

Rich Remembrance, Faithful Witness, and Manifest Unity: Recovering Biblical and Baptist Emphases in the Lord’s Supper

Joshua A. Waggener

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

Abstract: *This article revisits Paul’s instructions for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians, summarizing his three primary emphases: remembrance, proclamation, and communion. Then, sections on the Lord’s Supper in the 1689 Second London Confession and The Baptist Faith and Message (1925, 1963, and 2000), along with recent writings by Baptist authors, are examined for instances of these priorities. Lastly, implications of the Pauline emphases (as understood by Baptist theologians) are suggested to inform a renewed practice of the Lord’s Supper in churches today, addressing questions such as frequency, the preparation of participants, and the proper place for partaking. Overall, this article shows that Pauline priorities for the Lord’s Supper have been emphasized by Baptists (historically and recently), and that these priorities may guide Baptist churches in observing this ordinance as a time of rich remembrance, faithful proclamation, and true communion with God and others.*

Key Words: *1 Corinthians, Baptist Faith and Message, communion, Lord’s Supper, proclamation, remembrance, Second London Confession*

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many churches struggled to take the Lord’s Supper together, especially when members were viewing the service via livestream video. Christian leaders debated whether a valid “virtual” Lord’s Supper was possible, and, if so, how it should be administered. The situation resulted in some Christians not partaking in this important ordinance for months, if not years.

For liturgical traditions that practice the Lord’s Supper weekly due to their emphasis on its sacramental necessity, the absence of communion

was an issue that demanded immediate attention. Without the weekly Eucharist, Catholics were “impoverished” of “an irreducible good.”¹ Episcopalians experienced “urgency and longing” to return to communion.² According to the Lutheran pastor Gordon Lathrop, churches needed to “recover and restore the biblical and liturgical reality of assembly”—including the Eucharist—rather than continue “the emergency electronic means” which were not a true assembly—or Supper—at all.³ Meanwhile, many pastors in churches that did not observe the Supper on a weekly basis focused on current issues that were causing conflicts among their members and eroding the unity of the local church.⁴

Due to the questions that arose over the validity of leading the Lord’s Supper via livestream video, as well as the conflicts that arose in the local church, some pastors in Baptist churches began to reconsider the significance of the Lord’s Supper for their times of gathered worship. Would communion around the Lord’s Table, practiced faithfully according to biblical teaching, assist the church in regaining its gospel focus? Could this ancient rite of worship, instituted by Christ himself, help heal the wounds of division and bring their churches back together?

In this article, we will first examine Paul’s instructions for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians, summarizing the primary emphases evident in this NT epistle.⁵ Then, after briefly considering two Baptist confessions,

¹ Anthony R. Lusvardi, SJ, “Spiritual Communion or Desire for Communion?: Sacraments and Their Substitutes in the Time of COVID-19,” *Worship* 96 (April 2022): 177.

² Ruth A. Meyers, “Spiritual Communion as a Response to Hunger for Christ,” *ATR* 104.1 (2022): 89.

³ Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Assembly: A Spirituality* (Fortress Press, 2022), 51. Lathrop does affirm that, in “this recent and painful time of the pandemic, ... the wisest and most caring course has been not to assemble at all” (p. ix).

⁴ According to a September 2021 report by the Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “41% of churches struggled to adapt to [COVID] restrictions,” “24% of churches had moderate to severe conflict around COVID restrictions,” and for 67% of clergy “2020 was the hardest year for ministry” (p. 2). In addition, “42% of congregations struggled to maintain contact and a sense of community with their membership” (p. 7). Hartford Institute for Religion Research, “Navigating the Pandemic: A First Look at Congregational Responses” (November 2021), available online at <https://www.covidreligionresearch.org/research/national-survey-research/navigating-the-pandemic-a-first-look/>.

⁵ One reason to return to Paul’s instructions for the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians is that this epistle was most likely written before any of the Gospels. As

a survey of recent theological literature by Baptist authors will reveal some recurring convictions regarding the Lord's Supper.⁶ Lastly, Paul's emphases, as understood by Baptist authors, will be applied to more practical questions such as the frequency of practice of the Lord's Supper, the preparation of participants, the value for unbelievers that are present but do not participate, and the proper place for partaking. Overall, this article will show that Pauline priorities for the Lord's Supper have been emphasized by Baptists (historically and recently), and that these priorities may guide Baptist churches in observing this ordinance as a time of rich remembrance, faithful proclamation, and true communion with God and others.

Revisiting Paul's Instructions for the Lord's Supper

Paul's first canonical epistle to the church at Corinth deals with many problems. By chapter 11, the apostle has addressed divisions over their perceived leadership (1 Cor 3:22; cf. 1:10–17; 3:1–23), misunderstandings of apostolic authority (4:1–21), improper handling of sexual immorality (5:1–13; 6:12–20) and lawsuits in the church (6:1–11), questions regarding marriage and singleness (7:1–40), and whether Christians should partake of food offered to idols in pagan ceremonies (8:1–13; 10:1–33).⁷ This article focuses on Paul's concerns over the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11:17–34. However, a fuller understanding of Paul's specific instructions entails

David S. Dockery confirms, "It is practically certain that 1 Corinthians was written before the Gospels, which means that it is the earliest account we have of the supper's institution. It is indeed the earliest record of any words of the Lord Jesus that Paul described in detail. For this reason, many consider it the most revealing and helpful text on the Lord's Supper" (David S. Dockery, "The Church, Worship, and the Lord's Supper," in *The Mission of Today's Church: Baptist Leaders Look at Modern Faith Issues*, ed. R. Stanton Norman [B&H Academic, 2007], 39).

⁶ This article seeks to address the Lord's Supper from a distinctly Baptist perspective. Although there is much to learn about the Supper from other Christian traditions (including the vast literature on the Eucharist from Catholic and Orthodox perspectives), and ecumenical dialogue provides invaluable insights, for the purposes of this article supporting quotes and references will come almost exclusively from commentators and theologians with Baptist convictions.

⁷ James Hamilton categorizes the problems that Paul is addressing as (1) factionalism (chaps. 1–4), sexuality/gender issues (chaps. 5–7), and idolatry (chaps. 8–10), summarizing that "False worship (1 Cor 8–10) is to be replaced with true worship (1 Cor 11–14)" (James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Lord's Supper in Paul: An Identity-Forming Proclamation of the Gospel," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 76).

consideration of other passages (especially 1 Cor 10:16–17) and the context of the entire epistle.⁸ The following seeks to understand Paul's instructions in the context of 1 Corinthians and appreciate these as prescriptive for the church today.

Remembrance as Response

Paul's first emphasis is clear in 1 Cor 11:23–26 as he repeats what he has "received from the Lord" (v. 23),⁹ often referred to as the "words of institution." In the instructions (which Paul had "delivered to" the Corinthian church before, v. 27), he retells the account of Jesus and the disciples gathering for the Last Supper (cf. Matt 26:26–29; Mark 14:22–25; Luke 22:14–23), quoting Jesus's commands to "Do this in remembrance of me" (vv. 24 and 25, cf. Luke 22:19).

What were his disciples to "do"? They were to take the bread and the cup as an act of remembrance of the Lord Jesus, who gave his body and blood. In the context of a Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus transformed the simple action of eating and drinking into a new and profound ritual meant to be done as a reverent commemoration of his suffering on the cross: "For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7). Hamilton details how this act of remembrance for Jesus's disciples parallels that of the Passover, stating, "Just as Israel was instructed to remember what took place at the exodus by celebrating the Passover (Exod 12:14; Deut 16:3), so Jesus instructs His disciples to continue to partake of the bread that is His body for His 'remembrance.'"¹⁰ Likewise, Jesus's instructions to drink the cup "in remembrance"—similar to the cups of wine at the Passover—point back to blood poured out as part of a covenant ceremony. As Moses had poured out blood to ratify the old covenant (Exod 24:3–8), so the cup of the Lord's Supper—representing his blood poured out for them (Rom 3:25; 5:9; Eph 1:7; Col 1:20)—institutes "the

⁸ In contrast to 1 Corinthians 1–10, where Paul is seeking to correct various problems in the church, chapter 11 begins to put forth a positive view of what should happen "when you come together as a church" (v. 18) for the purposes of worship. He addresses the Lord's Supper (chap. 11), the use of spiritual gifts (chaps. 12–14), the proclamation of the gospel (chap. 15), and offerings to support the church in Jerusalem (chap. 16).

⁹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

¹⁰ Hamilton, "The Lord's Supper in Paul," 87–88.

new covenant” (v. 25; cf. Matt 26:27–28).¹¹

In response to Jesus’s command to his first disciples, Christians today continue to partake of the bread and the cup as an ordinance of worship intended to evoke Christ’s death. As Thomas Schreiner and Matthew Crawford explain, “Jesus’ death for sinners is so important and fundamental for Christians that our Lord commanded us to continue to observe this meal in His remembrance.”¹² Therefore, as we take the bread and drink from the cup, we are to dwell on the events of Christ’s Passion, recalling with thanks that “Jesus died for me.”¹³

Proclamation through Words and Symbols

Paul’s second emphasis is also clear from the words of the institution. Paul reiterates that eating the bread and drinking from the cup serve as a means of proclamation of “the Lord’s death until he comes” (v. 26; cf. Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25). This proclamation is accomplished through both biblical words and biblical symbols.

Regarding the words used in the ordinance, Paul instructed the church at Corinth by repeating Christ’s own words (vv. 24 and 25). Regarding the symbols used, Paul concisely explains how Jesus “took bread” (v. 23) and “took the cup” (v. 25). He then makes clear that participative action is required, calling the Corinthians to “eat this bread and drink the cup” (v.

¹¹ For more on Jesus’s interpretation of the wine, see Allen P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Kregel, 2006), 396–98. In response to objections to the Last Supper as a Passover observance (based on readings of the account in John’s Gospel), Ross provides ten points of evidence to affirm the Supper’s Passover origins (pp. 392–94). I also commend Hamilton’s reading of 1 Cor 11 in light of the Exodus (“The Lord’s Supper in Paul,” 85–91), which climaxes with these words: “The Corinthians have experienced the new exodus: Christ is the new Passover lamb whose blood covers them and removes God’s wrath; ... they have entered into a new covenant; ... and they journey through the wilderness toward the kingdom of God, partaking of the Lord’s Supper as Israel partook of the manna and celebrated the feasts of God’s deliverance” (p. 91).

¹² Schreiner and Crawford, “Introduction,” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 1.

¹³ The emphasis of thanksgiving (*eucharist*)—an appropriate response for saved sinners—is also implied here in 1 Cor 11. The fact that Jesus gave thanks before sharing the elements is recorded here in 1 Cor 11:24 as well as three of the four Gospel accounts (Matt 26:26–27; Mark 14:22–23; Luke 22:17–19). In Matthew and Mark, Jesus blesses the bread and gives thanks for the cup. The Gospel of Luke and 1 Cor describe how Christ gave thanks before he broke the bread (cf. John 6:11).

26). As Christ-initiated symbols (with rich Passover connections), the bread and the cup serve as irreplaceable tokens pointing to what made salvation possible. These tangible signs that are taken in the hands and tasted in the mouth signify the body and blood of Christ.

The words and symbols identified by Paul set the pattern for Christian observances of the Lord’s Supper. By reading the words of institution (either from 1 Cor 11 or the Gospel accounts), Christian leaders today follow Paul’s instructions and repeat Christ’s words. By eating of the bread and drinking from the cup, Christians declare to those around them, “This I believe” and “in this do I trust”—Christ’s body was broken for me and his blood poured out for my salvation.

How long are we to proclaim this message? Paul adds to his explanation in v. 26 the simple phrase “until he comes.” In partaking of the Supper, Christians “renew our commitment to proclaim Christ’s death until faith becomes sight and remembrance becomes reality.”¹⁴ As Christians, we are to proclaim that Jesus died and “He is risen indeed!” (cf. Luke 24:34). Therefore, we anticipate Christ’s return.

Communion with Christ and His Church

Beyond the clear emphases on remembrance and proclamation in Christ’s words of institution (1 Cor 11:23–26), additional emphases can be discerned from Paul’s teaching and instructions beyond these verses.¹⁵ Beginning in v. 27, he addresses taking the Supper “in an unworthy manner” and speaks to the dire consequences of doing so: such people are “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (v. 27), which results in sickness, death (v. 30), and being “judged by the Lord” (v. 32).

What does it mean to partake “in an unworthy manner”? What does it mean to be “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord”? Although many possibilities have been suggested, ranging from disrespect for the elements to guilt for crucifying Christ, what seems clear is that

¹⁴ John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Kregel, 2005), 283.

¹⁵ Hamilton’s chiastic outline of 1 Cor 11:17–34 helps to show how the passage is centered on “proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes” (vv. 23–26) and “partaking in a worthy manner” (vv. 27–32) while at the same time addressing the problem of disunity in the church at Corinth: “Corinthian anti-gospel divisions at the Lord’s Supper” (vv. 17–22) and “receiving one another at the Lord’s Supper” (vv. 33–34). As he summarizes, “The remedy for the problematic behavior outlined in 1 Cor 11:17–22 is proposed in 11:33–34, and the worthy manner in which the Corinthians are to proclaim the Lord’s death as they partake of the Lord’s Supper (11:23–26) is outlined in 11:27–32” (Hamilton, “The Lord’s Supper in Paul,” 79).

approaching the Supper without due reverence for the ritual which Christ commanded and the symbols that he instituted may bring the Lord's discipline.¹⁶

In contrast, Paul seeks to guide the Corinthian church to take the Supper in a worthy manner and to experience the remarkable benefits of doing so. He gives instructions that will prevent believers from taking the Supper in a way that would bring judgment upon themselves: before partaking, believers should "examine" themselves (v. 28) and by doing so, judge themselves "truly" (v. 31). Such an examination should lead to confession of sin and the intention to live a righteous life, to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Such a careful approach to the Table takes seriously both its significance and our own sinfulness.

By practicing examination and repentance, believers prepare themselves for an experience of true communion with Christ at the Supper. This is implied in 1 Cor 11 but can be understood more fully considering Paul's explanation regarding "the cup of blessing" and "one bread" in 1 Cor 10:16–17. In 1 Cor 11:27, Paul repeatedly emphasizes that the bread and cup—"the body and blood"—are "of the Lord." Hence, these elements at the Lord's Table belong to the Lord. Back in 1 Cor 10:16, drinking from the cup and eating of the bread is equated with "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ." As Dockery explains, "The word participation is a translation of *koinonia* and includes the ideas of spiritual communion or fellowship."¹⁷ Therefore, through the Lord's Supper we are to experience communion with Christ. If taken in a worthy manner, the believer will experience fellowship with the Lord.

However, the content and context of 1 Corinthians makes it clear that Paul also understands the Lord's Supper as communion with Christ's church. Regarding the Supper, Paul's brief comments in chapter 10 and instructions in chapter 11 point to an understanding of the meal—when practiced properly—as a unifying activity, while shedding more light on what it means to take the Supper in a "worthy" manner. First, in 1 Cor 10:17, Paul emphasizes the "one bread" that "we all partake of," signifying that the "many are one body" (cf. Rom 12:4–8; 1 Cor 12:12–31). As Hammett writes, "First Corinthians 10:16–17 links the Lord's Supper to

¹⁶ A full discussion of what Paul means by partaking in "an unworthy manner" and the resulting guilt is beyond the scope of this article. For a helpful treatment, see John S. Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord's Supper* (Kregel, 2015), Question 34, "What Does It Mean to Partake of the Lord's Supper in an Unworthy Manner?"

¹⁷ Dockery, "The Church, Worship, and the Lord's Supper," 48.

the unity of the body. As we partake of the one loaf, we renew our commitment to the body."¹⁸ The Supper was intended to be a meal that expressed the unity of the body.¹⁹

Furthermore, in 1 Cor 11, the "unworthy" approach to the Supper not only dishonored Christ, but also his earthly "body," the church that was intended to be "one body" (1 Cor 10:17).²⁰ The "divisions" (1 Cor 11:18) and "factions" (1 Cor 11:19) evident among the believers at Corinth when they came together to eat and drink was directly opposed to the nature of the meal that "was established to manifest their unity."²¹ And, as Mark Taylor observes, "To shame others and to show contempt for the church of God (11:22) is to be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."²²

This brings into view Paul's warning regarding "discerning the body (v. 29)." While some read the phrase in v. 29 as a shortened expression of "the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27), others, in consideration of the context of 1 Cor 11, understand that "the body" should be "discerned"

¹⁸ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 282.

¹⁹ Paul's concern for unity among the believers at Corinth repeatedly relates to issues of worship practice, beginning with how various factions in the church bragged over who had performed their baptism (1 Cor 1:10–17). Later, Paul addresses the misuse of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12–14). Based on Paul's comments, it is obvious that the Corinthian church was using their so-called "gifts" in such a way that did not benefit the church (14:6), prevented understanding (14:7–11), and lacked order (14:23, 40). All of this was bound to create even more disunity in the church.

²⁰ As Brian J. Vickers explains, "Though discussion of being worthy or unworthy to take the Supper is often linked exclusively to personal, hidden, or private sins, Paul's concern is not limited to individual sin.... The Corinthians are sinning against one another and doing so at a time when they ought to be the most united" ("The Lord's Supper: Celebrating the Past and Future in the Present," in *The Lord's Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 327).

²¹ Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, 173. As Ciampa and Rosner lament, "The sad irony was that the Corinthians were not actually 'coming together' when they came together, but gave clear indications of being a divided and disorderly group, which reflected poorly on Christ and on themselves.... The Lord's Supper, like the Passover meal on which it was based, should have served as an experience that strengthened the unity of God's people, not one that would divide them" (Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC [Eerdmans, 2010], 543, 544–45).

²² Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, NAC 28 (B&H, 2014), 275.

as the church.²³ If this is true, Paul is here expanding his instructive warning to say, “In addition to considering the Lord Jesus, do not eat the Supper without recognizing the church.”²⁴ Believers are to eat together with brothers and sisters in Christ in a way that shows deference, “wait[ing] for one another” (v. 33) instead of “[going] ahead with his own meal” (v. 21). Instead of an experience of disunity among professing believers, the Supper should be an occasion of profound unity and fellowship.

In sum, Paul gives instructions in 1 Cor 11 regarding the Lord’s Supper in response to the disunity and disorder that were occurring as the Corinthian church gathered (vv. 17–22). He addresses the liturgical problem by repeating the “words of institution” given by the Lord Jesus, emphasizing the command to take the Supper in remembrance and as a proclamation. He confronts the dishonoring of the Supper and disunity of the church by admonishing the Corinthians to first “examine” themselves, then come to partake of the Supper as a means of true communion with God and others.

Reclaiming Baptist Theological Emphases Regarding the Lord’s Supper

Reviewing Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians leads us to ask: Have Baptists emphasized the same things that Paul did in his apostolic instructions? In their ceaseless quest for more biblically faithful worship,²⁵ have Baptists sought to honor Paul’s teaching? To assess the situation, the following will briefly consider two Baptist statements of faith and then present a synthesis of authors representing recent Baptist convictions.²⁶ In

²³ According to Taylor, there are three primary views of Paul’s phrase “discerning the body” in v. 29: (1) distinguishing the Lord’s Supper from other meals (e.g., Leon Morris), (2) understanding the elements as representing “the death of Christ” (e.g., Anthony Thiselton), and (3) recognizing “the church as the body of Christ,” based on the lack of the genitive phrase “of the Lord” (e.g., Gordon Fee) (*1 Corinthians*, 276–77).

²⁴ Regarding 1 Cor 11:29, Hamilton argues that “No distinction should be drawn between the body of Jesus and the church. Both are in view” (“The Lord’s Supper in Paul,” 97). Likewise, Schreiner understands the warning in v. 29 to relate to both Christ’s death and the congregation (Thomas R. Schreiner, *1 Corinthians*, TNTC [IVP Academic, 2018], 133).

²⁵ For examples from seventeenth-century English Baptists, see Matthew Ward, *Pure Worship: The Early English Baptist Distinctive* (Pickwick, 2014).

²⁶ The collected essays in Scheiner and Crawford’s 2010 edited collection, *The*

the end, this section will show that some Baptist theological understandings of the Lord’s Supper line up closely with the Pauline emphases on remembrance, proclamation, and communion.

The Second London (Baptist) Confession (1689)

In 1689, Particular Baptist ministers in London signed the Second London Confession. Chapter 30 of this statement consists of eight full paragraphs addressing the Lord’s Supper. Its first paragraph states:

The Supper of the Lord Jesus, was instituted by him, the same night wherein he was betrayed, to be observed in his Churches unto the end of the world, *for the perpetual remembrance, and shewing forth the sacrifice in his death*[,] confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him, their further ingagement [*sic*] in, and to, all duties which they owe unto him; and *to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other*.²⁷

According to the confession, the Supper should be “observed” for “remembrance,” looking back to Christ’s death, and continued as a “perpetual” practice by faithful Baptist churches. Secondly, this ordinance serves as an act of proclamation which “[shows] forth the sacrifice in his death.” Paragraph 2 clarifies that Christ’s Supper is “only a memorial of that one offering up of himself, by himself, upon the crosse, once for all” and that “Christ’s own only sacrifice” is “the alone propitiation for all the sins of

Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes (in the NAC Studies in Bible & Theology series published by B&H Academic) present some of the best evidence of recent Baptist engagement with the Lord’s Supper. Chapters from this collection are referenced repeatedly above and below.

²⁷ W. J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (American Baptist Publication Society, 1911), 270–72 (emphasis added). The full content of the Second London Confession is available online at <https://www.the1689confession.com>. This paragraph from the Second London Confession includes emphases that go beyond the three identified above with regard to Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians. See Michael A. G. Haykin, *Amidst Us Our Beloved Stands: Recovering Sacrament in the Baptist Tradition* (Lexham Press, 2022), 33–34. Kindle Edition. For more on the English Baptist emphasis of “spiritual nourishment,” especially in the fifty Eucharistic hymns of Joseph Stennett (1663–1713), see Andrew M. Lucius, “Hast Thou, My Soul, Thy Savior View’d?: Eucharistic Piety in the Hymns of Joseph Stennett” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2025).

the Elect.”²⁸ Third, the words of the confession explicitly relate the Supper to the believers’ communion: it is “a bond and pledge of their communion with [Christ], and with each other.” Therefore, Paul’s emphases of remembrance, proclamation, and communion are all evident in the Second London Confession.

The Baptist Faith and Message (1925, 1963, 2000)

The lengthy article on the Lord’s Supper found in the Second London Confession may be contrasted with that of The Baptist Faith and Message (BF&M), which was first adopted as a statement of faith by Southern Baptists in 1925. This document includes only one sentence on the Lord’s Supper. Describing the Supper in relation to the other church ordinance recognized by Southern Baptists, it reads: “[Baptism] is prerequisite to the privileges of a church relation and to the Lord’s Supper, in which the members of the church, by the use of bread and wine, commemorate the dying love of Christ.” In 1963, the statement—still only one sentence—was revised to state: “The Lord’s Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.” This 1963 statement was retained verbatim in the 2000 revision of the BF&M.²⁹

Although brief, these statements from the BF&M make clear several key emphases of the Supper in line with Paul’s teaching. First, it is an “act of obedience” (1963/2000), as the Lord Jesus commanded us to practice this (1 Cor 11:24 and 25), alongside believer’s baptism. Second, it is done for the purpose of remembrance: “to commemorate the dying love of Christ” (1925) or “memorialize the death of the Redeemer” (1963/2000). Through mention of Christ’s “second coming,” the 1963/2000 statement also evokes Paul’s instruction to practice the Supper as a proclamation “until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Therefore, these Baptist statements identify the Supper as an ordinance which encourages remembrance as well as anticipation but lack attention to its role in proclamation or any hint of

²⁸ As Paul did in 1 Cor 11, the English Baptist authors of the Second London Confession addressed (at length) what they saw as misunderstandings or errant practices of the Supper, including “the Popish sacrifice of the Mass” (paragraph 2), “The denial of the Cup to the people” (paragraph 4), and “Transubstantiation” (paragraph 6). The confession also distinguishes “worthy receivers” (paragraph 7) with those “unworthy of the Lord’s Table” (paragraph 8), quoting Paul’s warning in 1 Cor 11:27 and 29.

²⁹ For a side-by-side listing of the articles from the 1925, 1963, and 2000 versions of the BF&M, see “Comparison Chart,” The Baptist Faith and Message, <https://bfm.sbc.net/comparison-chart/>.

communing with Christ and his church.

Since 2000, Baptists have given more voluminous attention to the Supper, bringing fresh biblical insights and theological convictions. The following shows how these more recent writings reclaim more of Paul’s emphases in 1 Corinthians, while maintaining that the Supper is a ritual of remembrance.

As Rich Remembrance

For those familiar with Baptist history since the seventeenth century,³⁰ it comes as no surprise that the Pauline emphasis on remembrance (based on Christ’s commands) remains the strongest among Baptists. In a Baptist church building with traditional furnishings, one needs to look no further than the central table in the worship space with the words “In Remembrance of Me” engraved on the front.³¹

While not seeking to minimize the memorial nature of the Supper, recent Baptist authors are keen to point out that this sacred meal is not an act of mere recollection. Drawing upon a deeper understanding of the biblical motif of “remembrance” in the OT and its usage in the NT, multiple writers point to something that goes beyond mere memorialism. Describing its OT significance, Vickers explains that “to remember . . . is not merely to list some historical facts, or to recall a piece of personal, experienced history; it is to take part in those events now in the remembering of them.”³² Giving attention to the NT and the meaning of the Supper in the early church, Dockery observes that

the remembrance of Christ in the biblical sense is different from our modern notion of remembering, which generally means a

³⁰ For a helpful survey, see Anthony L. Chute, Nathan A. Finn, and Michael A. G. Haykin, *The Baptist Story: From English Sect to Global Movement* (B&H Academic, 2015).

³¹ Since the nineteenth century there has been a persistent Zwinglian tendency in the Baptist tradition, sometimes prioritizing the memorial aspect of the Supper in a way that overshadows or excludes other biblical themes. This is clear in the terse BF&M statements above in their use of “commemorate” (1925) and “memorialize” (1963/2000) as the primary verbs related to the ordinance. On the prominence of the Zwinglian “memorial” view, see Haykin, *Amidst Us Our Beloved Stand*, 29, 44–46. For a fuller view of Ulrich Zwingli’s understanding of the Lord’s Supper beyond its simplification as the “memorial view, see Bruce A. Ware, “The Meaning of the Lord’s Supper in the Theology of Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531),” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 229–47).

³² Vickers, “The Lord’s Supper,” 321.

mental transportation of thought back to the moment of the occurrence of an event. It is rather the dynamic recalling of the past so that it again becomes a present reality that is operative in which we may share. The supper, then, is a dynamic remembrance of the life and death of our Lord.³³

Therefore, the “remembrance” that is expected as believers practice the Supper is not simply bringing historical facts to mind. As Hammett makes clear, “The word *ἀνάμνησις*, remembrance, is far richer than a mere recollection or commemoration. It is recalling an event with such vividness and power that it affects the present, bringing all the benefits of Christ’s death to bear, remembering that his body was broken ‘for you’ (1 Cor 11:24).”³⁴ In sum, as churches practice the Supper “in remembrance of [Christ],” contemporary Baptist theologians are calling them to experience a rich form of remembrance.

As Perpetual Proclamation

Although the Southern Baptist sentences from the BF&M do not explicitly state the word “proclamation,” the BF&M article on “Evangelism and Missions” (included in all three editions of the BF&M) leaves no doubt about the denomination’s commitment to gospel witness.³⁵ More recent Baptist authors have emphasized and explained how the Lord’s Supper serves as a witness in symbolic form. Dockery states, “The observance of the supper acts as a sermon and proclamation of the death that it commemorates.”³⁶ The Supper is not replacing a preached sermon, but it does accomplish something similar. Dockery adds that “this continuing practice, when regularly observed by the Lord’s people, can become a constant publishing of the gospel by visible word and deed.”³⁷ Likewise, Matthew Emerson and Lucas Stamps assert that “the Lord’s Supper is the gospel Word visually and bodily proclaimed The Lord’s Supper is the gospel proclaimed visibly and materially.”³⁸ This emphasis on the visual aspects of the Supper—the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup—is in line with the BF&M’s language of seeing the Supper as “a symbolic act” (1963/2000). Although open to local forms

³³ Dockery, “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 44–45.

³⁴ Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 282.

³⁵ For the BF&M 2000 version, see “XI. Evangelism and Missions,” *The Baptist Faith and Message*, accessed December 13, 2025, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xi>.

³⁶ Dockery, “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 41.

³⁷ Dockery, “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 43.

³⁸ Matthew Emerson and Lucas Stamps, *The Baptist Vision: Faith and Practice for a Believers’ Church* (B&H Academic, 2025), 43.

that best convey their significance, the bread and cup are irreplaceable symbols, instituted as part of the commands of Christ (1 Cor 11:24–25).

As Paul instructed, this ordinance of symbolic proclamation should be practiced “until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Indeed, to “anticipate His second coming” (BF&M 1963/2000) is required for the full gospel message to be intact. Coleman Ford and Shawn Wilhite make this point, writing:

There is no faithful gospel proclamation without the return and judgment of Christ. “Christ has died, Christ has risen, Christ will come again” is the hope-filled cry of the church. When we gather around the table of our Lord, we take bread and wine to remember both his body and blood, as well as “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).³⁹

The Supper thus functions as a multi-dimensional message: not a memorial that merely looks backwards, but one that perpetually proclaims Christ’s death, implicitly acknowledges his resurrection, and looks forward to his second coming.

As Communion with Christ

Understanding the Supper as a commemoration of past events and a proclamation that anticipates the future return of Christ is in line with Paul’s clear emphases in 1 Cor 11. But focusing on these alone may overlook the possibility of Christ being present during the observance today.⁴⁰ Recent Baptist writers point out the limitations of such a view and encourage churches not to miss Christ’s presence at the Lord’s Supper.

For example, in *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship*, Daniel Block (an evangelical biblical scholar with [ana]baptistic convictions) asserts that, “when we eat and drink with hearts that are pure and lives that are clean, we do indeed experience anew the life-giving grace of Christ, who is personally present through his Spirit.”⁴¹ Block’s statement exemplifies what is distinctive about many Baptist claims: There are certain qualifications regarding the practice of the Supper in order for us to expect Christ’s presence. He identifies the importance of partakers having “hearts that are pure and lives that are clean,” in line with the practice

³⁹ Coleman M. Ford and Shawn J. Wilhite, *Nicaea for Today: Why an Ancient Creed (Still) Matters* (B&H Academic, 2025), 82.

⁴⁰ The question of the “real presence” of Christ at the Lord’s Supper has been debated by theologians for centuries. For concise examinations of the issue from a Baptist perspective, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Baker Books, 2013), 1046–47; and Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, Question 31, “In What Sense Is Christ Present in the Lord’s Supper?”

⁴¹ Daniel I. Block, *For the Glory of God: Recovering a Biblical Theology of Worship* (Baker Academic, 2014), 160.

of self-examination and repentance.

In “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” Dockery warns of “focus[ing] only on the past and future work of Christ” when practicing the Supper and thereby “miss[ing] the present ministry of Christ in the life of the believing community.”⁴² The qualification apparent in Dockery’s phrase “the believing community” is the necessity of faith for experiencing the presence of Christ in the Supper. Only believers in Christ will encounter his presence at the Supper.

Likewise, in a chapter that encourages “Celebrating the Past and Future in the Present” in observances of the Lord’s Supper, Vickers argues that faith is “the key to the presence of Christ.”⁴³ He points to the meal that the resurrected Christ has with the two disciples in Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32) and concludes that “Though Jesus is not revealed visibly to us in the Supper, He is seen *by faith* through the analogy of the bread and the cup.”⁴⁴

Beyond the personal purity or faith of believers, recent Baptist writers—including Dockery, Block, as well as Mark Dever—stress that the work of the Holy Spirit is essential for Christ’s presence at the Table.⁴⁵ Dockery affirms that such is “made possible by the work of the Spirit.”⁴⁶ Likewise, Dever states that “the Lord’s Supper . . . is entirely dependent

⁴² Dockery, “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 48. Hammett observes that “Baptists have been so concerned to deny Christ’s physical presence that they have often in effect seemed to teach a doctrine of real absence. Wherever else Christ’s presence may be found, don’t look for it here!” (*Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 281). Likewise, Erickson notes that “Out of zeal to avoid the conception that Jesus is present in the elements in some sort of literal way, some have sometimes gone to such extremes as to give the impression that the one place where Jesus most assuredly is not to be found is the elements of the Lord’s Supper” (*Christian Theology*, 1047).

⁴³ Vickers, “The Lord’s Supper,” 334.

⁴⁴ Vickers, “The Lord’s Supper,” 335 (emphasis added).

⁴⁵ This role of the Holy Spirit in the Supper was emphasized by Calvin in the Reformation as a way to counter the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. As Block concisely explains, “According to John Calvin, Christ is present in the Lord’s Supper, though neither bodily nor physically. Contrary to the Roman Catholic view, when we partake of the elements, we do not actually eat the body and drink the blood of Christ” (*For the Glory of God*, 160).

⁴⁶ Dockery, “The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 48.

on God’s Spirit to create the spiritual communion between God and believers it depicts.”⁴⁷ Block adds, bringing together both the necessary human condition and the divine initiative, that, “[Christ’s spiritual presence] is not experienced automatically; faith and openness to the work of the Spirit are prerequisites to the spiritually energizing work of Christ.”⁴⁸ In sum, just as recent Baptists have gone beyond an understanding of the Lord’s Supper as a mere memorial and come to see the bread and cup as a symbolic form of proclamation, some have also embraced the conviction that Christ (in some way) is spiritually present at the Table.⁴⁹

As Communion with Other Believers

As shown above, Paul’s teaching in 1 Cor 10 and instructions in 1 Cor 11 make it clear that the Lord’s Supper also serves as a time of communion with Christ’s church. We participate as “one body, for we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor 10:17). This Pauline emphasis has been echoed by several Baptist authors. Millard Erickson states that “the Lord’s Supper is as much a symbol of the present vital fellowship of believers with the Lord and with one another as it is a symbol of the past death of Jesus.”⁵⁰ Vickers further explains that Jesus “is present in and with His people at all times, but the Supper affords a special glimpse into that reality as believers indwelt by the same Spirit, having the same baptism, commune together, confessing the same Lord and Savior.”⁵¹

Just as the Supper at Corinth was fraught with relational conflict that

⁴⁷ Mark E. Dever, “The Church,” in *A Theology for the Church*, 2nd ed., rev. and expanded, ed. Daniel L. Akin, Kenneth D. Keathley, and Keith Whitfield (B&H Academic, 2026), 993.

⁴⁸ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 160.

⁴⁹ While defending a historic Baptist understanding of Christ’s being present at the Supper in “a real spiritual sense,” Dockery makes the important clarification that “This in no way is to affirm the Roman Catholic position of transubstantiation or the Lutheran position of consubstantiation. But it is to borrow from the best of thought found in Zwingli and Calvin as well as our Baptist forefathers” (“The Church, Worship, and the Lord’s Supper,” 48). Recent Baptist advocacy for the spiritual presence of Christ at the Supper (by the work of the Holy Spirit) reclaims an emphasis that goes back to seventeenth-century Baptists (see above on the Second London Confession) and is in line with the views of the nineteenth-century Baptist “Prince of Preachers” C. H. Spurgeon (1834–1892). Spurgeon even penned a hymn titled “Jesu’s Presence Delightful” that, according to Haykin, “is quite remarkable for a late nineteenth-century Baptist author, for the vast majority of Baptist leaders in that era held that the Supper was a time of remembrance, nothing more” (*Amidst Us Our Belovèd Stands*, 6).

⁵⁰ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1037.

⁵¹ Vickers, “The Lord’s Supper,” 337.

Paul needed to address, recent Baptist authors recommend an approach to the Supper that encourages reconciliation among brothers and sisters in Christ. For example, Hammett explains that “the self-examination called for [by Paul] is not general, calling on us to look over our lives for the past week or months, and confess any minute sin that might render us unworthy, but to detect ‘broken relationships, division-causing behavior, disrespect, and mistreatment of brothers and sisters in Christ.’”⁵² Thus, true Christian communion entails regular conversations between believers to admit that hurtful words have been said and harmful wrongs have been done towards one another (following the procedure Jesus taught in Matt 18:15–20). In anticipation of the meal that symbolizes such communion, the hope is that these reconciling conversations will take place. And, in the act of partaking together, “Christ’s people . . . renew their communion with one another; confession is made, and forgiveness is visually and bodily proclaimed and received.”⁵³

Implications for Renewed Practice

The sections above have demonstrated that the Pauline emphases on remembrance, proclamation, and communion in the Lord’s Supper can be found in historic Baptist statements of faith and more recent theological writings. While the memorial aspect of the Supper has remained prominent, clearer explanations of the proclamatory nature of the rite and fresh convictions regarding the presence of Christ at the Supper have emerged, along with an appreciation of the communal nature of the Supper among fellow Christians.

In this last section, implications of the Pauline emphases (as understood by Baptist theologians) will be suggested to inform a renewed practice of the Lord’s Supper in churches today. These implications will be organized under the three emphases (remembrance, proclamation, and communion) and further supported by Baptist authors.

Practicing Remembrance

The Lord’s Supper should be thoughtfully planned and prepared. In section one, the Supper was identified as an act of intentional remembrance done in response to Christ’s command. Therefore, it should not be observed in a thoughtless way. Individually, this relates to the instructions to “examine”

⁵² Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, 173. Here Hammett is quoting from Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology, ed. John Feinberg (Crossway, 2012), 406–7.

⁵³ Emerson and Stamps, *The Baptist Vision*, 43.

ourselves (1 Cor 11:28) and properly “discern” the body (1 Cor 11:29). For pastors and others with leadership responsibilities over corporate worship services, this requires thoughtful planning and preparations so that all those participating may be encouraged to remember Christ in a worthy manner.⁵⁴

Autonomous Baptist churches—being without external authority or a mandated liturgy—are free to craft services that follow James Leo Garrett’s call for “the structuring of the order of worship so that the Supper can be more meaningfully observed.”⁵⁵ When the Supper is observed, great attention should be given to the other elements of the service, including the songs that are sung, the prayers that are prayed, the Scriptures that are read, and the sermon that is preached, as well as the order in which they are practiced. In this way, the Supper can become, as Emerson and Stamps envision, “the culmination of what has been sung, prayed, read, and preached thus far in corporate worship.”⁵⁶

If Christ-centered and Scripture-saturated elements of worship have all been thoughtfully prepared and placed in the order of service, the Supper may then follow the preaching of the Word. Considering the biblical rhythm of revelation and response,⁵⁷ worship planners may therefore employ the Lord’s Supper as the primary response to God’s Word in the service. Instead of closing the service with an adaptation of a nineteenth-century evangelistic strategy from revival meetings, Baptist churches may consider enacting the sacred meal that Christ instituted for the church. As Ray Van Neste suggests, “Rather than an altar call, it is a Table call, allowing each of us, in a sense, to rededicate ourselves each week.”⁵⁸

The Lord’s Supper should be observed with fitting frequency. Since Jesus commanded us to “do this,” churches should not neglect the Lord’s Supper. But how frequently should we partake?

⁵⁴ As Ciampa and Rosner emphasize, “the identity of the meal cannot be distinguished from the manner in which it is carried out” (*The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 545).

⁵⁵ James Leo Garrett Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Wipf & Stock, 2014), 675.

⁵⁶ Emerson and Stamps, *The Baptist Vision*, 43.

⁵⁷ For worship planning strategies related to “the rhythm of revelation and response,” see Joseph R. Crider, *Scripture-Guided Worship: A Call to Pastors and Worship Leaders* (Seminary Hill Press, 2024), 83–95.

⁵⁸ Ray Van Neste, “The Lord’s Supper in the Context of the Local Church,” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 388. On the evangelical value of the Supper for unbelievers, see below.

Among Baptists in America, quarterly observances have been common, although not universal.⁵⁹ However, Baptist scholars giving attention to NT evidence conclude that quarterly observance of the Supper is not frequent enough, if we are seeking to follow the model of the early church. Based on Acts 2:42 and 20:7, Van Neste affirms “a clear pattern of weekly observance in the NT.”⁶⁰ Furthermore, regarding the church at Corinth, he argues that “the fact that abuse of the Lord’s Supper was such a problem in Corinth strongly suggests the Supper was held frequently. Could it have been such a problem if it only occurred quarterly?”⁶¹ Hamilton agrees, noting that:

From what Paul says in 1 Cor 11:17–34, it seems that the church partook of the Lord’s Supper when they “came together,” and from 1 Cor 16:2, it seems that the Corinthian church “came together” on the first day of the week. When combined with a text like Acts 20:7, which indicates that Paul’s practice was to celebrate the Lord’s Supper with the church when it gathered for worship on

⁵⁹ As Gregory A. Wills notes regarding Baptists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: “Baptists differed . . . on the frequency of observing Communion. Most churches observed the ceremony once per quarter, a smaller number observed it once per month, and a few observed it weekly” (“Sounds from Baptist History,” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ until He Comes*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Matthew R. Crawford [B&H Academic, 2010], 288–89). A LifeWay Research survey confirms that quarterly practice was still the norm as recently as 2012, when 57% of SBC pastors surveyed report a quarterly observance. “Lifeway Surveys Lord’s Supper Practices of SBC Churches,” *LifeWay Research*, September 17, 2012, <https://research.lifeway.com/2012/09/17/lifeway-surveys-lords-supper-practices-of-sbc-churches/>.

⁶⁰ Van Neste, “The Lord’s Supper in the Context of the Local Church,” 370. Nevertheless, Van Neste is quick to add that, “As is commonly noted, there is no specific command given on how frequently we ought to celebrate Communion” (p. 370). But he is “convinced that our churches will benefit from celebrating Communion more, rather than less, often” (p. 370).

⁶¹ Van Neste, “The Lord’s Supper in the Context of the Local Church,” 371. He adds, “[Though they] were abusing the Supper, their practice (which was not considered odd by Paul) was to celebrate each time they gathered. Even the wording in 11:25, ‘As often as you drink it,’ which is often used to suggest frequency is unimportant, in context actually suggests a frequent celebration of the Lord’s Supper” (p. 372).

the first day of the week, this seems to be the early church’s practice.⁶²

Block affirms this conviction, adding that “It seems the New Testament ideal of a weekly observance is the most honoring to the Lord and the most spiritually rejuvenating for his people.”⁶³

Recent writings suggest that some Baptist churches have begun to partake of the Supper more often. Writing in 2025, Emerson and Stamps testify that “churches are beginning to see the benefit of more regular observance of Communion (monthly or even weekly).”⁶⁴ Likewise, Ford and Wilhite (in another 2025 publication) “advocate for a weekly observance of the Supper because we cannot have enough reminders of Christ’s work for us.”⁶⁵ Since we often forget, we ought to remember the Lord through partaking of the Lord’s Supper more frequently.

Practicing Proclamation

Our practice of the Lord’s Supper should display the gospel through carefully selected words and symbols. Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians confirm that the Lord’s Supper is to be a perpetual proclamation to believers and unbelievers.⁶⁶ Although the Supper often serves as a means of response in the service, it still retains its function as proclamation. It should be considered part of the church’s faithful witness of the gospel—not apart from the ministry of the Word but complementing the preaching and speaking truth through sacred symbols and ritual actions. Notwithstanding clear presentations of the gospel can and should occur throughout the service in many ways (sermons and songs, testimonies and exhortations), practicing the Lord’s Supper on a frequent basis should ensure that the gospel is

⁶² Hamilton, “The Lord’s Supper in Paul,” 100–101. See also Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord’s Supper*, Question 36, “How Often Should the Lord’s Supper Be Observed?”

⁶³ Block, *For the Glory of God*, 166–67. Block also counters the argument that “since First Testament roots of the Lord’s Supper are found in the annual Passover, the Eucharist should be celebrated only once a year, perhaps on Maundy Thursday” by contending that “the Lord’s Supper is more than a Christian Passover: it also incorporates traditions of covenant ratification and sacrifice for sin” (p. 382n54).

⁶⁴ Emerson and Stamps, *The Baptist Vision*, 54.

⁶⁵ Ford and Wilhite, *Nicaea for Today*, 85.

⁶⁶ After addressing the practice of the Supper in 1 Cor 11 and the use of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12–14, Paul reiterates the gospel message in 1 Cor 15:1–4. Just as he had to remind the Corinthians of the “words of institution,” he begins chapter 15 by stating “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you” (v. 1).

displayed through this Christ-ordained means.

Although particular words for the ordinance are not prescribed in the NT, some form of the words of institution (from 1 Cor 11 or the Gospels) will make the origins of the rite and its gospel significance clear.⁶⁷ Furthermore, other biblical words and phrases can be used to explain the Supper, perhaps beginning with Paul's own words in 1 Cor (e.g., 1 Cor 5:7; 10:16–17). But additional teaching that further explains the Supper (as appropriate for each service and in line with sermon themes or applications) should also be prepared and delivered. In this way, the Christian message of salvation is verbally preached, and those that hear the message may more likely partake in faith (cf. Rom 10:14–17).

As the symbol of bread represents both the unified church of Christ and the body of Jesus broken for sinners, pastors may make use of a common loaf at the table (even if larger congregations necessitate small wafers for the distribution). While reciting the words of institution, the pastor can break the loaf, just as Jesus “broke it, and said ‘This is my body’” (1 Cor 11:24). The symbol of the cup also has multiple interconnected meanings, summarized by Jesus as “the new covenant in my blood” (1 Cor 11:25). Whether juice or wine is used, the connection with Jesus's shed blood on the cross should be evident.

Our practice of the Lord's Supper should proclaim the gospel with evangelistic awareness. The Lord's Supper, while typically partaken of only by believers,⁶⁸ may serve as a powerful proclamation to unbelievers. The gospel

⁶⁷ As Emerson and Stamps encourage, “the Lord's Supper is ... necessarily accompanied by the verbally proclaimed words of institution (“This is my body,” etc.)” (*The Baptist Vision*, 43).

⁶⁸ Who can (or should) receive the Lord's Supper? Due to the common prerequisite of baptism for those intending to partake, and the Baptist commitment to believer's baptism, this question has been given extensive attention in Baptist literature. Since at least the seventeenth century, Baptists have debated whether this means that they should not offer the Supper to those that trust in Christ but were baptized as infants. In addition, Baptist commitments to local church discipline have led some churches to only offer the ordinance to local church members, a position sometimes referred to as “closed” communion. In contemporary practice, many Baptist churches seem more comfortable with “close” communion, allowing for believers of “like-minded” or “gospel-preaching” churches to also partake. While most conservative Baptists would not advocate for “open” communion, where anyone who so desires may partake, in practice few churches “fence the Table” sufficiently to prevent such. For a historical view on Baptist views, terminology, and practices, see Wills, “Sounds from Baptist History,” 287–312. Regarding more recent perspectives, see Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Questions 32 and 33, “Who May Properly Partake of the Lord's Supper? (Parts 1 and 2).

words and symbols used (as addressed above) speak of Christ's death for sinners. Thus, the regular practice of the Supper may itself be an evangelistic witness. As Van Neste describes the experience: “An unbeliever sitting in the service will have heard the gospel expounded and will have been called to repent and believe. The elements will have been explained with a call to repent and believe but a warning that if he does not repent and believe, then the elements are not for him.”⁶⁹ Pastors should be aware of unbelievers in their midst and lead the Lord's Supper with the same evangelistic mindset as they have when preaching. Thus, practicing the Supper becomes a means of faithful witness to both believers and unbelievers.⁷⁰

Practicing Communion

The Lord's Supper should be taken with confession of sin and assurance of faith. Paul's instructions for the Lord's Supper in 1 Cor 11, along with his related comments in 1 Cor 10, identify the practice as an experience of true communion with Christ and others. Therefore, in preparing to commune with Christ at the Lord's Supper, believers should be given opportunities to confess their sins (privately) and profess their faith (either privately or corporately).

Multiple Scripture passages point to the need for confession of known sin for continued communion with God (e.g., Pss 32; 51; 130; Matt 6:12, 14–15; Luke 11:4; Heb 4:16; Jas 5:13–16; 1 John 1:9). Paradigmatically, Isa 6 depicts the prophet Isaiah being confronted by the thrice-holy nature of “the LORD of hosts” (v. 3). He responds with these words of confession: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (v. 5). As it was for Isaiah, the prophet of the Lord, so it is for Christians today—we are “lost” and “unclean” and in need of atonement for our sin (v. 7) through our Lord Jesus Christ (1

⁶⁹ Van Neste, “The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church,” 389. The BF&M article on “Evangelism and Missions” (mentioned above) articulates the Southern Baptist commitment for “every follower of Christ” and “every church of the Lord Jesus Christ to endeavor to make disciples of all nations.” This is accomplished “by verbal witness undergirded by a Christian lifestyle, and by other methods in harmony with the gospel of Christ.” Surely the Lord's Supper, practiced by local churches according to biblical principles, should be a method “in harmony with the gospel of Christ” for the purposes of reaching the lost.

⁷⁰ This relates again to the issue of frequency (discussed above): As there is an urgent need for witness “until he comes,” the Supper should be practiced as a perpetual gospel proclamation.

Cor 15:3; 2 Cor 5:18–21; Eph 1:7; Col 1:14, 22; Heb 9:12–14; 1 Pet 2:24–25).⁷¹

Confession of sin can take place earlier in the service through quiet times of personal prayer, the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:9–13) prayed together, or a time of guided prayer with prompts such as "At this moment, examine your life and attitudes for personal sin" and "Ask yourself, are you persisting in faith in Jesus Christ, trusting him to forgive your sins?" Songs of faith or the recitation of a corporate creed ("We believe ...") provide ways for the congregation to reaffirm their belief in Christ.

When the scheduled date for the Supper is communicated beforehand or it is practiced according to a predictable schedule, local church partakers can also have times of self-examination on their own during the week. Such times may lead those experiencing conflict to have reconciling conversations with other believers, followed by joyful times of taking the Supper together.⁷²

An important truth must be kept in mind regarding self-examination: At the Lord's Supper, the only worthy receivers are those who realize and confess their own unworthiness. Therefore, repentant believers seeking to love God and neighbor need not fear Paul's warning about partaking in an unworthy manner. As Van Neste explains, "The warning does not apply to those who are struggling with sin but are looking to the cross in repentance, hating their sin and yearning to be pleasing to God."⁷³ Repentant believers should recognize that they have already been made worthy by Christ's perfect worth. Vickers provides these comforting words for the repentant believer who is hesitant to partake: "You are exactly right. You are not worthy. But Christ is, and His body and blood, broken and shed for you, make you worthy and by faith He abides with you. Now come, confess and repent of your sins and proclaim His death until He comes."⁷⁴ Sinners recognizing their need for Christ are invited to the Lord's Table to partake.

In addition, individual believers should remain aware of other believers around them. Instead of always looking down (introspectively), they

⁷¹ For recent thoughts on "liturgical confession" from an evangelical perspective, including commentary on Isa 6 and other passages, see Braden Joseph McKinley, "Rehearsing our Redemption: How Liturgical Confession Shapes Our Life in the Gospel" (PhD diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023).

⁷² Practiced in this way, more frequent observances of the Supper can be seen as the opportunity to live in closer fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ on a week-to-week basis.

⁷³ Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," 386.

⁷⁴ Vickers, "The Lord's Supper," 340.

can be encouraged to look around at the church, the body of Christ.

The Lord's Supper should be practiced when and where the church gathers for corporate worship. Although other places may seem meaningful to practice the Supper, such as at a retreat with a church small group (a smaller segment of the gathered church) or at a multi-church conference or seminary chapel (a broader gathering of Christians), the most appropriate time and place for the ordinance to take place is during the regular gathering of the local church.

With respect to the post-pandemic technological context, this implication has ramifications for online worship services. Should pastors invite those watching an online service to partake in the Supper along with those there in the building? Does it matter whether this occurs at the same time, or sometime later? Does it matter whether the person watching is by themselves, or with other members of the church (such as their own family members)?

Paul's emphasis on shared participation in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16–17) and clear instructions to "wait for one another" (1 Cor 11:33) speak directly to these issues. Although allowing for temporary solutions to unusual circumstances (such as a pandemic), churches should be careful not to encourage online participation—or anything else that limits the communal aspect of the communion—as a regular practice. As Van Neste reminds us, "In the Scriptures, Communion is part of the gathered worship. It is not merely a private act."⁷⁵ Therefore, "We are to take this as a church together. Anything which allows us to consider ourselves alone, apart from the rest of the body, seems to fly in the face of the unity called for in 1 Corinthians 11."⁷⁶ We are not to take the Supper alone, at our own convenience. The Supper should be a manifestation of our unity in Christ.

Conclusion

Emerging from the pandemic, many "liturgical" churches (such as the Catholics, Episcopalians, and Lutherans) immediately returned to their

⁷⁵ Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," 376.

⁷⁶ Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," 378. With regard to elderly believers in homebound or facility care who are physically unable to participate when and where the church gathers, pastoral wisdom should guide efforts to facilitate their continued observance of the Lord's Supper with their local church while holding to the biblical significance of the rite as a communal practice. For further discussion, see Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," 376–78; and Hammett, *40 Questions About Baptism and the Lord's Supper*, Question 4, "Are Baptism and the Lord's Supper Only for Churches?"

weekly eucharistic observances. Baptist churches also resumed their weekly worship gatherings, some with a renewed sense of the significance and potential for taking the Lord's Supper together.

As Baptist pastors and leaders continue to study and reflect on the Lord's Supper for current practice, they may come to conclusions such as those reflected above, reclaiming Baptist theological emphases from the past and joining the chorus of recent voices. Overall, they may be convicted to ask their congregations, "If one of the central acts of worship in the New Testament is corporate celebration of the Lord's Supper, should we not give it greater attention? ... Should our practice be done more faithfully and regularly?"⁷⁷

By revisiting Paul's instructions for the Lord's Supper (based on Christ's commands delivered to the apostle), pastors will find the biblical guidance needed to practice this sacred meal "more faithfully and regularly." With the help of other church leaders and carefully planned services, they can then lead their congregations in observing the Supper as a time of remembrance, vividly engaging in the story of Christ's sacrificial death. They can practice the Supper as an act of faithful gospel witness, making clear through words, bread, and a cup that Jesus is risen and will return. And together their churches can experience communion with Christ as well as one another in a way that renews faith and heals divisions. When practiced with fitting frequency as part of regular gatherings of corporate worship, the Lord's Supper can serve as the sacred symbol of what it was intended to signify, becoming a time of rich remembrance, perpetual proclamation, and manifest unity.

⁷⁷ Dockery, "The Church, Worship, and the Lord's Supper," 49.