow up the covering which is over all peoples, even the veil which is stretched over all nations. He will swallow up death for all time, and the Lord GOD will wipe tears away from all faces.' The Lord's Supper is the covenant community's regular anticipation of this eschatological feast, the regular enacted prayer for the day when the banquet Isaiah describes will be spread, death will be swallowed up, and the community of the redeemed will sit at the table of the returning Lord. Every observance of the Supper is one step closer to the fulfillment of that eschatological vision, and every breaking of bread and lifting of the cup is the community's covenant declaration that it is living in the hope of the feast that is coming.

V. THE GRACE DIMENSION

A Genuine Means of Grace

A. *The Supper as Nourishment for the Covenant Life*

The Lord's Supper is not merely a commemorative ceremony, a theological statement, or a social ritual of the covenant community's life. It is a genuine means of grace, an ordinance through which the Spirit works in the hearts of those who receive it faithfully to strengthen faith, deepen communion with Christ, renew covenant commitment, and nourish the soul in its ongoing relationship with the God who established the covenant the Supper celebrates. This claim about the Supper's genuine efficacy as a means of grace is not a concession to the sacramental traditions that locate the grace in the elements themselves; it is a distinctively Baptist conviction about how grace operates through the ordinance.

The grace of the Lord's Supper operates through faith, not through the elements themselves. When a believer receives the bread and the cup with genuine faith, engaging the memory of the Lord's death with the full weight of the anamnesis that Paul's 'remembrance' language implies, examining herself against the covenant commitments that the Supper renews, receiving the elements as the visible declarations of the body and blood that purchased her redemption, the Spirit works in that act of faith-engaged reception to strengthen the believer's trust in Christ, deepen her awareness of the covenant love that the cross displayed, renew her commitment to the Lord at whose Table she is sitting, and nourish the new life that His blood established. The grace is real; it is genuine spiritual nourishment; it is not placebo or mere memorial sentiment. But it is grace operating through faith, not grace operating through the physical substance of bread and wine.

The distinction between grace operating through faith and grace operating through the physical substance of the elements is the theological boundary that separates the Baptist's robust memorialism from the sacramental traditions' understanding of the Supper's efficacy. The Roman Catholic who receives the Eucharist is receiving, on the Catholic account, the actual body and blood of Christ whose sacrifice is re-presented in the Mass; the grace is in the physical substance. The Baptist who receives the Lord's Supper is receiving, through the Spirit's work in the act of faith-engaged reception, the strengthened covenant relationship and renewed trust in Christ that the bread and cup represent; the grace is in the Spirit's work through faith, not in the physical substance. The practical experience of genuine spiritual benefit from the Lord's Supper is shared by sincere Christians across the sacramental and memorialist traditions; the theological explanation of how that benefit is produced is where the traditions diverge.

B. *Spiritual Nourishment and Communion with Christ*

John 6:53-56 is the most extended New Testament text about feeding on Christ, and while it is not directly about the Lord's Supper in the first instance (Jesus speaks these words before the Supper's institution, and the discourse is addressed to a crowd that has witnessed the feeding of the five thousand), it provides the theological background for understanding what the Supper's grace dimension means: 'So Jesus said to them, 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. For My flesh is true food, and

My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.' The feeding on Christ that John 6 describes is the spiritual reality of which the Lord's Supper is the regular covenant enactment.

The critical interpretive key to John 6 for the Lord's Supper is verse 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 flesh profits nothing, the physical eating of Christ's physical flesh would accomplish nothing spiritually. It is the Spirit who gives life, the genuine spiritual nourishment of John 6:53-56 is the Spirit's work, accomplished through faith in the words that Jesus has spoken. The same principle applies to the Lord's Supper: the physical eating of physical bread and wine profits nothing in itself; it is the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception of the Supper's enacted memorial that produces the genuine spiritual nourishment. The Supper is, in this sense, the enacted form of John 6's 'words that are spirit and life', the visible declaration, in the breaking of bread and the lifting of the cup, of the same truth that John 6 declares audibly: that the life of the new covenant community is grounded in the body and blood of the Son of Man given for the life of the world.

The practical implication of the grace dimension is the importance of receiving the Lord's Supper with genuine preparation and genuine engagement. The believer who receives the Supper routinely, without preparation, without self-examination, and without the faith-engaged attention that the covenant renewal act requires is a believer who is not drawing on the means of grace that the Supper provides. She is eating bread and drinking wine; she is not receiving the spiritual nourishment that the Spirit provides through faith-engaged reception of the enacted memorial. The regular examination that Paul calls for in 1 Corinthians 11:28, 'But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup', is not a barrier to receiving the Supper but the pathway to receiving it in the way that draws on its full grace. Self-examination is the posture of faith-engaged reception; it is how the believer comes to the Table as one who knows what she is doing and why, and who receives the bread and cup as genuine covenant renewal rather than mere religious habit.

VI. THE ELEMENTS AND THE ACT

Bread and Cup as New Covenant Signs

A. *The Bread*

The elements of the Lord's Supper, the bread and the cup, are the physical forms in which the visible word of the Supper is proclaimed, and their specific character as physical objects gives the Supper's proclamation a tangible, embodied, sensory dimension that the preached word alone cannot provide. The bread that Jesus breaks at the institution, the unleavened bread of the Passover seder, becomes, in His hands and through His word, the sign of His body about to be broken. The physical act of breaking the bread enacts the breaking of the body; the physical act of eating the bread declares the individual's personal appropriation of the body broken for him. There is a physical intimacy to the eating that the hearing of a sermon cannot replicate: the bread that enters the body, that is physically incorporated into the person of the one who eats it, physically enacts the spiritual reality of Christ's body received and incorporated into the life of the believer.

The bread used in the Lord's Supper has been the subject of debate, unleavened bread (as at the Passover) vs. ordinary leavened bread, but the Baptist tradition's general approach is to treat the specific form of the bread as a matter of practice rather than theological necessity. The significance is in what the bread represents and in the

act of breaking and eating it together, not in the specific chemical composition of the loaf. The single loaf that Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 10:17, 'since there is one bread, we who are many are one body', is the more theologically significant detail: the unity of the bread from which all partake is the enacted declaration of the unity of the body that the Supper constitutes and renews. Whether a congregation uses one loaf broken and distributed, or individual portions, or some other form, the theological content of the one bread shared by the many is worth preserving in whatever form the administration takes.

The question of whether the Supper should use fermented wine or unfermented grape juice is a pastoral question that this unit does not resolve with a single mandatory answer. Both views are held by serious and thoughtful Christians within the Reformed Baptist tradition, with arguments on both sides: those who prefer fermented wine note that this was certainly what was used at the Passover and at the institution, and that the biblical imagery of wine carries specific connotations of gladness and covenant blessing that grape juice does not fully replicate; those who prefer unfermented grape juice note the pastoral concern for members who are in recovery from alcoholism and the desire to remove any potential stumbling block from the Table. This pastoral question deserves the kind of thoughtful, charitable, elder-led congregational discernment that the broader series has consistently commended for contested practical questions.

B. The Act of Eating and Drinking

The act of eating and drinking the elements, not merely the presence of the elements, but the physical act of taking them into the body, is constitutive of the Lord's Supper's meaning. Christ did not say 'look at this bread' or 'observe this cup'; He said 'take, eat' and 'drink from it, all of you.' The physical acts of eating and drinking are the covenant acts of the Supper; they are the specific forms in which the anamnesis, the proclamation, and the communion are enacted. The elements themselves, sitting on the Table but untouched, are not the Lord's Supper; the elements received and eaten in the act of covenant remembrance and renewal are the Lord's Supper. The physical intimacy of eating and drinking, of taking the signs of the Lord's body and blood into one's own body, expresses the depth of the covenant union that the Supper declares in a way that no other act can.

The communal character of the eating and drinking is equally important. First Corinthians 11:33 instructs: 'So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.' The Lord's Supper is not an individual act performed simultaneously by a group of individuals; it is a communal act performed together by the covenant community as a body. The 'one another' of verse 33 is the same 'one another' of the body-of-Christ imagery that pervades Paul's Corinthian correspondence: the members eating together are the members of the one body that the Supper constitutes and renews, and the manner of their eating should reflect the unity that the one bread declares. The congregation that receives the Supper with genuine communal awareness, attentive to the significance of sharing the one bread and one cup with the other members of the covenant body, is a congregation that is receiving the ordinance with the full covenant-community consciousness that Paul's instruction requires.

The frequency of the Lord's Supper's observance, how often the covenant community should gather at the Table, will be addressed in Lesson 22's treatment of practical and pastoral questions. At this stage it is sufficient to note that 1 Corinthians 11:26's 'as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup' does not prescribe a specific frequency but assumes a regular practice, and that the Acts 2:42 description of the apostolic community's life together includes 'the breaking of bread' among the four characteristic practices that defined the community's gathered life. The early church clearly treated the Lord's Supper as a regular, central feature of its corporate worship, not

an occasional supplement to the primary activities but one of the foundational practices that constituted the community's identity and renewal.

VII. THE SUPPER IN THE LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

Preparing for the Table with Theological Depth and Pastoral Joy

A. The Four Dimensions Integrated

This lesson has examined four dimensions of the Lord's Supper's meaning: the memorial dimension (the anamnesis of the covenant community's regular covenantal re-appropriation of the death of Christ), the proclamatory dimension (the enacted gospel sermon declaring the Lord's death until He comes, in its past, present, and future tenses), the covenant dimension (the koinonia of the community's shared participation in the body and blood of Christ and in one another), and the grace dimension (the genuine spiritual nourishment produced by the Spirit's work through faith-engaged reception). These four dimensions are not competing theologies of the Supper; they are complementary aspects of a single rich ordinance, each illuminating what the others leave in relative shadow.

The integration of the four dimensions in the congregation's practice of the Supper determines the quality of the community's encounter with the ordinance. A Supper that is purely memorial, focused exclusively on the historical recollection of the cross, will lack the proclamatory urgency, the covenant communion, and the gracious nourishment that the full theology of the Supper provides. A Supper that is purely communal, focused exclusively on the fellowship of the covenant community, will lack the backward-looking memorial, the forward-looking eschatological anticipation, and the vertical communion with Christ that the full theology requires. The Supper that holds all four dimensions together, that is observed as both a memorial and a proclamation, as both a covenant renewal and a means of grace, is the Supper that most fully serves the purposes for which Christ instituted it.

The pastoral preparation of the congregation for the Lord's Supper is the elders' most direct contribution to the quality of the community's encounter with the ordinance's full meaning. The brief explanation that precedes the administration of the elements, the pastoral word 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; it is the teaching dimension of the visible sermon's administration. The congregation that receives the Supper after a careful, theologically substantive, pastorally warm explanation is a congregation that is being formed by the ordinance in the same way that it is formed by the preached word, through the teaching of the whole counsel of God applied to the specific act the community is about to perform together.

B. Looking Forward to Lessons 21 and 22

Lesson 21 will address the most significant theological debate surrounding the Lord's Supper: the question of Christ's presence in the ordinance. The four major positions, transubstantiation (Roman Catholic), consubstantiation (Lutheran), spiritual presence (Reformed/Calvinist), and memorialism (Zwinglian/Baptist), will be described, evaluated, and the position of this ministry will be defended with the theological seriousness and the charitable engagement with the other traditions that the series has consistently modeled. The defense of

robust memorialism, the conviction that Christ is not physically present in the elements but is genuinely and spiritually present to faith in the act of covenant remembrance, will draw on the four dimensions of the Supper's meaning that this lesson has established.

Lesson 22 will address the practical and pastoral questions of the Table: who may come (the question of open, close, and closed communion), how frequently the Supper should be observed (the question of frequency that Acts 2:42 and 1 Corinthians 11 raise), and how it should be received (Paul's instructions about self-examination, discerning the body, and the warning against unworthy participation). Together the three lessons of Unit 7 constitute a complete Baptist theology of the Lord's Supper that takes the ordinance with the full theological seriousness it deserves and applies it to the specific pastoral life of the congregation that celebrates it.

The final word of this lesson is the word with which the unit began: the Table is the most regularly repeated, most communally central, and most theologically dense act in the covenant community's regular worship. When the church gathers at the Lord's Table, it does not gather to perform a religious ceremony; it gathers to do the most significant thing it regularly does, to proclaim the death of Jesus Christ, to renew the covenant that His death established, to commune with the Lord at whose Table it sits, and to anticipate the feast at which it will sit at His Table forever. There is no more important regular act in the life of this congregation, and no act that deserves more deliberate, more theologically substantive, and more pastorally joyful preparation and celebration. Let it be so.

“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

Lord's Supper	The ordinance instituted by Christ on the night of His betrayal, in which the covenant community regularly gathers to share the bread and cup as the enacted proclamation of His death and the renewal of the covenant established by His blood. Also called Holy Communion, the Eucharist, or the Breaking of Bread. The Baptist tradition's preferred designation, Lord's Supper, emphasizes the ordinance as the meal instituted by the Lord and eaten in His honor, not as a sacrifice performed by the clergy.
Anamnesis	The Greek word for 'remembrance' in Christ's institution command ('Do this in remembrance of Me', 1 Corinthians 11:24-25). Carries a richer sense than mere cognitive recall: the active, participatory, covenant-renewal appropriation of a past event's continuing significance. In the Passover context, the anamnesis was the covenant community's regular re-appropriation of the redemption accomplished in the Exodus. In the Lord's Supper, it is the church's regular re-appropriation of the redemption accomplished in the cross.
1 Corinthians 11:26	The most theologically comprehensive single statement about the Lord's Supper: 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.' Contains three temporal dimensions: backward-looking (the Lord's death, the past event of the cross), present (proclaiming His death now, the active, ongoing significance), and forward-looking (until He comes, the eschatological anticipation of the Lord's return).
Koinonia	Greek for 'fellowship' or 'sharing.' Used in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 to describe the Lord's Supper as a sharing in the blood and body of Christ and a sharing with one another as the one body of Christ. The deepest form of participatory, mutual, covenant-community life. The Supper as koinonia establishes the two dimensions of the communion: vertical (with Christ, through sharing in His body and blood) and horizontal (with one another, through sharing the one bread as members of the one body).
Passover Typology	The typological relationship between the Old Testament Passover and the New Testament Lord's Supper. The Passover was the old covenant's defining covenant meal, commemorating the Exodus and constituting Israel's identity as the redeemed community. The Lord's Supper is the new covenant's defining covenant meal, proclaiming the death of Christ and constituting the church's identity as the redeemed community. 1 Corinthians 5:7 makes the typological connection explicit: 'Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.'
Words of Institution	The specific words Christ spoke over the bread and cup at the Last Supper: 'This is My body... This is My blood of the covenant.' The Baptist tradition reads these as figurative rather than literal: Christ is saying 'This represents My body; this represents My blood of the covenant.' The figurative reading is supported by Christ's consistent use of predicate-nominative constructions in figurative senses elsewhere ('I am the door'; 'I am the vine') and by the physical impossibility of the literal reading (His body was still intact when He spoke the words).
Memorial	The primary character of the Lord's Supper in the Baptist/memorialist tradition: a regular act of corporate remembering in which the covenant community covenantally re-appropriates the significance of Christ's death. Not mere nostalgic recollection but the active, participatory anamnesis of a community whose entire existence depends on the event it is remembering. The memorial character is established by Christ's 'Do this in remembrance of Me' (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).
Means of Grace	Appointed instruments or practices through which God works to strengthen the faith, deepen the communion, and nourish the spiritual life of the covenant community. In the Baptist tradition, the primary means of grace are the Word of God (preached, read, and studied), prayer, and the two ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper). The Supper is a genuine

	means of grace, not in the sacramental sense of conveying grace ex opere operato through the physical substance of the elements, but in the sense that God genuinely uses it to strengthen faith and deepen communion through the Spirit's work in faith-engaged reception.
Eschatological Anticipation	The forward-looking dimension of the Lord's Supper: every observance points toward the Lord's return and the eschatological feast. Grounded in 1 Corinthians 11:26 ('until He comes'), Matthew 26:29 (Christ's promise not to drink of the vine until the kingdom), and the Old Testament's vision of the eschatological banquet (Isaiah 25:6-8) and the New Testament's wedding feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9). The Supper is the covenant community's regular enacted prayer: 'Come, Lord Jesus.'
Covenant Meal	A shared meal whose eating enacts and renews a covenant relationship between the parties. A pattern in the Old Testament (Abraham and Melchizedek; Moses and the elders on the mountain; the Passover) that finds its New Testament fulfillment in the Lord's Supper. The shared eating at the Lord's Table is the new covenant community's regular enacted declaration of the covenant relationship established by Christ's blood and renewed in the community's regular participation in the bread and cup that represent it.

Practical Application

A. For the Mind: What Must We Believe?

We must believe that the Lord's Supper is a genuine ordinance of Christ, instituted by His explicit command, grounded in the covenant He established with His blood, and observed by the church in obedience to His 'Do this in remembrance of Me.' The Supper is not an optional supplement to the church's primary activities of preaching and prayer; it is one of the two visible words that Christ has appointed for the enacted proclamation of the gospel and the regular renewal of the covenant that His blood established. The congregation that treats the Supper as a minor appendage to its worship, observed infrequently and without theological preparation, has not understood the full weight of what Christ instituted on the night He was betrayed.

We must believe that the four dimensions of the Supper's meaning, memorial, proclamation, covenant fellowship, and means of grace, are all genuinely present in every faithful observance. This multi-dimensional understanding prevents the reductionism that can afflict any single-emphasis account of the ordinance: the Supper that is only a memorial loses its proclamatory urgency and its covenant depth; the Supper that is only a covenant renewal loses its memorial grounding and its means-of-grace nourishment. The congregation that holds all four dimensions together in its understanding and practice receives the Supper with the full richness that Christ intended when He instituted it.

We must believe that the Lord's Supper is a genuine means of grace, that the Spirit works in the act of faith-engaged reception to strengthen faith, deepen communion with Christ, renew covenant commitment, and nourish the soul. This conviction honors the ordinance's genuine efficacy without locating the grace in the physical substance of the elements. The bread and wine are signs; the grace is the Spirit's work through faith. The congregation that receives the Supper with genuine faith-engaged attention, genuine self-examination, and genuine covenant awareness is a congregation that is drawing on the means of grace the Supper provides.

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

We should feel a renewed sense of privilege at being welcomed to the Lord's Table. The bread and cup that we receive declare that the blood of Jesus Christ has established the covenant under which we live, that we are members of the new covenant community purchased by that blood, and that the Lord at whose Table we sit has promised to return and to receive His community as His own. To be welcome at that Table is to be welcome in the most significant gathering in the history of the universe, the covenant community of those who belong to the triune God, gathered around the bread and cup that declare the death of their Lord.

We should feel a holy anticipation for the next observance of the Lord's Supper in this congregation. Not as a routine religious obligation to be fulfilled, but as the most significant regular act of this community's covenant life, the act that most directly and most embodiedly declares what the community is, why it exists, and what it is waiting for. The Supper observed with genuine theological preparation, genuine self-examination, genuine covenant awareness, and genuine eschatological anticipation is the Supper that most fully honors the Lord whose death it proclaims.

We should desire for the Lord's Supper to occupy the central, regular, theologically substantive place in this congregation's corporate worship that the New Testament's pattern of the apostolic community suggests it should occupy. Not as a dominating obsession, but as one of the two visible-word proclamations that accompany the

audible word of preaching in the full ministry of the means of grace. The congregation that regularly gathers at the Lord's Table with full theological engagement, genuine pastoral preparation, and the corporate joy of the covenant community renewed at its Lord's meal is a congregation that is living the life of the ordinance that Christ instituted and commanded.

C. For the Hands: What Must We Do?

- Before the next observance of the Lord's Supper in this congregation, read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 in its entirety as the most sustained apostolic treatment of the Supper's practice and abuse. Note: (1) the specific failures Paul addresses in the Corinthian community's observance (verses 17-22); (2) the tradition he delivers about the institution (verses 23-26); (3) the command to self-examination (verses 27-32); (4) the practical instructions for the gathering (verses 33-34). Come to the Table prepared by this reading.
- Practice the 'three-tense' reading of 1 Corinthians 11:26 in your personal preparation for the next Lord's Supper. Before you receive the bread: remember what the Lord's death accomplished (backward-looking); as you receive: consciously proclaim His death in the present (present-tense); after you receive: renew your anticipation of His return (forward-looking). This three-tense engagement transforms the Supper from a passive ceremony into an active, faith-engaged, covenant-renewing act of worship.
- Examine your personal experience of the Lord's Supper against the four dimensions examined in this lesson. Do you receive the Supper as a genuine memorial, actively re-appropriating the significance of the cross for your covenant life? As a genuine proclamation, consciously declaring the Lord's death to yourself and to the watching community? As a genuine covenant renewal, aware of the koinonia of the body you share with the other members of the community? As a genuine means of grace, expectant that the Spirit will work in the act of faith-engaged reception to strengthen your faith and deepen your communion with Christ? Which dimension is most developed in your current practice and which most needs cultivation?
- Speak with an elder or the pastor about the congregation's current frequency and form of Lord's Supper observance, and share your response to the four-dimension theology of this lesson. Are the four dimensions clearly communicated in the current pastoral explanation that precedes the administration? Is there a dimension that is currently under-emphasized in the congregation's practice? What specific, constructive suggestion might enrich the congregation's regular encounter with the ordinance?
- Read Matthew 26:26-29 alongside Luke 22:14-23 as a meditation on the night of institution. Note the Passover context (Luke 22:15-16), the new covenant declaration (Luke 22:20), and the eschatological promise (Matthew 26:29: 'I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom'). Let the institutional narrative ground your next participation in the Supper in the specific, historical, narrative context in which Christ first broke the bread and lifted the cup in the Triune name.

Key Texts: *Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Luke 22:14–23; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17*

Study and Discussion Questions

Opening Question

- What is your personal experience of the Lord's Supper? How frequently does this congregation observe it? How theologically substantive is the preparation and explanation that accompanies it? What has been the most meaningful observance of the Supper in your experience, and what made it meaningful?

Observation Questions (What Do the Texts Say?)

- Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26. How does Paul describe the source of his account of the institution (verse 23)? What are the specific words Christ speaks over the bread (verse 24) and the cup (verse 25)? What command is attached to each element, and what does that command establish as the Supper's primary character? What three temporal dimensions does verse 26 pack into its description of the Supper's proclamatory character?
- Read Matthew 26:26-29. What is the physical action that accompanies the words of institution over the bread (verse 26)? What does Christ say over the cup in verse 28, and what does 'poured out for many for forgiveness of sins' describe? What is the eschatological promise of verse 29, and how does it establish the Supper's forward-looking dimension?
- Read 1 Corinthians 10:14-21. What does Paul describe in verse 16 as the two dimensions of the cup's sharing and the bread's sharing? What conclusion does verse 17 draw from the unity of the bread? What contrast does Paul draw in verses 20-21 between participation in the Lord's Table and participation in the table of demons? What does this contrast imply about the covenant exclusiveness of the Lord's Supper?
- Read Luke 22:14-23. What does Jesus say about His desire to eat the Passover with His disciples (verse 15), and what does this reveal about the significance He attaches to the occasion? How does Luke's account differ from Matthew's in the words over the cup (verse 20)? What does the phrase 'new covenant in My blood' (verse 20) add to Matthew's 'blood of the covenant'?
- Read Exodus 24:3-11 alongside Matthew 26:26-29. What covenant-ratification ceremony does Exodus 24 describe? What is the significance of the blood in the old covenant ratification (verse 8)? How does the blood of the new covenant (Matthew 26:28) both continue and surpass the blood of the old? What does Moses' declaration in Exodus 24:8 ('Behold the blood of the covenant') mean, and how does Jesus' institution of the Supper fulfill and transcend it?

Interpretation Questions (What Does It Mean?)

- The lesson argues that the anamnesis of the Lord's Supper is richer than mere cognitive recall, that it involves the active, participatory, covenant-renewal re-appropriation of the cross's continuing significance. What is the difference, in practice, between the cognitive recall of a historical event and the covenantal anamnesis the lesson describes? How does the Passover analogy illuminate this distinction?
- The lesson presents 1 Corinthians 11:26 as containing three temporal dimensions (backward, present, forward-looking). Is this three-tense reading exegetically persuasive, or is it reading more into the verse than it contains? How does the eschatological dimension ('until He comes') change the character of the Supper compared to an understanding that focuses only on the memorial and proclamatory dimensions?
- The lesson argues that the Lord's Supper is a genuine means of grace, but that the grace operates through faith in the Spirit's work rather than through the physical substance of the elements. Is this distinction

theologically coherent? What evidence from the New Testament specifically supports the faith-mediated rather than element-mediated account of the Supper's grace?

- The koinonia of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 establishes both vertical communion (with Christ) and horizontal communion (with one another in the one body). How do these two dimensions of the Supper's communion relate to one another? Can one be present without the other? What does the horizontal communion dimension imply about the relationship between the Lord's Supper and the community life of the congregation that observes it?
- The lesson describes the Lord's Supper as the Passover fulfilled. What specific elements of the Passover find their fulfillment in the Lord's Supper? Is this typological reading of the institution context a valid hermeneutical move, or is it an imposition on the text? What would be lost from the understanding of the Lord's Supper if the Passover typology were removed from its interpretation?

Application Questions (What Does It Demand of Us?)

- The lesson argues that the pastoral preparation and explanation that precede the administration of the Supper constitute the teaching dimension of the visible sermon. How does this congregation currently prepare its members for the Supper's reception? Is the preparation theologically substantive, drawing on the four dimensions this lesson has examined? What would it look like for the preparation to be more consistently connected to the full range of the Supper's meaning?
- The lesson identifies four dimensions of the Supper's meaning (memorial, proclamation, covenant fellowship, means of grace) and argues that the congregation that holds all four together receives the Supper with the fullness Christ intended. In your experience of this congregation's observance, which of the four dimensions is most consistently present and which is most often absent or underemphasized? What specific change to the observance's form, explanation, or preparation would most strengthen the under-emphasized dimension?
- The lesson closes with the claim that the Lord's Supper is the most significant regular act of this community's covenant life. Does this congregation's practice of the Supper reflect this significance in the time, preparation, and pastoral investment it receives? Compared to the preparation given to the Sunday sermon, to congregational events, and to other regular activities, does the Lord's Supper receive the investment its significance warrants?
- The eschatological dimension of the Supper ('until He comes') gives every observance a character of anticipation and longing for the Lord's return. How does cultivating this forward-looking dimension change the emotional and spiritual quality of the Supper's reception? What practices, prayers, or words of explanation most effectively cultivate the eschatological anticipation that the Supper is designed to produce?

Prayer Focus

Begin by reading 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 aloud as the church's oldest recorded account of the Lord's Supper's institution: '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.' Read it slowly. Linger on each phrase. 'In the night in which He was betrayed', the betrayal is the context; the Supper is instituted in the shadow of the cross. 'Do this in remembrance of Me', the command establishes the church's obligation for every generation until He comes. 'You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes', the Supper is a proclamation that spans the entire age between the cross and the return, binding every observance to both the historical past and the eschatological future. This is what the congregation is doing when it gathers at the Lord's Table. Let that reality ground every prayer that follows.

Pray for this congregation's practice of the Lord's Supper with the specificity that the four dimensions of this lesson suggest. Pray for the memorial dimension: that the members would come to the Table with genuine anamnesis, not merely the cognitive recall of a historical event but the active, covenant-renewal appropriation of the cross's continuing significance for their own lives. Pray that the bread and cup would never become routine, never be received without genuine engagement with the death of Jesus Christ that they represent, never become a religious habit divorced from the covenant reality they declare. Pray for the proclamatory dimension: that every observance would be a genuine visible sermon, proclaimed with the theological clarity and the pastoral warmth that the enacted gospel deserves, and received with the awareness that the watching community and the watching world are witnessing the most direct enacted proclamation of the death of Jesus Christ that the congregation performs.

Pray for the covenant dimension of the congregation's Supper observance. Pray for the vertical koinonia, that the members would genuinely commune with Christ at the Table, aware that the bread and cup they receive are the signs of the body and blood that purchased the covenant they share, and that the One who died is the One who is present by His Spirit in the gathered community that bears His name. Pray for the horizontal koinonia, that the sharing of the one bread would genuinely declare and renew the unity of the one body, that any relational fractures within the congregation would be honestly addressed rather than obscured in the community's gathering at the Lord's Table, and that the covenant fellowship enacted in the Supper would be a genuine expression of the love that Christ has shown to the community He purchased.

Pray for the eschatological anticipation that the Supper's forward-looking dimension is designed to produce. Pray the prayer of Revelation 22:20, 'Come, Lord Jesus', with the genuine longing of a community that knows it is living between the cross and the return, that knows every observance of the Supper is one closer to the last before He comes, and that knows the feast at which it will sit is the feast that Isaiah 25:6-8 envisions and Revelation 19:6-9 describes. Let the Lord's Supper be, for this congregation, the regular enacted renewal of the eschatological hope that the Spirit of the risen Christ produces in all those who genuinely belong to Him. And give thanks, genuine, specific, covenant-aware thanks, for the night in which He was betrayed, when He took bread, and gave thanks, and broke it, and said: Do this in remembrance of Me.

“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: Matthew 26:26–29; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26; Luke 22:14–23; 1 Corinthians 10:16–17

Soli Deo Gloria
To God Alone Be the Glory

FAITHFUL TO THE WORD

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