



The Lord's Supper/Communion: Church Practice Series

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The Lord's Supper/Communion

Introduction

It is no exaggeration to say that the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is the single most important event to occur in time and space. To the world, a bleeding Jew hanging on a cross is utter foolishness. To the Christian, however, it is the perfect revelation and demonstration of God's character through the sacrifice of His son. It is the most precious memory of our most precious Savior. It is no surprise then, on the night before He was to hang on the cross, that Jesus Himself would institute a pattern for remembering that event, as a gift to all who would believe in His name.

The Lord's Supper, or communion, is that gift. It is a means of grace, not unto salvation, but unto turning our hearts, corporately and frequently, toward the grace that was poured out on Calvary. Such a gift is to be handled delicately, studied thoroughly, and practiced reverently. Its abuse, both theologically and practically, is to be combated on every front. Faithful men have died for the Biblical understanding of communion, and rightly so. There is much at stake when we come to the Table, for it is the gospel itself that we remember. Many popular views of the Lord's Table portray and promote another gospel, which is no gospel at all. God's glory and men's souls are at stake in these matters. Therefore we must approach the text soberly, looking to the Holy Spirit to lead us into all truth.

Much has been taught concerning the Lord's Table, making it a hotly debated topic. The truth of the table, however, is not hidden from us. The Scripture is clear and sufficient for our understanding. It is the greatest striving of this fellowship to know more of Christ, and thus love Him more deeply. Toward those ends, it is the purpose of this paper to understand and embrace all the fullness of the Lords' Table, that we might rightly remember the death of Christ. The means to achieving this goal are twofold.

First, there must be a diligent study of the relevant Scriptures. It is there that God reveals His truth to us. And it is there, and there alone, that the true understanding and practice of the Lord's Table is found. Secondly, what is found must be applied and put into practice. The hearing of the Word must produce the doing. Whereas the scope of this paper is limited, only able to document the Biblical understanding of Communion, it is our prayer that it will set a course for the "doing" of the ordinance in a God-honoring manner.

There is indeed a feast for the soul of the Christian at the Lord's Table. The crowning event of redemption is remembered and celebrated in this ordinance. It is our objective then, to come to the table often, remembering the death of Christ, and proclaiming His death until He comes again. In all this we desire that God would receive the glory and honor.

Terminology

The Bible uses several terms to describe the ordinance that Christ instituted in the upper room. All of them point to the same ordinance and are interchangeable. "The Lord's Table," "the Lord's Supper," and "Communion" will be used in this paper.

- "The body... (and) blood of Christ" (Matt. 25:26-28)
- "A sharing ("communion," King James Version) in the blood of Christ...(and) in the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16)
- "The table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:20)
- "The Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20)

- "The bread...(and) the cup of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27)
- "The breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42, 20:7; both may refer to a common meal and not the Lord's Table)

Historical Overview

The development of the doctrine of Communion since its first century inception is a massive study in itself. There are, however, key people, dates, and conclusions that have been influential in both the progress, and demise of this ordinance. Concerning this ordinance, the debate is ongoing among Protestants, as well as among Protestants and Catholics. Among those who legitimately hold to the authority of the Bible, however, there is general consensus regarding the Lord's Table. A brief overview of the past two millennia will provide a good background from which to examine the major views. The question that has fueled this debate is simple, "What did Jesus mean when He said, 'Take eat, this is My body.'"

Soon after Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper its practice was already being abused and its intended meaning was beginning to drift. 1 Corinthians 11, from which we gain Paul's understanding of communion, is first and foremost a rebuke from Paul to the Christians in Corinth, for their failure to rightly appraise the meaning of the Table and approach it with reverence. The Bible records this first century abuse for our instruction (examined on pages 13-18). In addition, church history records almost 1500 years of slow but continual drift away from the Biblical instructions concerning Communion. It is worth the effort to briefly examine the history of its subtle demise and faithful recovery during the Reformation.

The practice of Communion began in the early church. From its inception, believers participated corporately, in obedience to both the apostles' teaching and the quickly forming New Testament canon. They initially gathered Sunday evening for Communion and the agape/love feast, having gathered for worship and teaching in the morning. This appears to be the setting of 1 Corinthians 11.

When the Roman emperor Constantine (306-337) rose to power, he loosely adopted the Christian faith and brought with him changes that would drastically affect Christianity as it headed into the Medieval period (600-1500). In an attempt to unify the Roman Empire, he granted freedom of worship to all faiths in the Edict of Milan (313). No longer threatened by persecution, Christianity moved from the simplicity of hidden worship (in the catacombs, etc.) to public worship in ornate church buildings, with an ever growing liturgy and formality.

Constantine's efforts (most likely politically motivated) were brought to their fulfillment in 380 and 381 when Emperor Theodosius I issued edicts declaring Christianity the official religion of the state.¹ This widespread "acceptance" of the Christian faith, along with its usefulness to the state, aided the gradual drift away from a Biblical understanding of communion (among other doctrines), toward the explicit "sacramentalism" of the Medieval Roman church.

The Latin word *sacramentum* initially referred to "any ritual observance or sacred thing."² As the Roman Empire wed itself to the Christian faith, these outward signs (communion, baptism, and others) became essential tools for political rule and administration. Centuries passed, and the state began to wield its power through the church, via the sacraments. The new birth no longer marked out the community of faith, for now everyone was as much a part of the church, as they were a part of the state. The sacraments then were utilized as "governing" tools, salvation withheld or dispensed by the authority of the state.

The symbolism and true meaning of the sacraments faded. What was meant in the Scriptures to represent, symbolize, and point to a spiritual reality, became the reality itself. For example, baptism is an outward picture or symbol of an inward reality of salvation by grace through faith. Sacramentalism, however, sees in baptism the actual transference of grace through the act itself. The symbol *is* the reality. "The use of this word (sacramentum) for baptism and the Lord's Supper affected the thought about these rites, and they tended to be regarded as conveying grace in themselves, rather than as relating men through faith to Christ."³

This gave rise to the view of communion known as *transubstantiation* (explained on p.8), which is a sacramental view of the Lord's Supper. It appears that Paschasius Radbertus was the first to formally teach transubstantiation, or the literal transformation of the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ (818). He was initially opposed, sparking a lengthy controversy over the issue. In 1059 Humbert took up the cause and was quoted as saying, "The very body of Christ was truly present in the priest's hand, broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful."⁴ In 1133 Hildebert of Tons taught and defended the doctrine of transubstantiation. He was the first to give it this name.

William Cunningham- *This tendency (toward sacramentalism) increased continually as sound doctrine disappeared and vital religion decayed, until, in the middle ages, Christianity was looked upon by the great body of its professors as a system which consisted in, and the whole benefits of which were connected with, a series of outward ceremonies and ritual observances.*⁵

The Fourth Lateran Council included transubstantiation as an article of faith in 1215. Three centuries later, at the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the Roman Church affirmed the doctrine, including the communication of saving grace in the ordinance and its necessity for salvation. They also restricted its administration to the priesthood. These doctrines still stand today (see Appendix 2).

The 1500's saw the faithful uprising of the reformers. The Roman church and her doctrines were opposed by Wycliffe, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and others, on the basis of Scriptural authority. It is sufficient to say here that the reformers agreed in their rejection of transubstantiation, though they agreed on little else concerning the ordinance. They saw in the Scriptures no basis for the wine and the bread becoming the literal body and blood of Christ. Their various interpretations of the table will be covered on pages 9-11.

Biblical Overview

There are five major texts that define for us both the institution and symbolism of the Lord's Supper. Three of the gospels contain an account of its inauguration on the night Christ was betrayed (Matt. 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-26, Luke 22:14-23). The other two texts are found in I Corinthians 10:14-22, and 11:17-24.

The setting of the first Lord's Supper was in an upper room on the night Jesus was betrayed (Matt. 26:21,26; I Cor. 11:23). Jerusalem was teeming with Jewish pilgrims who had left their hometowns to celebrate the Passover, in obedience to Deut. 16:5-6. It was the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread and the day on which the Passover lamb was to be slain (Matt. 26:17; unleavened bread was eaten for seven days during Passover, Ex. 12:15).

The disciples made the preparations according to Jesus' instructions (Matt. 26:17-19), and secured an upper room for them to eat the Passover meal. It was there in the upper room, in the midst of the Passover meal, that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. The backdrop for instituting this New Covenant ordinance, the Passover meal, was rich with Old Covenant imagery and anticipation, all looking forward to its fulfillment in Christ.

The Passover Context

It is significant that Jesus chose to institute this memorial meal in the midst of another. Each meal signifies a progress in redemptive history, unfolding more details of God's sovereign plan. It is therefore necessary to understand the Passover meal and its place in the Old Covenant, if we are to fully understand the significance of the Communion meal.

The Passover was one of three pilgrim feasts, though it held a special place in the Jewish mind as the defining celebration of Israel's history. Passover remembers, through a memorial sacrifice, God's deliverance of His people from the Egyptian slavery, and the establishment of Israel as a nation. God's promise to Abraham is first realized as the Jewish nation emerges from Egypt to possess the land under the leadership of Moses, having begun quietly with the entrance of Joseph and his family 430 years earlier. Passover also anticipated a future people, a future deliverance, and a future deliverer. Christ would be that deliverer, and His deliverance via the cross would secure a new people of God, those marked by faith (see Appendix I., "Meals in the History of Redemption). All that the Passover typified was to be fulfilled in Christ the following day.

The Passover was instituted by God Himself on the night He spared the firstborns of Israel and delivered His people from Egyptian bondage. With great detail God articulated a meal that was to be eaten, with instructions that were to be precisely followed, in order to secure God's mercy on their behalf. Bound up in the Passover meal is the shadow of redemption itself, that looked forward to the reality found in Christ.

The yearly Passover meal commemorated an event in redemptive history that defined Israel as a nation. From its inception, Passover spoke of a relationship between God and His chosen people. It was a meal to be eaten only by Israelites, for God's favor and mercy was only extended to His people. In Exodus 11:7, as the final plague is revealed against Egypt, God explains the uniqueness of His people, distinguished from all others.

NAU Exodus 11:7 'But against any of the sons of Israel a dog will not *even* bark, whether against man or beast, that you may understand how the LORD makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.'

And yet, even being an Israelite was not sufficient to avoid this wrath. Each household required the blood of the lamb for the firstborn to be spared.

The killing of the firstborn was a righteous punishment by the hand of God, against sin, idolatry, and rebellion. The Passover was necessary only because God set out to judge all those in Egypt who were not His people, exemplified by Pharaoh's persistent rebellion. And His judgment was severe. He would take the firstborn of both rich and poor, man and beast. Killing the firstborn was an act of judgment not only against the Egyptians, but against all the false gods they served, declaring God alone to be lord.

NAU Exodus 12:12 'For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments -- I am the LORD.'

With the punishment came a promise, God would deliver His people. Egypt would feel the sting of God's wrath, but for Israel, God promised that "a dog will not even bark, whether against man or beast." (Exodus 11:7) That promise was fulfilled that very month, as God, through Moses, outlined His plan for delivering His people, not only from the angel of death, but from Egypt's oppression.

Once God set His course in carrying out the tenth plague, to kill every firstborn child, there was only one remedy, one *provision* that God made for passing over an Israelite house. A blood sacrifice

was necessary. An unblemished lamb a year old was to be killed at twilight and the blood applied to the doorposts and lintel of each house. The Passover lamb was to be eaten, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. Nothing was to be left until morning. All was to be eaten or burned. In this provision God's promise would be fulfilled.

NAU Exodus 12:13 'The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

In one sense, the Jews experienced a corporate salvation on the night of the first Passover. Their deliverance as a people would echo through the pages of the Old Testament as a celebration of God's faithfulness to His people. It would mark their identity and serve as a foundation for future trust and hope in God.

NAU Exodus 12:14 '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.

NAU Exodus 12:23 "For the LORD will pass through to smite the Egyptians; and when He sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to come in to your houses to smite *you*. 24 "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. 25 "When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. 26 "And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' 27 you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'..."

The temporal deliverance and its sacrificial feast of remembrance, however, never dealt with the issue of sin. The people were free from Egypt, but not free from sin. As Israel exited Egypt and received the Law on Mt. Sinai, they received an elaborate system of blood sacrifices through which they were to relate with God. They were ongoing and ineffectual as it pertained to forgiveness (Heb. 9:8-10). Bound up in the Passover feast was the anticipation of another sacrifice, one that would deal finally with sin.

The Passover united a people through a common temporal deliverance. The institution of the Lord's Supper identified the progress of redemption with the arrival of a new covenant. It would unite a new people, a people of faith marked by a better sacrifice and a better deliverance. In 1 Cor. 5:6-8 Paul rebukes the Corinthians for their tolerance and boasting of sin. He instructs them to "clean out the old leaven," pointing them to rid themselves of the influence of evil in their midst. The justification for such purging of sin is the reality that "Christ our Passover...has been sacrificed." In a brief example Paul identifies Christ as the fulfillment of the Passover feast. All that the Passover typified, Jesus has fulfilled. He *is* the Passover. His deliverance of His people from the bondage of sin has made them a new lump, an unleavened lump enslaved to righteousness.

NAU 1 Corinthians 5:7 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.

For a Jew marching out of Egypt almost 1,500 years prior, the Passover feast was rich with meaning. For the disciples sitting around the table in the upper room, all the Old Testament imagery and anticipation of the Passover meal became the backdrop for the institution of the Lord's Supper.

The New Covenant Remembrance

God has purposed to incorporate various meals throughout the history of redemption as symbolic mileposts along the way. The act of gathering together, to share both food and company, becomes the backdrop for remembering and celebrating the unfolding plan of God. The Communion Table finds a unique place in the history of redemption, as a meal of fulfillment, transition, and anticipation (see Appendix 1A).

Jesus instituted the Lord's Table in the midst of the Passover meal, thus showing us both sides of the redemptive coin. When the new comes, the old is done away with. The type is fulfilled in the antitype. The shadow is chased away by the light. In giving this new ordinance, Jesus declared in its symbols the arrival of the New Covenant, defined by His body and His blood. At the heart of Communion is the gospel, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant in the one seed, Christ, the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.

The Scripture records for us the essence of the ordinance in just four verses from Matthew 26. These four verses are paralleled and explained further in Mark 14, Luke 22, and 1 Cor. 11.

NAU Matthew 26:26 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." 27 And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave *it* to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. 29 "But 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." 30 After singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The symbolism of the Table is rich with New Covenant imagery and symbolism. The bread and the wine point us to the cross event. So much of the teaching of Christ involved symbolism that it is very natural to see in the Lord's Supper a picture representing His own death. In John's gospel Jesus taught that He was "the light," "the door," "the shepherd," "the true vine," etc. None of these statements have brought the sort of forced literalism like that associated with the Lord's Table. Few argue that Jesus is a literal door, or that He becomes a literal vine to which we must be joined. These literary devices are plain and their meaning is poignant. To force their meaning beyond what was intended is to miss the point entirely.

Jesus chose the symbol of bread to represent His body in the communion ordinance. Having already taught the disciples that He was the "bread of life", He now spoke of His body (and His blood) in sacrificial language. Even in John 6 it is clear that Jesus was not equating Himself with literal bread to be eaten. John 6:35 establishes, within its own context, what Jesus means in this passage.

NAU John 6:35 Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; he who **comes** to Me will not hunger, and he who **believes** in Me will never thirst. (emphasis added)

To eat and drink of Christ is to "come" to Him and "believe" in Him. Other options are refuted by the context. John 6 is a good example of the symbolism that must be understood when dealing with the Lord's Supper.

NAU John 6:53 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. 54 "He who eats My flesh and drinks My

blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 "For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink.

Eating of these symbols represents participation in the New Covenant. This is the heart of what the Lord's Table remembers. Having partaken of Christ (believed/received), we are now joined to Christ and possess eternal life. Christ, Himself, is the great mediator between God and man. The New Covenant, accomplished through His blood, is the means for reconciling God to man, and man to God. This is why Christ chose meaningful symbols for His people, so that through participation at the Communion Table, the His death would be remembered.

NAU Luke 22:20 And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood.

The "new covenant in My blood" speaks of the atoning death that ratified this covenant between God and His people. To partake of Communion then, is to remember the One who is the covenant, whose blood accomplished the covenant. The simplicity of the Table is found in Jesus' own words, "Do this in remembrance of Me." Such a statement points us to the great redeeming work of God in Christ, the depth of which we will spend eternity learning. Though now we are weak, and our hearts are prone to wandering, then we will know and remember perfectly. Until we arrive in glory, the Lord has left us with one ongoing ordinance to corporately remember His death.

Major Views

Each view of the Communion Table finds its place along a progression from a literal sacrifice (transubstantiation) to a meal of remembrance (memorial view). Each will be explained briefly and then addressed in light of the Biblical texts. (See Appendix 1B and 1C)

Roman Catholic View (Transubstantiation)

Transubstantiation is the view held by the Roman Catholic Church. It is the basis for the Eucharist celebration (the communion taken during the Mass). It is traced back most likely to Paschasius Radbertus (818) and is best summarized as a real, yet unbloody sacrifice. The remembrance aspect, if present at all, is overshadowed by a ritual sacrifice in which the bread and the wine are "transubstantiated" (changed in their substance) into the literal body and blood of Jesus Christ. The physically altered elements then become the vehicle through which grace is transferred to the partaker.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997)- *The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."*⁶

Because the elements, once transubstantiated, are offered as a real sacrifice, the effect they secure is the same as the effect secured by Christ Himself on the cross, the forgiveness of sins. The

1997 Catechism of the Catholic Church says that the Eucharist sacrifice is “truly propitiatory.”⁷ (meaning it averts the wrath of God for the partaker)

Catechism of the Catholic Church (1997)- *Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is "given up for us," and the blood we drink "shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins." For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins:*

*“For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord's death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy.”*⁸

The Council of Trent linked salvation to participation in the sacraments, communion being one of them. In fact, so explicit was their claim to this salvation through outward acts of obedience, that salvation by faith alone was marked out as heresy worthy of anathema (eternal cursing).

Council of Trent- *If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification;-though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema...If any one saith, that these sacraments were instituted for the sake of nourishing faith alone; let him be anathema...If any one saith, that by the said sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace; let him be anathema.*⁹

The error of transubstantiation lies in its misunderstanding, and therefore its misapplication, of the atoning work of Christ. Jesus died as a single and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of His people. In His death He accomplished all that the Father had set out for Him, the redemption of all the Father had given Him. His sacrifice was both sufficient, and based on the Father's response, accepted as payment for sin.

Paul understood this as he dealt with the believers relation to sin, citing the finality of Christ's death as the basis for our present death to sin. The author of Hebrews understood this as he exhorted his Jewish audience to not forsake Christ for the Old Covenant, as they returned to the frequent, unfinished sacrifices of the Law in place of the finished work of Christ. The apostle Peter understood this as he put forth Christ as the example of suffering according to the will of God, dying for sin once and for all.

NAU Romans 6:8 Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, **is never to die again**; death no longer is master over Him. 10 For the death that He died, **He died to sin once for all**; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. (emphasis added)

NAU Hebrews 9:24 For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; 25 **nor was it that He would offer Himself often**, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. 26 Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now **once** at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to **put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself**. (emphasis added)

NAU 1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also died for sins **once for all**, *the* just for *the* unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (emphasis added)

Transubstantiation, therefore, is irreconcilable with a Biblical understanding of the atoning work of Christ. Not only is Christ not present in the elements as a memorial sacrifice, He cannot be. His presence there in any form as a sacrifice, is a negation of the finality of the cross. For the work of Christ was finished at Calvary, His body being offered up once for all, to satisfy the demands of His Father's justice. If the sacrifice of the cross was not final and therefore not sufficient, we are still in our sins and without a savior.

When an item is purchased in a store the transaction is final. The item has now changed owners based on the receipt of payment. The store cannot continue to demand payment, and it would be senseless for the purchaser to continue to try to pay for the item over and over again. What is done, is done. The work of Christ as it pertains to our sin is finished.

Martin Luther's View (Consubstantiation)

The "middle" view known as consubstantiation, "denies that the elements change, but asserts that the literal presence of Christ may be received sacramentally by those who observe the ordinance."¹⁰ This view has most often been credited to Martin Luther. Luther's view, while denying the literal change of the elements into the body and blood of Christ, removed Christ one step back from being the actual elements, and placed Him "in and under" the elements.

Martin Luther- *It (the Sacrament of the Altar/Communion) is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, **in and under the bread and wine** which we Christians are commanded by the Word of Christ to eat and to drink. And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God.*¹¹ (emphasis added)

Luther refuted transubstantiation, but still believed that forgiveness was found through participation in the Table. He saw profit unto salvation in the Table, as the partaker received of the literal presence of Christ. Though he used language emphasizing the faith of the participant, he linked that faith to the assurance of receiving forgiveness via the sacrament. The faith he spoke of was not in Christ alone, but in the promise (as he saw it) that forgiveness was found at the Table.

Martin Luther- *Now this is plain and clear from the words just mentioned: This is My body and blood, given and shed FOR YOU, for the remission of sins. Briefly that is as much as to say: For this reason we go to the Sacrament **because there we receive such a treasure by and in which we obtain forgiveness of sins**. Why so? Because the words stand here and give us this; for on this account He bids me eat and drink, that it may be my own and may benefit me, as a sure pledge and token, yea, the very same treasure that is appointed for me against my sins, death, and every calamity.*

For they (instructions concerning the Table) are not spoken or proclaimed to stone and wood, but to those who hear them, to whom He says: Take and eat, etc. And because He offers and promises forgiveness of sin, it cannot be received otherwise than by faith. This faith He Himself demands in the Word when He says: Given and shed for you. As if He said: For this reason I give it, and bid you eat

*and drink, that you may claim it as yours and enjoy it. Whoever now accepts these words, and believes that what they declare is true, has it.*¹² (emphasis added)

The instructions of Christ concerning the ordinance, however, place the priority not on the presence of Christ in the ordinance, nor on the transference of forgiveness through participation, but on the remembrance of Christ crucified. "Do this, in remembrance of Me." No unique presence of Christ "in and under" the elements is found anywhere in the pages of Scripture. Nor does the Bible support the idea that forgiveness is communicated through any ritual observance (i.e. the Table), instead of through Christ alone. On the basis of the Scriptural evidence, this view must be rejected as well.

Huldreich Zwingli's View (Memorial View/Symbolic Commemorative View)

A third view, the memorial view, is the view of Southside Bible Church and its leadership. We hold to this view based on its Biblical support. The memorial view, also called the symbolic commemorative view, best describes the understanding of the Swiss reformer Huldreich Zwingli (1484-1531). Simply stated, it sees in the communion ordinance a meal of remembrance only, pointing back to the reality of the cross. Those that partake of the elements do so corporately, reverently, and symbolically, the elements only serving to remind one of Christ's death.

The memorial view stands in stark contrast to transubstantiation. Grace is not imputed through participation. A person is not saved by participating, but participates because they have been saved. Zwingli is often challenged for his literal interpretation of the Table and his refusal to engage the debate surrounding the presence of Christ. It is precisely for this reason that we concur with him. The simplicity of the ordinance is found in Christ's own words. The blessing of the Table is found in our hearts obedience to what Jesus instructed.

John Calvin's View (Reformed/Spiritual Presence View)

It is difficult to establish precisely what Calvin, and those he was influenced by, understood regarding the Lord's Table. Calvin put forth a middle position as a compromise between Luther and Zwingli. On one hand he vehemently opposed the physical presence of Christ in any way (Roman Catholic/Martin Luther). On the other hand he did not believe the Table to be a "flat memorial," the symbols only pointing believers to the reality of the cross (Zwingli). As long as there was no physical presence of Christ, he saw the Table as an open ended gift from God.

John Calvin- *But when these absurdities are discarded (any physical presence of Christ in communion), I willingly admit any thing which helps to express the true and substantial communication of the body and blood of the Lord, as exhibited to believers under the sacred symbols of the Supper, understanding that they are received not by the imagination or intellect merely, but are enjoyed in reality as the food of eternal life.*¹³

The Westminster Confession stands firmly against any literal presence of Christ in the Table, as Calvin did, and details the balance he sought to strike between Luther and Zwingli. Calvin brought to the discussion the working of the Holy Spirit in the Communion ordinance, as the vehicle through which his understanding of the presence of Christ was accomplished.

Westminster Confession of Faith- *Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but*

*spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves to their outward senses.*¹⁴

John Calvin- *And first we must not dream of such a presence of Christ in the Sacrament as the craftsmen of the Roman court have fashioned — as if the body of Christ, by a local presence, were put there to be touched by the hands, to be chewed by the teeth, and to be swallowed by the mouth... And there is no need of this for us to enjoy a participation in it, since the Lord bestows this benefit upon us through his Spirit so that we may be made one in body, spirit, and soul with him. The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us.*¹⁵

Calvin's middle view is not supported from any direct Scriptural references, but stems from his belief that Christ would not have given a symbol that had no direct spiritual edification for the believer. This spiritual edification is accomplished as the Holy Spirit "channels" the spiritual presence of Christ to the believer, that he might "feed" upon Christ and be strengthened in his soul. The one time sacrifice of Christ's body and blood becomes an ongoing spiritual meal for the Table participant.

John Calvin- *...Just as bread and wine sustain physical life, so are souls fed by Christ. We now understand the purpose of this mystical blessing, namely, to confirm for us the fact that the Lord's body was once for all so sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice; and that his blood was once so shed for us in order to be our perpetual drink.*¹⁶

Because of his emphasis on the spiritual benefit for the partaker ("feeding"), Calvin saw the remembrance of the Table as only secondary. It was first and foremost a gift from God, intended for the strengthening of faith via Calvin's understanding of receiving the presence of Christ through the work of the Spirit.¹⁷ In practice this view has drifted more toward the memorial view simply because it is difficult to comprehend, though Calvin stood against the simplicity of Zwingli.

Conclusion Regarding the Major Views

The goal of the leadership of this church is to be faithful to the text of Scripture, and only to the text of Scripture. Scripture refutes the Roman Catholic view, while Luther's and Calvin's view cannot be supported from Scripture. Zwingli's "flat" understanding is the only view that is both supported by the various texts, and yet doesn't reason beyond what those texts actually say.

When asked of the particular presence of Christ in the Communion ordinance, the only Biblically defensible answer is quite simple. Jesus is no more or less present then, than He is at any other time. The Spirit of Christ is omnipresent. Though the experiential reality may be that we are made aware of His presence in a more profound way at the Table, we ought not build doctrine on a foundation other than the Word of God.

Therefore, the view of this leadership is that the Lord Jesus intended in the Table, precisely what He communicated in the language He used to inaugurate its practice. The bread and the wine symbolize His body and blood, and they are to be eaten corporately for the purpose of remembering His death. They do not physically or mystically communicate the *presence of Christ* to us, though the

ordinance itself was given to bring unique focus to the *death of Christ*, for the edification of the participants.

Guidelines for Participation

The gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper give us the essence of the Communion ordinance, and how it is to be observed. The bread and the wine are to be eaten, and the death of Christ is to be remembered. It is from Paul's rebuke to the Corinthian believers concerning the Table, however, that we gain a more detailed understanding of the manner in which the church is to partake.

In 1 Corinthians Paul addresses several issues of church practice that had resulted in divisions among the people. The Corinthians were dividing over all sorts of issues (leader affiliation, 1:11-13, 3:1-23; lawsuits among believers, 6:1-11; issues of conscience, ch.8). His initial exhortation sets the tone for his letter, establishing his overall goal.

NAU 1 Corinthians 1:10 Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Paul's Rebuke

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

Beginning then in 11:17, Paul addresses the issue of the Lord's Table to the church in Corinth. Paul's objections center around one issue, the Corinthian's disregard for each other while assembled to eat the Lord's Supper. Some of the believers who had gathered were concerned only for themselves (11:20-21). They ate before the others, leaving some with nothing to eat at all. They drank excessively and became drunk. The scene looked more like the excess of a fraternity party, than a gathering of Christians to remember the death of Jesus.

This is precisely Paul's appraisal in v. 20. Their assembling was *not* to eat the Lord's Supper, whatever their original intentions may have been. The result of their assembling, however, revealed a despising of the church of God and a sinful shaming of those believers who had nothing (the poor). What was intended to be a corporate time of remembering was turned upside down into a selfish time of indulging in which Christian brothers and the cross were ignored.

Paul's Review

In light of these abuses of the Table, Paul first recounts what he received from the Lord regarding the Table, and what he had *already* delivered to the Corinthians. Their sin wasn't a case of

blind ignorance. The Corinthians knew how to approach the table from Paul's previous instructions to them. His summary of the Lord's instructions is in line with the gospel accounts, adding only the words "do this, *as often as you drink it*, in remembrance of Me." (v. 25)

By reviewing the night the Lord instituted the ordinance, Paul is returning the Corinthians to the purpose and order of the Communion Table. A fresh look at Christ and the first Table would be the basis for his instructions and call to sobriety in the following verses.

Paul's Warning

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

Based on his initial rebuke concerning the Corinthians behavior ("...In this I will not praise you"), and his review in v. 23-26, Paul then details the seriousness of the issue. "Therefore" in verse 27 refers us back to the Corinthians' sin and Paul's rebuke, Paul having inserted a review of the ordinance to support his forthcoming instructions. Nothing more was intended in the context of this passage since it is by definition a rebuke.

The "unworthy manner" in which some of the believers were partaking of the Table rendered them "guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." (11:27) Much discussion has focused on these words. Taken alone they appear to somehow link the actual death of Christ with the one who comes to the Table in an unworthy manner. "If you do this you are guilty of killing Christ," would be the tone of Paul's warning. This is unsupported by the context for several reasons, all of which support the following explanation.

A simpler understanding flows out of the overall intent of the passage (11:17-33), the nature of the discipline (11:29-32), and the final instructions that Paul gives (11:28,33-34). Simply stated, Paul's declaration of guilt moves us from the horizontal (how the believers were treating each other), to the vertical, how they were treating the Lord. The transgressor is guilty of sinning against Christ, the very One symbolized in the elements, and the One they were assembled to remember. The scope of the original language is well within these bounds, and the NIV captures this idea more clearly.¹⁸

NIV 1 Corinthians 11:27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

They were guilty of sinning against each other, and therefore against Christ. Paul's movement from the horizontal to the vertical is consistent with previous issues he has addressed in this letter. Issues of conscience in chapter eight brought the same rebuke.

NAU 1 Corinthians 8:12 And so, by sinning against the brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ.

Paul's point is simple; remembering the death of Christ cannot be separated from those that Christ died for. Furthermore, sinning against the brethren cannot be separated from sinning against

Christ Himself. Their reckless approach to the Table was a despising of both Christ's people, and Christ Himself, the "body and the blood." Paul lets them know that they were not remembering Christ nor loving their brothers when they came to the Table in such an unworthy manner. The context of v. 27-34 supports this understanding.

From the onset of Paul's arguments he has been addressing the sin of participating at the Table with little or no regard for God's people. Their guilt stems from wrongly appraising ("judging") the body of Christ (each other). Their sin finds its ultimate offense against the "body and the blood of the Lord," the Lord Himself, to which the elements point. Nowhere in the Bible do the combined terms "body and blood" refer to the body of Christ, the church. This shift in focus flows right into the following verses.

Like a caring but firm father, God disciplined those who had sinned in this way. Verse 30 says that *many* among them were experiencing physical repercussions for their actions. God sovereignly caused weakness, sickness, and even death to occur. The severity of His discipline shows us His perspective toward the Table, the manner in which it is approached, and the mandate for believers to love each other. Preeminent in His discipline, however, is His own name. Ultimately His discipline is for the sake of His own glory.

Paul's Audience: Believers vs. Unbelievers

Here the question arises, "How could God do these things to His children?" Perhaps the deeper question might be, "Are these believers in the first place?" The latter must be answered to address the former. There is sound evidence in this letter supporting the conversion of those Paul is addressing. He addresses his letter to the "church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling" (1:2). In our immediate context he refers to his audience as, "my brethren" (11:33). Though Paul addressed a "professing" church, including both believers and unbelievers, the present context assumes a converted audience. The most definitive evidence, however, comes from the warnings and instructions of v. 27-34.

Paul presents a progression to his arguments in these verses that winnows in on whom exactly he is addressing. Verse 27 establishes the guilt of "whoever" partakes of the Table in an unworthy manner. The "whoever" is made clear as Paul continues his warning. Verse 29 says this guilt brings the judgment of God upon the one who judges the body incorrectly. Implicit in this instruction is an *ability* for the one Paul is instructing to judge the body (the church) rightly. They *should* be doing this, but they are *not*. This is supported in verse 31, where Paul includes himself in this conditional sentence. "But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged."

The unbeliever cannot judge the body rightly (1 Cor. 2:14). This is a Spirit lead endeavor, to which the unregenerate, left to himself and his own resources, could never do. An unbeliever cannot think rightly of a community of faith to which he does not belong. Paul is not discussing *who* comes to the table, but the *manner in which* they come. His warning therefore, is not for the unbeliever evaluating his own soul, but for the believer disregarding his brothers and sisters in Christ.

Revisiting our first question, how does physical discipline, even unto death, reconcile with our view of God? Paul lays out very clearly in v.32, the purpose behind these judgments. The weakness, sickness, and death from the hand of God are all for the explicit purpose of disciplining those sinning believers, that they would "not be condemned along with the world." Paul is very clear that believers are judged, unbelievers are condemned.

Discipline is an expression of love and an indication of relationship (Heb. 12:7-11). Verses 27-32 provide us with a tangible example of a general principle. When God's children sin in this reckless manner, He exercises His chastening hand to bring them back. The death of some would both end their

rebellious course, and serve to discipline the others, as they witnessed God's disdain for such sinful behavior.

The sins of the Corinthians were serious, and God responded accordingly. This was a demonstration of His love for them. His response was to preserve them, to redirect them. Even causing their death was for their own good. For the believer, the ultimate preservation from sin occurs when God takes us home to be with him, thus ending our battle with sin.

To warn unbelievers of physical judgments pertaining to participation in the Lord's Table would be to aim at the wrong target, and miss Paul's instructions here. Weakness, sickness, and physical death are not the issues for unbelievers. A much severer judgment awaits those not joined by faith to Christ, that of eternal judgment in hell. In addition, if Paul is warning unbelievers with regard to their participation at the Table, then his exhortation in v. 34-35 becomes unclear. Summarizing his arguments, he instructs them to wait for each other when they assemble, and, if needed, eat at home. Paul says all of this is for the purpose of avoiding the judgment of God. Why would Paul tell unbelievers to wait for each other and eat at home if necessary? These instructions are clearly for believers to repent of unrighteous acts, not for unbelievers to fear participation in the Lord's Table. The context answers these questions in favor of a believing audience.

Chapter 11 is an example of the Father's extreme commitment to His children in the midst of irreverence toward Christ and gross mistreatment of each other. Such severe discipline warrants close attention to Paul's conclusions and instructions.

Paul's Instructions

Woven into Paul's warnings are very clear instructions regarding participation in the Table. It is helpful to view them together.

1. Examine/Judge Yourself

NAU 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.

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.

2. Judge the Body Rightly

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.

3. Wait For Each Other

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

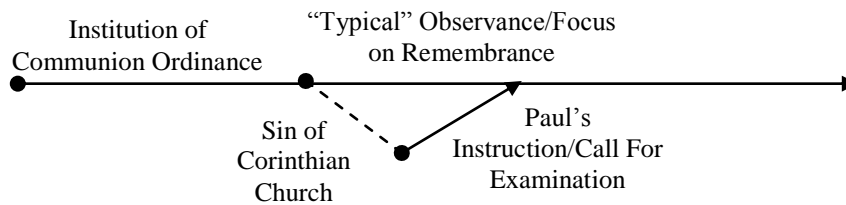
4. If Needed, Eat At Home

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

So much has been written regarding these instructions, and so many practices defined from this passage, it is necessary to take a big step back and remember the larger picture. It is from there that we will best discern the meaning of Paul's call for examination, and its place in the Communion ordinance.

Paul's instructions are quite simple, and remaining in the context, very specific. The "examination" Paul commands is not one concerning salvation, or anything other than what he states. The scope is very simple. How are you treating your brothers and sisters as you approach the Table? Judging ourselves and judging the body rightly get to the heart of this issue. If a Corinthian Christian, recklessly disregarding those around him, would stop and take a good look at what he was doing (examine himself in light of the body), he would realize that he was sinning against Christ by not thinking rightly about those around him. Such behavior rendered the assembly useless as it pertained to Communion.

While self examination is implicit in every act of a Christian (carelessness with our words, thoughts, and deeds is sin, because it is void of faith), more often churches are not sinning in the way the Corinthian church was sinning. Examination is a filter of sorts, given in response to a particular situation, to ensure consideration for others and reverence toward the Lord. If we return to the upper room where Christ instituted the Communion ordinance, we find only the instruction to remember and no instruction to examine. Paul's call for self examination is inseparable from the unique circumstances regarding the Corinthians and the manner in which the Table was approached. Their behavior warranted Paul's instruction to revisit the purpose and context of the Table, through the means of self examination.



Therefore, we see in the gospel accounts (and Paul's review for the Corinthians) the essence of participation in the Lord's Supper. Believers are to gather, partake of a symbolic meal, and remember the death of Christ. We do not see the self examination of 1 Cor. 11:17-34 as the norm for participation. Many argue that communion, by design, purifies the church, as a result of the examination time. This most certainly is a result of remembering the death of Christ, but it is not the entrance exam for participation in the meal. A person need not bring perfection to the Table, though they will most certainly leave the Table with a greater love and resolve to follow the Lord Jesus. Culture and tradition have woven these two instructions (examine/remember) together, so much so that often a time of self examination (self focused) overshadows the purpose of the Communion Table, remembering the death of Christ (Christ focused). The focus on remembering Christ will generate fruit in our lives. We will examine our behavior in light of our Savior. We will turn our hearts from sin, but this is because of our remembrance, not to permit our remembrance.

Paul's application in v. 33-34 is very specific to the nature of the Corinthian offense. He says wait for each other. He says eat at home if your hunger will be a problem. Don't be ruled by your desires. Plan ahead. The time of examination should be limited to Paul's intended meaning. If this kind of recklessness becomes evident in the local church, then a formal time of examination and repentance is warranted. If the church is approaching the Table reverently, with consideration for each other, then no formal time of examination is necessary.

Sobriety Versus Joy

Paul's instructions to the Corinthian church has been an ongoing source of confusion for believers through the years. Many are uncertain how they should approach the Table, and equally as uncertain as to what they should take away from the time. It is necessary then, to examine both the purpose and profit of the Table.

The death of Christ on the cross is *the most precious event* in the mind of a Christian. From Calvary the mercy of God flows down to us. By faith in the dead and resurrected Christ, the atonement He secured there becomes our salvation. Christ is now our very life, and remembering His finished work is first and foremost a source of great joy to the believer. The Lord's Table is a delight to participate in because Christ is our delight.

This in no way negates the seriousness of the event. The cross was a brutal murder. Taking on Himself the wrath of God was an incredibly high cost for Christ, to purchase our salvation. The pain and anguish of our Lord weighs heavy on the hearts of those who seek to remember correctly. Therefore, remembering the death of Christ is also a very sobering event.

With these two thoughts joined together, we see in the Table a sober joy, a reverent delight. Our salvation came at a great cost, and yet it is just that, our salvation! It is neither a time of festive indulgence (like the Corinthians), nor is it a time of dark introspection that misses the beauty of the cross event. Often our view of "examination" can rob the Table of its real essence, remembering the death of Christ that we might love Him more. Balance is required as we approach the Table.

The Lord's Supper finds a unique place in the sanctification of each believer. God is at work in us to conform us to the image of His Son. Slowly, but surely, He is finishing what He has started in us. The joyful sobriety of the Table brings us back to both the person and event that has reconciled us to God. In remembering the death of Jesus Christ, we are reminded of who we are in Christ, those objects of mercy that God has bestowed His grace upon. The inescapable response is one of deep gratitude and indescribable love. Christ is life to us, and the Table preaches this to our soul with tender precision.

The Table is not intended to shame and alienate, but to unite, comfort, and draw near. Paul reminds us that the Table cannot be treated lightly. There is a necessary horizontal and vertical respect as we partake. Let our approach, however, be balanced. Christ instituted the Communion ordinance for our remembrance, as a memorial to His redeeming cross work, as we labor and fight the good fight of faith, until we see Him face to face.

Questions Associated with Church Practice

While the Bible defines very clearly the actual ordinance of communion, and the manner in which to take it, it does not identify many other details of how and when to carry it out. In these areas where the Bible is silent, each church has the freedom to prayerfully consider how they will partake of the Lord's Table. Below are several practical questions regarding the Table and the positions of Southside Bible Church.

Who should participate in the Lord's Supper?

Christ left this meal of remembrance for His disciples, and all believers who would come after them. Participation at the Table is justified by only one event, personal salvation by grace through faith in Christ Jesus. Only a Christian can remember rightly the death of Jesus Christ. The Lord invites (actually commands) His people to the Table to remember Him. Many believers, however, withhold

themselves from participation based on various requirements. The presence of sin or unconfessed sin, spiritual dryness, marital strife, lack of preparation for the Table, etc., often contribute to a person's decision to simply watch, and not partake. Refusal to participate can even be seen as a noble choice, elevating the Table to such a sacred level that it only seems right for "someone like me" to wait until spiritual matters are more in order.

Communion is often personified as such a restricted remembrance, that only the Lord Himself could participate rightly. Preeminent in the ordinance is the assumed fact that its participants are sinners. If a person tried to confess every sin and clean themselves up before participating, they could never participate. The good news is that each seat around the Communion Table is reserved for sinners saved by grace. Paul's instructions in 1 Cor. 11 were not intended to keep believers from the Table, but to fix a problem, that they could then come and participate rightly.

We miss the blessing of corporately remembering the death of our Savior when we import meaning into the Corinthian time of examination and add various self-devised reasons to refuse participation. The blessing of the Lord's Table awaits all who will come, having been joined by faith to Christ, and remembering that we come together and remember together, as one body in Christ.

Is there any preparation necessary before partaking of Communion?

The instructions in 1 Cor. 11 are often expanded beyond their contextual meaning. As mentioned earlier, the examination with regard to the Communion Table has to do with the immediate manner in which it is partaken, and not some isolated time of introspection and confession. Any formal season of preparation for the Lord's Table (fasting, confession, etc.) is extra-Biblical and left to the conscience of each individual. If a person sees a need to prepare for the Table, then by faith they should do that. The leadership of this church believes that the best preparation for the Table is a daily, thriving relationship with the Lord Jesus, built on time in the Word and prayer (which is not really "preparation," but simply walking with Christ). Daily growing in our love for Him will ensure a blessed time of remembrance around the Table. As far as Scripture is concerned there is no "preparation" required. Neither the Lord nor Paul required anything save coming in remembrance of Christ.

Does the Bible place any requirements on the Table, such as baptism, restricting who can participate?

Surprising to many, the Bible nowhere restricts anyone from partaking of Communion. Implicit in the ordinance, however, is a restriction for unbelievers. The Bible defines in great detail the nature of saving faith and instructions for participating in this ordinance. An unbeliever simply cannot remember the death of One whom they do not believe in. Therefore, instructions are given at the Table to unbelievers regarding the nature of saving faith, not because judgment will come on them now if they participate (the warnings in 1 Cor. 11 are all to professing believers), but because an eternal judgment awaits them in the future if they do not know Christ by faith.

Judas himself was present in the upper room at the first Lord's Supper. Jesus invited all of His disciples to partake with Him in the ordinance (Matt. 26:27). He certainly knew of Judas' plans and mentioned several times that evening the presence of the one who was to betray Him.

NAU Luke 22:20 And in the same way *He took* the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. 21 "But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Mine on the table. 22 "For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!"

Even in the 1 Cor. 11 context, in the midst of such terrible abuses, Paul did not once instruct the Corinthians to stop participating. His instructions were for the believers to repent, having been disciplined by the Lord, that they might come together for the better, loving each other and bringing glory to God as they corporately remembered the death of Christ. In 1 Cor. 11:34 Paul tells the one who is hungry to “eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment.” The command is to eat at home, not stay at home. Eating prior to assembling would enable the person to come and partake rightly, without hunger driving his decisions.

The New Testament Scriptures do not instruct the local church, the elders, the deacons, etc., to “police” the hearts of those gathered at the Table. As a leadership we desire to be faithful to what is written and uphold the instructions given, concerning this ordinance. We must also guard against adding to the instructions the Lord gave us, and going beyond what is written.

Two requirements are common in what is known as “closed communion,” church membership and baptism. Both emphasize the need for a believer to make a formal identification, with Christ in baptism and with the local church through membership. Without such identification, a persons participation at the Table is seen as irreverent and should therefore be prohibited by the leadership of the local body.

While baptism is clearly defined in Scripture, and membership is a useful means of attaining unity in the body, there is a Scriptural and practical leap when the Communion Table is used to filter out certain people. The Scripture no where makes this link, and there is no more precedent to exclude them from the Table than there is to exclude them from walking in the door of the assembly. Most would not argue with allowing a believing, yet unbaptized, non-member to join in a mid week study, a worship service, etc. The Communion Table, however, is seen as a line of separation when it comes to theological differences. It is believed that the Table is where the local body must unify around its doctrinal statement, to the exclusion of other believers who do not agree. The Bible does not teach us to use the Table in this way, or in any way other than to remember the death of Christ.

Based perhaps on church history, baptism in some circles has found a unique place in the Communion ordinance. Though there may be examples from church history where the Lord's Table was restricted only to believers who had been baptized, this is not the position of Southside Bible Church. Two main reasons support this position. The first is the overall silence of the Scriptures regarding such a prohibition. The New Testament nowhere even implies a requirement of baptism before participating in the Lord's Table. It is prudent, therefore, to not go beyond what is written and impose extra-biblical requirements upon the congregation.

This is not to say that the leadership of this church does not uphold baptism in its proper New Testament place. Baptism is a command to be obeyed out of love for Christ and joy in a new found salvation. Upon believing in Christ every new Christian should be baptized as the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It is a clear and well supported Scriptural mandate, and no reasoning excuses a person from obedience to it. However, to restrict access to the communion table based on baptism would be to necessarily open the door to other restrictions based on other realms of obedience. Participation in the Lord's Table could then be restricted based on any number of commands (i.e. giving, loving your neighbor, spiritual disciplines, etc.).

In addition to the lack of biblical support, there is actually a more serious problem that arises when certain believers (which an unbaptized believer is) are kept from the Lord's Table. As mentioned earlier, communion is a meal of remembrance to be taken corporately. We remember the death of Christ together, as the body of Christ. In Paul's reasoning against idolatry in 1 Cor. 10, he draws on the symbolism of the Lord's Table. In his explanation he shows how the unity of the body is actually demonstrated in the communion meal.

NAU 1 Corinthians 10:16 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? 17 Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread.

To restrict access to the table is to dismiss a believer (though temporarily) from the body, in the midst of an ordinance which proclaims the work of Christ and the unity of those for whom He died. It approaches an act of "temporary church discipline," without biblical warrant. Though all believers are commanded to be baptized, every believer is also commanded to remember the death of Christ in the Communion ordinance. Neither ordinance takes precedent over the other. It is the practice of the leadership of this church to baptize new believers as soon as they are converted. Unbaptized believers who participate in the Lord's Table will be exhorted and shown the command of baptism. We will not, however, restrict access to the corporate meal of remembrance based on obedience in this one area.

Because the Table is a believers' ordinance, unbelievers are encouraged not to participate, and parents are cautioned to oversee their children. This is done out of love for those individuals. There is no profit to the unbeliever as he comes to the Table. There is profit, however, as an unbeliever is challenged to reckon with the gospel and their own soul through an encouragement to refrain from participating. Parents are encouraged to ensure the conversion and understanding of their children before they participate because children are very moldable and easily deceived. Clarity concerning their salvation, for both parent and child, is necessary before participation at the Table. The requirement of salvation is the only restriction that will be put forth during the Lord's Supper.

Why isn't there a formal time of "examination"?

Based on the specific circumstances of 1 Cor. 11:17-34, and the lack of similar circumstances in the monthly observance at Southside Bible Church, we see no necessary precedent for a formal time of self examination. If circumstances similar to the Corinthian church were to arise, the rebuke, review, warning, and instructions Paul gave in 1 Cor. 11 would be revisited.

As mentioned earlier, a formal time of examination, where circumstances do not warrant it, runs the risk of overshadowing the remembrance of the Table. The gospel contexts (and Paul's 1 Cor. 11 review) will serve as the pattern for normal observance.

Why is the Lord's Table eaten once a month?

The Bible does not identify a pattern or frequency for partaking of the Communion Table. Jesus said only that when it was done, it was to be done with one purpose in mind, to remember His death.

NAU 1 Corinthians 11:25 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."

The leadership of this church has decided to partake of the Lord's Table on the last Sunday of every month. The reasoning behind this frequency is simple. We desire to remember often the death of Christ, while at the same time preserving the uniqueness of the event. The potential exists for a weekly communion to lose much of its meaning.

Church history has demonstrated that very frequent partaking potentially leads to apathetic ritualism or even a superstitious view of the Table. It has also shown that very infrequent participation fights against the purpose of the Table, to remember the death of Christ. Through the brief history of this church, a monthly communion service has proven to be a very profitable frequency that resists

both tendencies. If the current frequency proves unfruitful for this congregation, other options will be considered.

Why grape juice instead of wine?

The Bible does not speak against drinking wine. It very clearly speaks against drunkenness (Eph. 5:18). Using wine in a communion service would not be unbiblical by any means. In fact, one would assume this was the practice of the church throughout history. Several things are to be considered, however, before using wine in the ordinance today. The first is the nature of the wine used in Jesus' time. Far from the wine of our day, extremely diluted wine was drunk for its sanitary purposes, in place of less than reliable water supplies. The "fruit of the vine" (Matt. 26:29) seemed to be the issue Jesus was addressing, and not alcohol content. Grape juice serves this purpose.

The second issue is the unnecessary burdening of a believer's conscience. Many do not drink alcohol for the sake conscience. They may want to avoid its temptation, either because they have never drunk alcohol, or because they formerly struggled with excessive drinking. Parents may have restrictions for their children (who may be believers and partake of communion) due to cultural laws, or their own convictions. With these issues in mind, and with nothing lost from the ordinance by using grape juice, the leadership has decided not to use wine at the communion table.

Why are flat little crackers used instead of real bread?

The first communion was eaten in the midst of the Passover meal. The Passover meal, as well as the Feast of Unleavened Bread, had very clear prohibitions against the use or presence of any leaven. Throughout Scripture leaven is used to symbolize corruption and sin, and its "tainting/leavening" effect. Unleavened bread carries the idea of purity, being untainted by sin. Unleavened bread was eaten during the first communion. Therefore, though not commanded, little crackers of unleavened bread are used for this reason during our communion services. (As for the size and type of unleavened bread, no special meaning is intended. They are simply used for the convenience of serving several hundred people in just a few minutes.)

NAU 1 Corinthians 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 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. 8 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.

Who oversees/ administers the Lord's Table?

Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, which restricts the administration of the Eucharist to the priests (see Appendix 2- Roman Catholic Eucharist), the Bible gives no restrictions regarding who can oversee the table. Because we take communion when the church is gathered corporately, and because the elders oversee the worship service, an elder will usually oversee the communion table for the purpose of maintaining order. Any man the elders see as able, however, could oversee the communion table. (This does not mean the elder stands in a priestly position on our behalf. The Scripture teaches that all believers are priests [1 Peter 2:5, 9] and have access to God through Christ. The role of the elder, or any man overseeing the table, is strictly for purposes of order.)

Why is the Lord's Table taken corporately as a church?

(see page 19-20, "Does the Bible place any requirements on the Table, such as baptism, restricting who can participate?"; note 1 Cor. 10:16-17.)

Why is the Lord's Table taken during the worship service?

The Lord's Table is taken during the worship service because this is the time the body is gathered together. The previous question explained the corporate nature of this ordinance of remembrance. With that in mind, and because a commuter church like ours does not have a building, the worship service is the most practical time for celebrating the Lord's Table. This does not exclude other corporate gatherings such as a fellowship, mid-week service, home Bible study, or at a retreat. Such assemblies fall within the guidelines for the ordinance and should not be prohibited from taking place as long as order is maintained.

Appendix 1- Diagrams

Diagram A: Meals in the History of Redemption

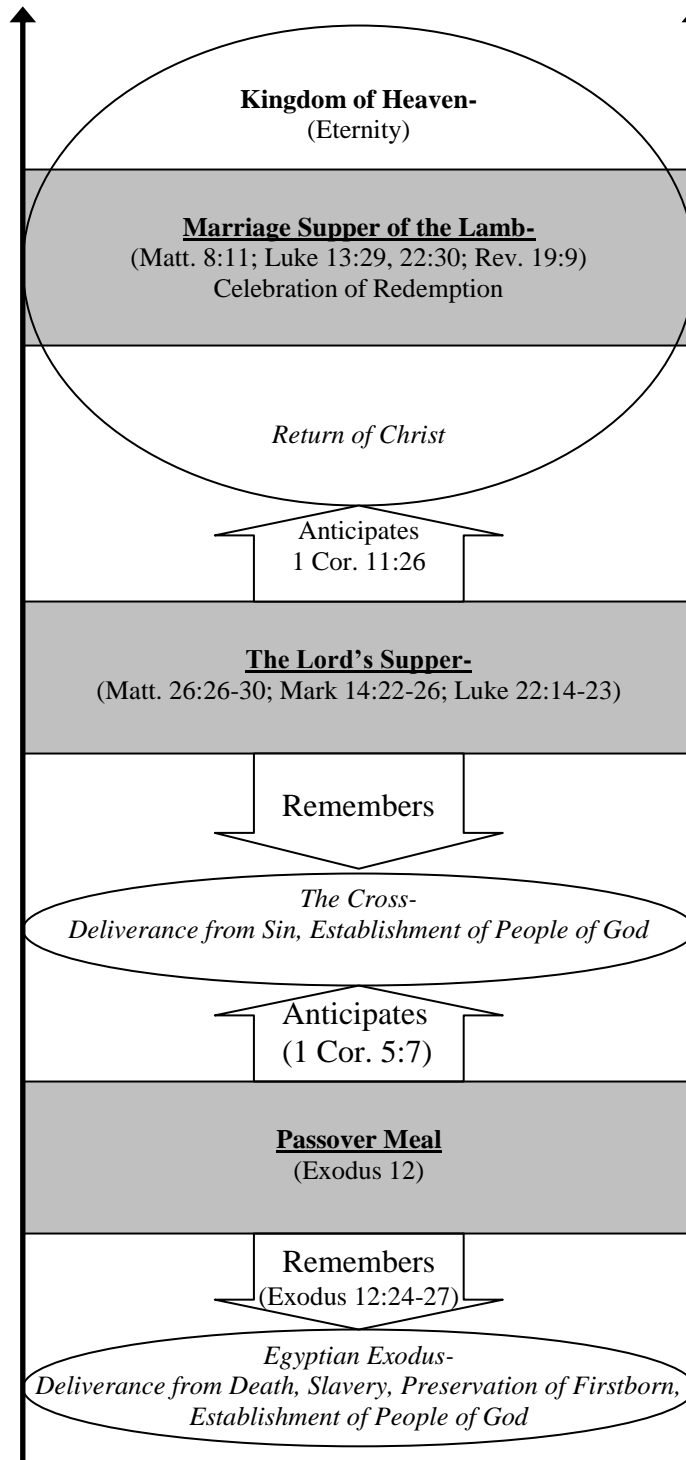
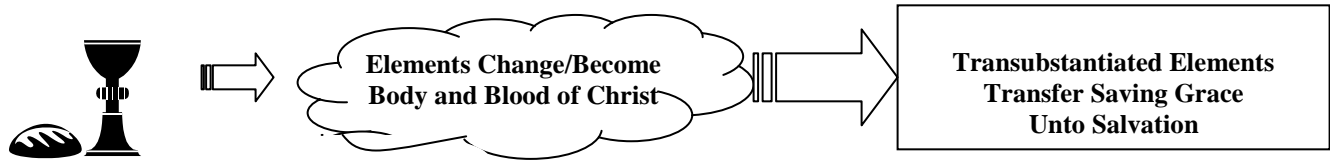


Diagram B: Major Views of the Lord's Supper

Transubstantiation (Roman Catholic View)



Consubstantiation (Martin Luther's View)



Memorial View (Zwingli's View)



Reformed/Spiritual Presence View (Calvin's View)

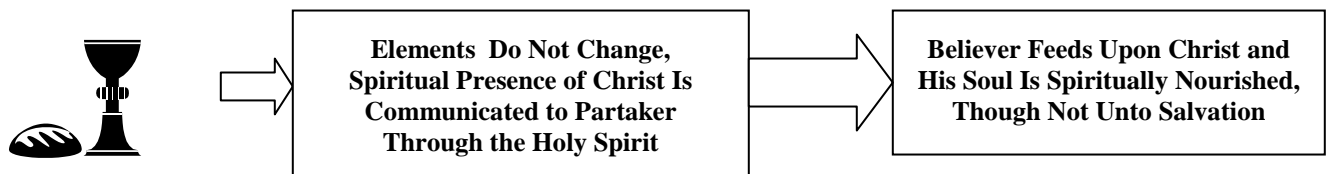
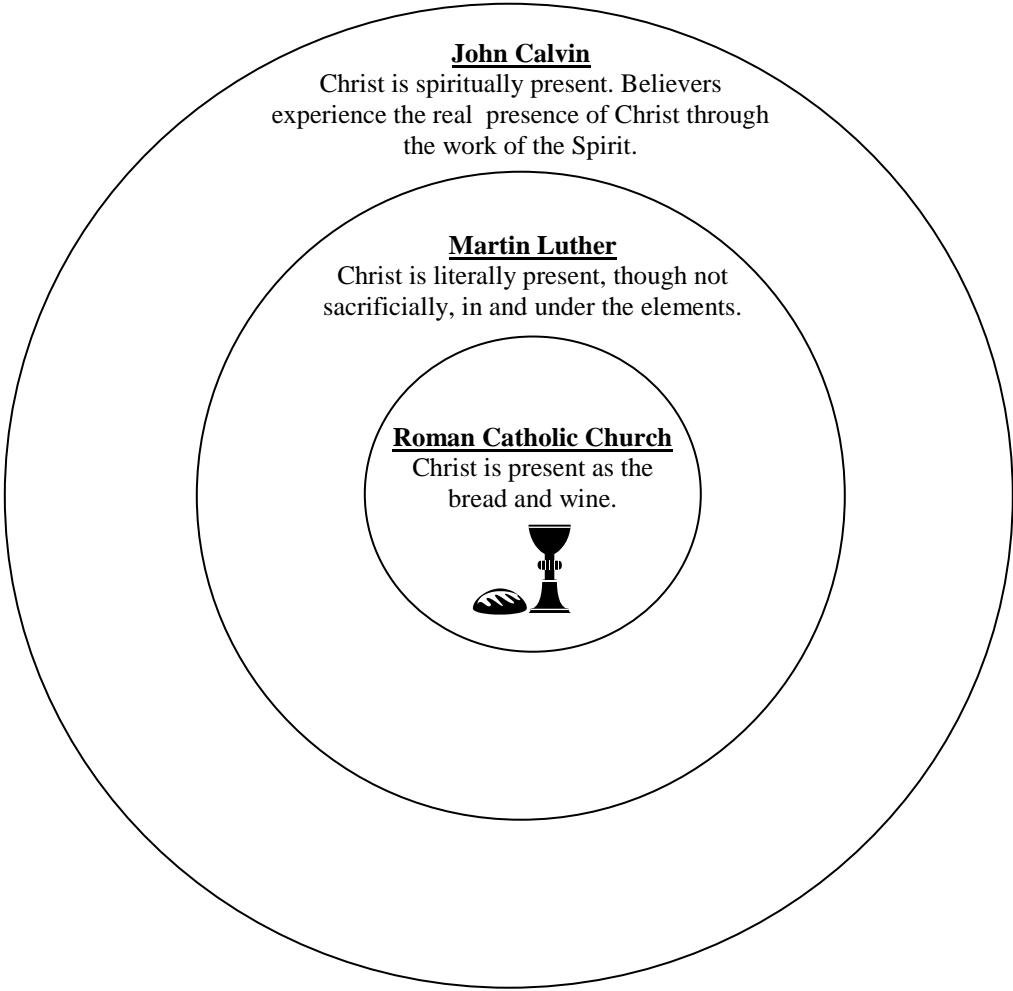


Diagram C: Finding Christ at the Communion Table

Jesus Christ
(Seated at the right hand of God, Eph. 1:20;
Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3; 8:1; 12:2)

Huldreich Zwingli
Christ is neither physically present nor uniquely
spiritually present at the Table.



Appendix 2- The Roman Catholic Eucharist

Quotations From Authoritative Roman Catholic Literature (1997 Catechism of the Catholic Church/ Council of Trent)

Transubstantiation- *At the heart of the Eucharistic celebration are the bread and wine that, by the words of Christ and the invocation of the Holy Spirit, become Christ's Body and Blood. Faithful to the Lord's command the Church continues to do, in his memory and until his glorious return, what he did on the eve of his Passion: "He took bread. . . ." "He took the cup filled with wine. . . ." The signs of bread and wine become, in a way surpassing understanding, the Body and Blood of Christ... (CCC, 1333)*

We carry out this command of the Lord by celebrating the memorial of his sacrifice. In so doing, we offer to the Father what he has himself given us: the gifts of his creation, bread and wine which, by the power of the Holy Spirit and by the words of Christ, have become the body and blood of Christ. Christ is thus really and mysteriously made present. (CCC, 1357)

It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament. The Church Fathers strongly affirmed the faith of the Church in the efficacy of the Word of Christ and of the action of the Holy Spirit to bring about this conversion. Thus St. John Chrysostom declares: It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered. And St. Ambrose says about this conversion: "Be convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed. . . . Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature."(CCC, 1375)

The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation." (CCC, 1376)

Real Sacrifice- *In the New Testament, the memorial takes on new meaning. When the Church celebrates the Eucharist, she commemorates Christ's Passover, and it is made present the sacrifice Christ offered once for all on the cross remains ever present.¹⁸⁵ "As often as the sacrifice of the Cross by which 'Christ our Pasch has been sacrificed' is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried out." (CCC, 1364)*

Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. The sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."(CCC, 1365)

The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it re-presents (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross, because it is its memorial and because it applies its fruit: [Christ], our Lord and God, was once and for all to offer himself to God the Father by his death on the altar of the cross, to accomplish there an everlasting redemption. But because his priesthood was not to end with his death, at the Last Supper "on the night when he was betrayed," [he wanted] to leave to his beloved spouse the Church a visible sacrifice (as the nature of man demands) by which the bloody sacrifice which he was to accomplish once for all on the cross would be re-presented, its memory perpetuated until the end of the world, and its salutary power be applied to the forgiveness of the sins we daily commit. (CCC, 1366)

Propitiatory Sacrifice- *The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are one single sacrifice: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner. . . this sacrifice is truly propitiatory."(CCC, 1367)*

Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is "given up for us," and the blood we drink "shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins." For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins: For as often as we eat this bread and drink the cup, we proclaim the death of the Lord. If we proclaim the Lord's death, we proclaim the forgiveness of sins. If, as often as his blood is poured out, it is poured for the forgiveness of sins, I should always receive it, so that it may always forgive my sins. Because I always sin, I should always have a remedy. (CCC, 1393)

Restricted To Priesthood- *Only validly ordained priests can preside at the Eucharist and consecrate the bread and the wine so that they become the Body and the Blood of the Lord. (CCC, 1411)*

If any one saith, that all Christians have power to administer the word, and all the sacraments; let him be anathema. (Canon Ten, Seventh Session, Council of Trent)

Frequency- *The Church warmly recommends that the faithful receive Holy Communion when they participate in the celebration of the Eucharist; she obliges them to do so at least once a year. (CCC, 1417)*

Necessary For Salvation- *If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification;-though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema. (Canon Four, Seventh Session, Council of Trent)*

Grace Conferred- *If any one saith, that by the said sacraments of the New Law grace is not conferred through the act performed, but that faith alone in the divine promise suffices for the obtaining of grace; let him be anathema. (Canon Eight, Seventh Session, Council of Trent)*

More Than Commemoration- *If any one saith, that these sacraments were instituted for the sake of nourishing faith alone; let him be anathema. (Canon Five, Seventh Session, Council of Trent)*

Dissenters Anathema- *If any one saith, that, by the sacrifice of the mass, a blasphemy is cast upon the most holy sacrifice of Christ consummated on the cross; or, that it is thereby derogated from; let him be anathema. (Canon Four, Twenty Second Session, Council of Trent)*

¹ Cairns, Earl E. *Christianity Through the Centuries* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 1954) 125.

² *New Bible Dictionary: Second Edition* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1962) 1044.

³ *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Edited by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 965.

⁴ Berkhof, Louis *The History of Christian Doctrines* (Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1937) 253.

⁵ Cunningham, William *Historical Theology*, Volume I (Pennsylvania: Banner of Truth, 1862) 122.

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition (1997) 1376.

⁷ *Ibid*, 1367.

⁸ *Ibid*, 1393.

⁹ *Council of Trent* Edited and Translated J. Waterworth (London: Dolman, 1848) 53-57.

¹⁰ *Pictorial Bible Dictionary*, Edited by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967) 492.

¹¹ Luther, Martin *The Large Catechism*, Translated by F. Bente and W. H. T. Dau [Published in: Triglot Concordia: The Symbolical Books of the Ev. Lutheran Church. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1921), pp. 565-773,"On the Sacrament of the Altar.]

¹² *Ibid*.

¹³ Calvin, John *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book IV, Ch. 17, 19).

¹⁴ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Ch. XXIX, Article 7.

¹⁵ Calvin, John *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book IV, Ch. 17, 12).

¹⁶ *Ibid*, (Book IV, Ch. 17.1).

¹⁷ Berkhof, Louis *Systematic Theology* (Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1958) 646.