

PERSPECTIVE

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THE LORD'S SUPPER

A BIGGER DEAL THAN
YOU MAY THINK



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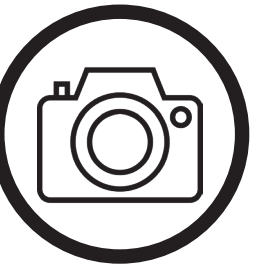
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The Lord's Supper—A Bigger Deal Than You May Think!

I recently asked other church staff to share their earliest memories of the Lord's Supper. Some responded thoughtfully—they questioned their relationship with Jesus as the plate passed by them. Others, myself included, weren't quite so introspective. I wondered why the "bread" was a pale oyster cracker!

We should all be thoughtful regarding our approach to the Lord's Supper or communion. Can we mature in how we partake in this meal, this ordinance? ⁱ It's a strange question, isn't it? For various reasons, I fear many believers view the Lord's Supper with indifference. We consider it a routine, maybe even an insignificant part of our life together. But what if it's not?

I believe our discipleship of Christ will grow as we come to observe communion more thoughtfully. After all, the Lord's Supper is a bigger deal than you may think! Christ ordained churches to remember him, enjoy him, commit to him, proclaim him, and long for him together in the Lord's Supper.

This article aims to grow your appreciation for the Lord's Supper. I'll offer reflections on communion with implications for how to participate in this symbolic meal.

EAT TOGETHER

The Corinthians had a recurring problem—they couldn't get along. Factions abounded, even when they gathered for the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34). Their manner of taking communion betrayed the unity proclaimed in the Supper. In other words, that meal was to be a picture of togetherness. Unfortunately, in Corinth, it displayed selfishness.

In the first century, wealthy church members hosted corporate worship gatherings in their large homes. This gathering included a full meal and the Lord's Supper. Sadly, divisions between the rich and poor seeped into their fellowships. People ate before everyone arrived. Some even got drunk. Poor members went hungry. Uncommendable (vv. 21–22)! Call it what you may, "It is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (v. 20). Say what you will, "you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing" (v. 22).

What was Paul's corrective? Namely, make a bigger deal of the Lord's Supper. In communion, we remember Christ's selfless sacrifice that unites us. Eating and drinking are to be done in and with unity, without divisions (vv. 24–26). If

we're united in Christ, we must eat together to remember Christ.

But there's more: in communion, the many are made one, a church. By taking communion together, we're united together. Paul states in 1 Corinthians 10:16–17:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, *we who are many are one body*, for we all partake of the one bread (*emphasis added*).

Did you catch that? When eating the "one bread" (shorthand for the Lord's Supper), we who are "many are one body" (v. 17). The Lord's Supper, like no other everyday meal, gathers Christians and makes them into one body, a church. So, what we do in the Lord's Supper, we do together. We're united together, so we eat together (11:17–34). And when we eat together, we are united together (10:16–17).

For this reason, at Mount Vernon, we only observe the Supper in a corporate gathering when all members are invited to attend (Sunday morning and evening). Where possible, make a point to gather for communion each time it's observed. We partake of it monthly, usually at the beginning of the month. To help you prepare, we publish and announce the dates well in advance. Mark it on your calendar and plan to eat together.

On Sunday evenings, we recite the Church Covenant before communion. We do this to remind one another of the seriousness of church membership. Communion expresses a commitment to Christ and one another. The Covenant "simply makes explicit what is implicit in the Lord's Supper." ⁱⁱ You can also make a bigger deal of the Supper by prayerfully reading the covenant the week before our celebration.

What exactly is it we do together in observing the Lord's Supper? We remember Christ, enjoy Christ, commit to Christ, proclaim Christ, and long for Christ.

REMEMBER CHRIST

Jesus told his disciples why he instituted the Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Lk. 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24–25). Remembrance isn't like reminiscing past times with a college roommate. It's to commemorate, specifically, Jesus' sacrificial death for the forgiveness of our sins.

It was Passover on the night Jesus instituted the Supper, a highwater mark in the Jewish calendar (Ex. 12:1–50;

Mt. 26:17; Mk. 14:12; Lk 22:7). He and the disciples were commemorating Israel's redemption from bondage in Egypt. They remembered how the Lord passed over his people in judgment when he saw the blood of a lamb on their homes. He delivered Israel from slavery and established his covenant at Mt. Sinai. The Jews celebrated Passover by eating the sacrificial lamb and unleavened bread, commemorating God's redemption, the Exodus, and the old covenant (Ex. 12:1–50).

Luke tells us in Luke 22:19–20:

And [Jesus] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Jesus spoke these words on the eve of his crucifixion. He, the true Lamb of God, was to be slaughtered to satisfy God's wrath and atone for sin. The disciples did not connect all the pieces until after the resurrection—then, they got it. Jesus's broken body and shed blood is the point! His life was freely "given for you." His blood paid the penalty for sin (Mt. 26:28; Lk. 22:19). The Lord's promise through Jeremiah to "forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more" came through Jesus' self-sacrifice (Jer. 31:34).

In other words, the Lord's Supper is a big deal because the New Covenant is a big deal! Jesus instituted a new meal to commemorate a New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Mt. 26:28; 1 Cor. 11). No longer do God's people slaughter a lamb during Passover to remember God's redemption. Now they eat a new meal commemorating Jesus' broken body and shed blood that secured eternal forgiveness. Together they eat as an ongoing profession of faith in Christ's substitutionary death.

It's hard to remember something unless you recall it regularly. Though Scripture does not prescribe how frequently to take communion, we must do it often. The early church may have celebrated the Supper weekly (see Acts 2:42; 20:7). There are pros and cons to weekly and monthly observance. Some Christians value the Lord's table being where they go weekly to remember Christ's death for them. Others fear that weekly observance leads to it becoming a thoughtless ritual. Again, the Bible does not prescribe how often churches are to celebrate the Supper. In fact, in 1 Corinthians 11:26, Paul simply says that whenever we eat the bread and drink the cup,

we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Let's look forward to the first Sunday of each month as we eat and drink in remembrance of Christ.

Celebrating the Supper is like singing a song written in a major key but with a stanza accenting the minor cords. Joyfully celebrate that sin is fully atoned for! But soberly remember that sin still has our number and knows our address. Sins committed that week nailed the Son of God to Calvary's cross. So be sober-minded in confessing sin before communion. But celebrate Jesus' pardon: "This is my blood poured out for you!"

Have you ever considered *how* we distribute the bread and the cup at Mount Vernon? On Sunday evening, we come forward to receive the Lord's Supper from an elder. Coming to the table showcases our unity as a body and the goodness of shepherds called by God to know and feed the sheep. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper on Sunday morning, we remain seated. The elements are brought to us, and we serve them to one another. This, too, displays our unity as the body of Christ in serving one another and how Christ served us.

The Bible does not give instructions for how to distribute and eat together. We have freedom in passing the elements or coming forward to receive them.ⁱⁱⁱ However, does one showcase better the remembrance of what Christ gave for us? Jesus said, "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mk. 10:45). It should be no surprise then that right before Jesus plainly explained his death and instituted the Lord's Supper, he served his disciples by washing their feet (Jn. 13:7–8). Again, we have freedom, but I suggest that having the elements served to us as we're seated is a more fitting picture of Christ symbolically coming to us, giving himself for us. Like in our salvation, we do nothing; he did everything.

ENJOY CHRIST

The Lord's Supper is where we commune with one another. We proclaim our faith in Christ's death and rededicate our lives to him. We also commune with Christ at the table. We are spiritually nurtured by God's grace when we partake with thanksgiving.

Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ" (1 Cor. 10:16)? The word translated "participation" is *koinonia*. It can be translated as "fellowship" or "share."

In this context, Paul instructed the Corinthians that

eating meat consecrated to a deity meant fellowship with that deity. Thus, he warns against idolatry. “You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons” (1 Cor. 10: 21, v. 14).^{iv} The point is simple: When partaking of the symbolic meal devoted to the Lord or a demon, you are fellowshiping with the one to whom it is devoted. You share, commune, and participate with the Lord or with a demon in that meal. These meals proclaim whose side you are on.

To fellowship with Christ in the Lord’s Supper is to enjoy the benefits of the relationship with him. Like any host that welcomes guests for dinner, our Lord welcomes us to his table to enjoy fellowship with him. Forgiveness is secured by Christ’s death so that we can be one with him. The physical meal of the Lord’s Supper symbolizes this spiritual reality. When we thoughtfully eat together, fellowship is deepened. A guilty conscience for sins committed is soothed by his grace. Famished souls are spiritually nourished.

Historically, 1 Corinthians 10:16—“participation in the blood of Christ [and] the body of Christ”—has generated much debate. Is Christ present in the elements? If so, how? As John Calvin noted, how exactly the Lord Jesus communes with his people at his table is a mystery. Our Baptist forefathers articulated their understanding in historic confessions like the Second London Confession (1689) and The Charleston Confession (1850), which was popular among southern Baptists:

The Supper of the Lord Jesus . . . is to be observed in his churches . . . [for] confirmation of the faith of believers in all the benefits thereof, their spiritual nourishment, and growth in him . . .”^v

In other words, our faith is confirmed in communion—we are encouraged that Christ is our Savior. Our faith is nourished and grows. That’s a big deal!

Enjoying Christ in communion should dissuade one from refraining from the table. Why might some choose not to take the Supper? Spiritual discouragement, lack of zeal, struggles with assurance, undisciplined quiet times, and many other weaknesses. These often tempt us to stay away from the table. However, in times of discouragement, we ought to commune with Christ as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, not refrain from that fellowship.

We would never counsel someone who is discouraged to stay away from church, or to close their Bible, or to stop praying *until they feel* spiritually ready. If you were famished, you would not plant a garden and wait for the harvest to eat. You would run to your neighbor and beg for

food. Why deprive your soul of the spiritual nourishment you need by staying away from the Lord’s Supper?

The table is God’s means of grace for the spiritually weak. A soul famished by temptations and sin comes to Christ for assurance of pardon. To be clear, saving grace *does not come* through the bread and the cup! Nonetheless, we truly fellowship with Christ by his Spirit. God uses the Scriptures, prayer, baptism, and the Lord’s Supper to confirm, nourish, and strengthen our faith in Christ so that we might enjoy him more.

COMMIT TO CHRIST

Our Church Covenant says, “Having been led by the Spirit of God . . . we do now prayerfully and seriously make this covenant with God and with one another.” In communion, we are recommitting ourselves to a set of promises that summarize Scripture’s teaching about faithful obedience in a local church. The Lord’s Supper is a time of covenantal renewal. (Remember, the Church Covenant simply makes explicit what is implicit in the Supper.) But what do you do if it’s time for communion and you’ve been unfaithful? Should you abstain from the Supper? Remember, the Lord’s Supper is for Christians. Of course, no one is called to sinless perfection, but the table is for Christians who, by definition, walk in repentance and faith. We cannot nurture sin in one hand and take communion elements in the other. As one author says, “You say you remember, and [yet] you spit in his face by nurturing your sin.”^{vi} If you are professing Christ and yet living in unrepentant sin, you should not partake of the Lord’s Supper. You should repent. It’s time to examine your soul and ask if you’re truly a Christian. To be clear, struggling with sin is different than living in unrepentant sin. We all come to the table as sinners. But the unrepentant will drink judgment on himself.

Each time we take the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded of Paul’s warning from 1 Corinthians 11:27: “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” In saying “unworthy manner,” Paul was pointing out unfaithfulness in the church. The Corinthians acted selfishly. They divided the body. They approached the Lord’s Supper with their own individual interests in mind (see vv. 17–22). Thus, they took the Supper in “an unworthy manner.” Their celebration of Christ’s death was a public lie. It was a farce to “proclaim the Lord’s death” while factions existed in the church. They were “guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord” (v. 27). They should have questioned the genuineness of their faith because they appear to have

been living in unrepentant sin (v. 19).

Members also partook of it unworthily if they refused to repent of sin before coming to the Lord's table. They were to deal with the "old leaven" of sin. That, in part, is what made their acceptance of sexual immorality so scandalous (1 Cor. 5:2, 6). They didn't properly deal with unrepentant sin.

An invitation to feast at the Lord's table is not extended to those walking in unrepentance. Paul says, "Let us, therefore, celebrate the festival, not with old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor. 5:8). Communion is for Christians whose lives—however imperfectly—bear witness to the fact that "Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed" for them (1 Cor. 5:7).^{vii}

Paul calls then for self-examination and repentance that should be taken seriously: "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:28-29). To "examine" yourself means to give serious consideration to your life in relationship to Christ and the church before taking communion. To not "examine" yourself in this manner is to partake of the Supper "without discerning the body." The "body" Paul refers to is both Jesus' life given for our forgiveness and the body we're united to, the church.^{viii}

In short, Paul is calling us to thoughtful recognition of what Christ has given to forgive and unite his church. We're to examine whether or not we're living in unrepentant sin. The Lord's Supper commemorates Christ's life given for you. It reminds us of Christ's selfless love that unites God's people. Therefore, if the "old leaven" of sin has not been dealt with (1 Cor. 5:6-8)—if you are living in unrepentant sin against Christ or the church—then you should abstain from the Lord's Supper. Do so for a limited time as you pursue repentance, seek counsel, and strive toward, by God's grace, faithful commitment to Christ.

Commitment to Christ in the Supper takes these passages seriously. But are we taking them seriously enough? Do you know what happened when the Corinthians refused to discern the body? Notice Paul's report in 1 Corinthians 11:30-32:

That is why [i.e., not discerning the body] many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we

are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the Lord.

Members actually got sick, and some physically died because they treated the Lord's Supper lightly. The Lord "judged" them by afflicting their bodies. His judgment is "discipline." Had they "judged [themselves] truly" (i.e., properly eaten the Lord's Supper), they would not have been disciplined with afflictions. God's discipline was a severe mercy. It was to produce repentance so they would "not be condemned [i.e., eternally judged] along with the world."

PROCLAIM CHRIST

Baptism and the Lord's Supper fascinate children (at least they did me). Kids remember what they see on Sunday. Whether it's a person strangely dunked under water or the sound of hundreds of people simultaneously chewing a cracker, kids are right to be fascinated, and so should we be. Something profound happens in the Lord's Supper. Words become pictures. Spiritual realities become physical symbols. The historical drama is (figuratively) living drama. The Lord's Supper is a big deal because it is a visible word of Christ's death.

Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26, emphasis added). The word "proclaim" is associated with heralding a declaration commonly used in evangelistic contexts (see Acts 4:2; 13:5; 15:36; 16:17; 1 Cor. 9:14; Phil. 1:18). Communion visibly "proclaims" what is normally proclaimed audibly. It heralds a story to the world of sacrificial love where Christ gave his life for others.

Though Paul would not have condoned unbelievers taking communion, maybe he envisioned it being an evangelistic opportunity. What could that look like? When we celebrate the Lord's Supper non-Christians are inevitably present. Our whole service is a demonstration of the work of God: singing, praying, preaching, and communion. Our songs focus on the cross. The preaching explains Christ's substitutionary death. We confess sins committed individually and corporately. All these elements explain how the Lord's Supper is not ritualistic or perfunctory but is instead Christ given for us. Then in the Lord's Supper, all in attendance see something of the work of Christ for sinners.

The elders need to fence the table. In other words, they need to be clear that the Lord's Supper is not for unbelievers. But they should ensure unbelievers know why it's not for them. We might explain it this way:

Non-Christian friends, we want to explain what you're going to see us do in this meal. This broken, unleavened bread symbolizes Jesus giving his life for ours. This cup symbolizes Jesus' blood shed on the cross to atone for our sins. He told us to eat and drink "in remembrance of him." If you're not a Christian, we're thankful you're here. But you should not partake. You can't do something "in remembrance" of Jesus when you don't actually trust in Christ's death for your forgiveness. While we partake, we encourage you to watch and pray. See how Christians trust in Jesus' death and rest their hope on him for eternal life. Pray you would do the same. ^{ix}

The Lord's Supper is a big deal because it visibly proclaims Christ's death.

LONG FOR CHRIST

Routines are an important part of life. They help prioritize what matters—especially relationships. The Lord gave his people routines for prioritizing their relationship with him and one another. We gather weekly for worship (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1–2; Heb. 10:25). We meditate on Scripture, day and night (Josh. 1:18; Ps. 119:9–16; Lk. 2:19; Phil. 4:8–9). We "exhort one another daily" (Heb. 3:12–13). And we partake of the Lord's Supper regularly to "remember" Christ.

Remembering Christ's death will never cease. The refrain sung in heaven is "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain" (Rev. 5:9–14). What will cease is the Supper as how we remember. Communion is temporary. We have it now, but not forever. Paul wrote, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes*" (1 Cor. 11:26; *emphasis added*). Churches will cease eating the Lord's Supper when Christ returns.

But the temporary nature of communion is meant to foster a longing for when we'll feast with Christ forever. It's an appetizer for the full meal, the heavenly banquet. As Jesus promised his disciples when he instituted communion, "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Mt. 26:29). The Supper awakens desires and stirs hope for feasting with Christ in the new heavens and new earth.

Isaiah foretold a day when . . .

On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make
for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,

of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine
well refined.

And he will swallow up on this mountain
the covering that is cast over all peoples,
the veil that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever;
and the Lord God will wipe away tears
from all faces,
and the reproach of his people he will take
away from all the earth
for the Lord has spoken (Is. 25:6–8).

Revelation 19:6–9 says,

Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a
great multitude, like the roar of many waters and
like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying
out,

"Hallelujah!
For the Lord our God
the Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
it was granted her to clothe herself
with fine linen, bright and pure"—for the
fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.

And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed
are those who are invited to the marriage supper
of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the
true words of God."

The meagerness of communion elements—a single bite of bread and a single drink from a cup—awaken longings for the marriage supper of the Lamb. Life on earth as we know it is fleeting and unsatisfying. The Lord's Supper is a sensory reminder that we've been invited to feast with Christ, a meal that is eternal and filling. As Bobby Jamieson says, "The Lord's Supper is pilgrim food. Like the Passover, it is a meal on the way." ^x

Our Lord's Supper fellowship meals, where we feast on a full meal in love and unity, are a faint glimmer of the banquet that awaits. The early church likely had a full meal in their weekly gathering or with some regularity. That's a good reason for us to have fellowship meals periodically. A better reason is how they make a big deal of the Lord's Supper. They picture the marriage banquet we'll enjoy with Christ, the bridegroom.

Make a point to come to the fellowship meals. And as you walk out the door with a full stomach and, Lord willing, a full heart, think, “I long to do this eternally. Oh, how satisfying it will be to feast in perfect righteousness with Christ at the banquet.”

CONCLUSION

The *Doxology* is a fitting way to end a communion service—“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.” But when you can still taste the elements on your palette, what should fill your heart? Hopeful assurance! Not sorrow or worry or doubt. Assurance that Christ’s death has atoned for sins and hope that rests on his glorious return. Hopeful assurance in the hearts of God’s people makes a big deal of the Lord’s Supper.

— Brad Thayer

serve it in a manner that strips it of any symbolic meaning. This could be substituting bread and wine or grape juice for elements associated with parties and frivolity, e.g., chips and soda. It would also change the symbolic meaning if it were taken merely as a sign of individual discipleship, like having elements available in the foyer to take on your own after the service.

^{iv} The main command is “flee idolatry” (1 Cor. 10:14). It was idolatrous to knowingly eat meat offered to an idol in an idol house.

^v The Charleston Confession of Faith, Article 31. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nc01.ark:/13960/t9184jh3n&view=1up&seq=67>. Accessed 05/03/23

^{vi} D. A. Carson, “Essentials of Communion.” www.preachingtoday.com/skills/themes/doctrine/200403.26.html. Accessed 05/03/23.

^{vii} See James 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*, eds. Thomas Schreiner & Matthew Crawford (B&H Academic, 2010), 92–99.

^{viii} The crux of my arguments for refraining from communion for relational conflict in the church and unrepentance for deliberate sins rest on what I believe is Paul’s dual meaning in “without discerning the body” (1 Cor. 11:29). The context implies that “the body” refers to the congregation. Some members failed to discern the unity of the body, that which Christ accomplished in his death. Furthermore, Paul has already made a close connection between Jesus’ broken body that unites the church as one body in the Lord’s Supper (10:16–17). But the language of 11:28–29 also refers to Christ’s body, aka life, given for us. “Bread” and “cup” in v.28 are symbolic of Christ’s body and blood, i.e., his life. Jesus’ blood is implied in the phrase “without discerning.” In other words, “whoever eats and drinks without discerning the body [and the blood].” The verbs “eats and drinks” before and after “without discerning” imply such. Thus, we should discern how Jesus’ life was given for our sins individually and our unity corporately. As Ciampa and Rosner state, “To sin against the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27) is to sin against the new covenant established by Christ’s body and blood, calls down judgment on oneself and on the community, and thus is to be avoided at all costs (vv. 28–34).” *The First Letter to The Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Eerdmans, 2010), 555. Also see Schreiner who says the body is a “both/and” in *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (IVP Academics, 2018), 247.

^{ix} Inspired by D. A. Carson, *Ibid*.

^x Bobby Jamieson, “The Lord’s Supper: A Foretaste of the Heavenly Banquet” (Dec. 2020). www.9marks.org/article/the-lords-supper-a-foretaste-of-the-heavenly-banquet. Accessed 05/08/23

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Article 7 of our Statement of Faith says baptism and the Lord’s Supper are the church’s two ordinances. An ordinance is a symbolic act of the Christian faith commanded by Christ for churches to practice (Mt. 26:17–30; Mk. 14:12–26; Lk. 22:7–23), have been handed down through the apostles (1 Cor. 10:14–22; 11:17–34), and were regularly practiced by the early church (Acts 2:42; 20:7, 11). See Peter Gentry, “Baptist Faith and Message: Article 7b: The Lord’s Supper.” www.baptistpress.com/resource-library/news/baptist-faith-and-message-article-7b-the-lords-supper. Accessed 05/01/23.

ⁱⁱ Bobby Jamieson, “How the Lord’s Supper Makes a Local Church.” www.9marks.org/article/how-the-lords-supper-makes-a-local-church. Accessed 05/01/23.

ⁱⁱⁱ Caution is still needed. Extremes should be avoided. One extreme is practices implying that saving grace is received through the elements. This is transubstantiation practiced by the Roman Catholic Church. An opposite extreme is to

Worship by the Book

Edited by D.A. Carson

Worship by the Book is an endeavor to define “worship” and parse its practical implementation in the local church. It is organized into four chapters and brings unique perspectives from each author. D.A. Carson aims to define worship, while the following three chapters detail the thoughts and practices of pastors from various denominations: Mark Ashton, an Anglican; R. Kent Hughes, of the Free Church tradition; and Tim Keller, a Presbyterian. For a topic that draws so much debate, to Carson’s point in the preface, “the degree of agreement is impressive . . . because each of us takes biblical theology very seriously.”

In the opening chapter, Carson defines worship and explains each section of his definition. Carson explains that worship is the proper response to God and is present in “all our living, finding its impulse in the gospel.” It is the “adoration and action” in the individual believer and corporate worship.

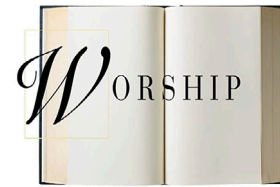
Ashton’s concern is that Anglican church services are biblical, accessible, and balanced—tenets of Thomas Cranmer and his Book of Common Prayer (the Anglican liturgy). Despite our differences, I appreciate Ashton’s commitment to evangelizing non-Christians in his services by “removing obscurity” and “bringing biblical truth close to ordinary people.”

The subsequent chapter analyzed a tradition born in protest to Anglicanism—the Free Church. Hughes summarizes its roots in the Separatist and Puritan movements and the ensuing freedom to exposit Scripture rather than relying on prayer books and homilies. This freedom, however, gave birth to pragmatism, which Hughes combats with six worship distinctives—that worship must be God-centered, Christ-centered, Word-centered, consecrated, wholehearted, and reverent.

Finally, the late Tim Keller juxtaposed contemporary and traditional worship services. Keller argued that we must look first to the Bible, then to tradition and culture to structure our services. Keller drew this conclusion from studying Calvin and distills his traits of a reformed corporate worship service to simplicity in its voice, transcendence in its goal, and gospel reenactment as its order.

I recommend this book to any Christian who would like to think deeply about the practical ways we worship God in our corporate gathering or to the Christian curious about the differences in other denominations’ worship service structure. This has inspired me to search the Scriptures to understand how God desires (and demands) that we worship, provoked many discussions at my dinner table, and grew my appreciation for Mount Vernon’s commitment to biblical worship.

– Recommended by Jonathan Melber



by the Book

D.A. CARSON
editor

Mark
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R. Kent
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Keller

Excerpts from the Book

1

“Worship is the proper response of all moral, sentient beings to God, ascribing all honor and worth to their Creator-God precisely because He is worthy, delightfully so.”

– “Worship under the Word” p.26

2

“Because worship encompasses all of life, this awesome focus must perpetually be cultivated. When we meet for corporate worship, we must consciously begin with the question: How must we conduct our lives and shape our meetings so as to glorify God?”

– “Free Church Worship: The Challenge of Freedom” p.150

3

“Instead, Calvin saw the entire service not as a performance for God by the celebrants but as a rhythm of receiving God’s word of grace and then responding in grateful praise. That is how the gospel operates.”

– “Reformed Worship in the Global City” p.215

Children and the Worship Service

Written by David & Sally Michael

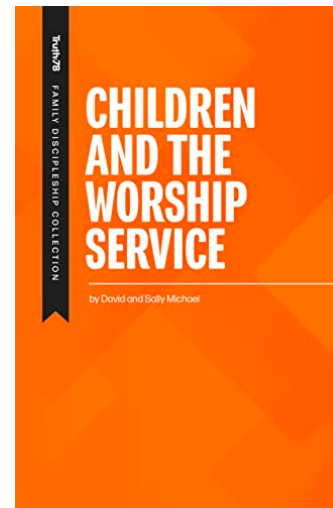
One of the most practical and pressing questions for any parent and for the church is what should we do with our children each Sunday morning? As a young parent, I remember having so many questions: Should our children sit in the worship service with us? At what age? What does the church want? What is best for our children in the long haul? What about my spiritual growth? What is age-appropriate? And is this cruel to do to my child?

Children and the Worship Service gives thought to those types of questions. First, it provides historical and biblical reasoning for including children in the Sunday morning worship service and the movements that led to separating children from their parents and the church body. (Fascinating!) It then gives reasons why children should participate with the church body. The second part provides many helpful strategies for involving children in the worship service: strategies to prepare during the week, Saturday night, Sunday morning, right before, during, and after the service. Much intentionality works to inculcate a love for God's worship! The third part was written for church leaders to cast a vision for children in the Sunday morning service. I was thankful for how Mount Vernon is already putting these into practice. Included is also an article by John and Noel Piper called "The Family: Together in God's Presence." It presents a high view of God's worship and instruction for bringing your children along in the most crucial time you could experience with them—the worship of God with the people of God.

For those without children of their own or at home—singles, empty nesters, and the elderly—this book is also fantastic to see how we might, as one family, prepare the next generation to be worshippers of Christ. I hope you'll read it and find out how!

This book reminded me why David and I are training our children to worship with the church, but we are still learning! It was a great encouragement to keep going and fine-tune our approach. There are many helpful reminders here of "better ways" (not that they are "easier ways") to give the worship of God its rightful priority in our lives. It is hard but good work to train our children to worship God with us each Sunday morning.

– Recommended by Charity Roe



Excerpts from the Book

1

"There does seem to be a significant connection between the rise of alternative 'experiences for kids that ran concurrently with their parents' worship service' and the unprecedented numbers of young people dropping out of the church."

– "Children & the Corporate Gathering of God's People: A Biblical Norm" p.7

2

"Our ultimate desire as parents is to please the Lord . . . And not to perform for others. We will not handle every situation perfectly, but by God's grace, our children will mature in faith, grow to be like Christ, and worship the Lord with all their hearts in church on Sunday morning and one day, in the very presence of the King of Kings."

– "Parental Strategies for Effectively Engaging Children in Corporate Worship Gatherings" p.33

3

"Parents should be jealous to model for their children the tremendous value they put on reverence in the presence of Almighty God."

– "The Family: Together in God's Presence" p. 45

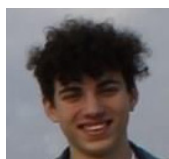
TAKE UP & READ

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the
Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

June 1	Matthew 7:1–14	June 17	Psalms 67
June 2	Isaiah 52:13–53:12	June 18	Psalms 65
June 3	Matthew 7:15–8:4	June 19	Colossians 2:6–15
June 4	Matthew 8:5–17	June 20	Colossians 1:1–23
June 5	Psalms 35	June 21	Colossians 1:24–2:5
June 6	Psalms 31	June 22	Colossians 2:16–23
June 7	Psalms 32	June 23	Genesis 3:8–24
June 8	Psalms 33	June 24	Colossians 3:1–17
June 9	John 15:18–27	June 25	Colossians 2:6–15
June 10	Psalms 34	June 26	Psalms 54
June 11	Psalms 35	June 27	1 Samuel 23
June 12	Psalms 65	June 28	1 Samuel 24
June 13	Psalms 63	June 29	1 Samuel 25
June 14	Psalms 64	June 30	John 14:1–17
June 15	Psalms 66		
June 16	1 Corinthians 14:20–40		

***Sermons in bold**

NEW MEMBERS



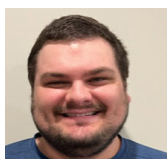
Andrew
Folmar



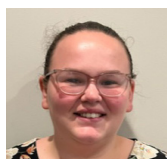
Richard
Fowler



Lindsay
Fowler



Parker
Jenkins



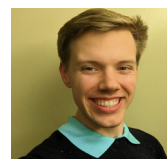
Claudia
Jenkins



Zach
Kahrs



Collins
Kahrs



Cole
Landrum



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH