



CHURCH OF CHRIST THE KING

The Purpose and Importance of The Lord's Supper

For some time, the elders have discussed increasing the frequency of observing the Lord's Supper in our services, and we have decided that beginning in January, we are going to start celebrating Communion on the first and third Sundays of each month. There are several reasons for this, the most important of which is the theology of what we are doing each time we gather for corporate worship. This is something that we take time to explain during new members classes, but we elders have also discussed the need to regularly remind ourselves of what we are doing.

One of the most important truths about corporate worship that we need to remember is that God has ordained corporate worship services to form and shape his people into holy, mature worshippers. In other words, everything we do in corporate worship—the Scripture readings, the songs, the prayers, the sermon, Communion, and even the order of the services—has been designed by God to sanctify us into people who will bring him most glory through our lives and devotion toward him.

This means that when we gather for corporate worship, we are not devising our own means to draw near to God in worship based on our personal preferences, convenience, or what is popular in the culture. Rather, God has established certain practices and patterns in his Word that we follow because they are what God has given us to conform us into his image.

And the patterns that we find in Scripture are reenactments of God's work on behalf of his people in order to rescue them from their sin and draw them into communion with him. A perfect example of this in the Old Testament was the Passover. Passover was a corporate worship service that enabled God's people to literally reenact God's deliverance of his people in the Exodus from Egypt—that's why God calls it a "memorial." He wanted his people to regularly observe this memorial so that they would remember his deliverance of them and, perhaps even more importantly, be shaped by that remembrance as they reenact the first Passover.

Fifteenth hundred years later, while observing the Passover himself, Jesus Christ established a similar reenactment and commanded his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." This new Christian memorial serves the same function for the church as Passover did for Israel—it shapes Christians by a remembrance of Christ as we reenact his broken body and shed blood.

And even more, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper as part of the complete worship service, eating at Christ's Table pictures the communion that we enjoy as Christians with Christ and with one another through the gospel. The order of our worship service reenacts the gospel, which then shapes us to live out the gospel, and the climax of the gospel is communion with God because of what Christ did for us on the cross.

All of this emphasizes the need to regularly observe the table as part of the gospel-shaped worship service because this is the primary means God has given to form us into people who live out the gospel.

This is why early Christians observed the Table every time they gathered; celebrating Communion was the characteristic act of their corporate worship. If you look through the New Testament at descriptions of corporate worship, almost without exception the service is characterized by the central act of the Lord's Supper. Acts 2:42 says that the first Christians were "devoted to . . . breaking of bread." Acts 20:7 says, "On the first day of the week we came together to break bread"; that's how they described their corporate worship—breaking bread. The regular practice of the early church was to eat the Lord's supper every time they gathered because by regularly reenacting the communion they enjoyed with God because of the broken body and shed blood of Christ, they were formed and shaped by it.

There are many reasons the frequency of Table observance diminished through the history of the church, but the one likely most relevant for churches like ours is when corporate worship was replaced by evangelistic meetings in nineteenth century American evangelicalism. When that happened, the Table as the climax of corporate worship was replaced by the altar call. Whereas in traditional worship everything in the service progressed toward the Lord's Supper, a nineteenth-century evangelistic service progressed toward the come-forward invitation.

Now, there has been in much of evangelicalism a recovery of worship as the primary focus of church gatherings on the Lord's Day, but for a variety of reasons one thing that has not been recovered in many churches is frequent Lord's Table observance, though more and more churches are beginning to recover the practice.

And we believe it is time for our church to do so as well. On the first and third Sundays of each month, we will observe the Lord's Supper as the climax of our worship, and on the second and fourth Sundays our worship will climax as we have traditionally for years now with an extended time of Intercessory Prayer. That time of prayer pictures communion with God through the gospel in a very similar way that that the Lord's Supper does, only we draw near to the throne of grace rather than the table.





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