

CPC Adult Sunday Studies

Fall 2026 |

The Wonders of Communal Worship #6

The Sacrament of Communal Worship

Last Week: We looked at what it meant to hear from Christ our prophet in the sermon, having already been welcomed into the Holy of Holies through praise, confession of sin, and God's forgiveness. The preached Word is then complemented by the "visible Word" in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

THEOLOGY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Read 1Cor. 10:14-22 and 11:17-34

See also: 1Ki. 8; Heb. 2:10-11, Heb. 10, John 6, Exod. 24)

WCF 27.1 - "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to **represent** Christ, and his benefits; and to **confirm** our interest in him: as also, to **put a visible difference** between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to **engage** them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word." (Rom 4:11; Gen 17:7,10-11; Matt 28:19; 1Cor 11:23; Rom 6:3-4; Col 2:12; 1Cor 10:16; 1Cor 11:25-26; Gal 3:27; Exod 12:48; Gen 34:14; 1Cor 10:21; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27; 1 Pet 3:21; 1Cor 10:16; 1Cor 5:7-8)

1. **"Signs and seals"** - neither mechanical (Roman Catholic) nor merely memorial (Anabaptist), they are instruments in the hands of a sovereign God who has promised to use them for us by the Spirit through faith in Christ. Literally, *means of grace*, of God coming to us, rather than means of gratitude, where we serve or bring ourselves to God. Importantly, the Spirit is the *agent* of grace, the Church (its officers) *administers* grace, and the sacraments (and preaching) are *means* of grace.
2. **"Immediately instituted"** - God commanded us to do them

27.2 - "There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union, between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other." (Gen 17:10; Matt 26:27-28; 1Cor 10:16-18)

1. **Sacramental Union** - relation between the sign (i.e. bread) and thing signified (body)
 1. Consider Gen. 17, the covenant of circumcision (and thus Rom. 4.11), alongside Gen. 15 (the "Old Testament Golgotha") and the **ratification** of the covenant with

Abraham with the animal sacrifices.

1. Circumcision (sign & seal) is to the "cutting" of the animals (thing signified) as baptism (sign & seal) is to the Cross (thing signified).
2. “**Presence**, therefore, is not a question of space; it is a relation'. . . As grace is not a question of space but of covenant ratification and assurance. It is here, at the [baptismal] font and the communion table, as well as in the pew as we hear the gospel preached, that the question is finally settled for us: God is present; he is near. And he comes in peace.” - Michael Horton

Baptism **enters** us into the covenant community (just as circumcision did); and the Lord's Supper **renews** our covenant with him (just as Passover did) and binds our communion with him and one another (1Cor. 10.16-18)

WCF 29.1 - "Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the **Lord's Supper**, to be observed in his church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual **remembrance** of the sacrifice of himself in his death; the **sealing** all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual **nourishment and growth** in him, their further **engagement** in and to all duties which they owe unto him; and, to be a **bond and pledge** of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body." (See 1Cor 10:16-17,21; 11:23-26; 12:13)

DETAILS AROUND THE MEAL

1. *Words of Institution* - "On the night in which Jesus was betrayed . . . "
 1. The pastor reminds and frames the meal with the words of Christ, which we hear and obey by partaking.
2. *Fencing of the Table* - Clarifying that only baptized members of a church partake
 1. Thinking especially of 1Cor. 11.27 ("*unworthy manner*"), this section clarifies who should and should not partake of the meal. This is an aspect of church discipline, where the Word is proclaimed under the authority of the Session, who has the keys of the kingdom to determine who belongs to Christ. We should allow for the fact that different churches define and enact membership differently, but every Christian should have assurance that they belong to the body of Christ through the authority he gave.
3. *Offering* - Financial giving

1. We have freedom to do this at different parts of the service. Doing it around the meal communicates that we devote our lives to Christ, bringing our gifts to him as the one who gave them to us in the first place.

4. *Communal Prayers*

1. Again, we can pray communally throughout the service (and do in different ways), but this prayer is the prayer of the people, whose needs are brought to the Lord who feeds us. It is also a prayer of consecration, that the gifts we provide would be set apart for holy use in the kingdom.

5. *Doxology and Procession*

1. We praise God, from whom all blessings flow, as the giver of our gifts, and we bring them up to the Lord in thanksgiving and consecration.

6. *Confession of Faith*

1. Faith being the only means to God in Christ, we proclaim what we believe before we partake of the Supper.
2. We use different confessions of faith - again, knowing we have freedom in Christ with the form. Some of them are ecumenical creeds (Apostle's, Nicene), others are from Reformed Confessions (Westminster, Heidelberg, etc.) or more modern day confessions (Lausanne, Barmen). This rotation unifies us with the global and historical church without falling into rote memorization with just one.

7. *"Sursum Corda" - "Lift up your hearts . . . "*

1. A traditional liturgical sequence, we say with the historical church that this meal is about communing with the Lord who is the Lamb, the one to whom we should give our hearts.

8. *How we partake*

1. This is an example of a "form" or style, with which we have freedom. Over the years, we've sometimes brought the elements to the people, as they remain seated. Of late, we've processed forward, in order to communicate that the church is in procession to her Lord. It's also helpful to get our bodies involved in worship, rather than sitting too long.

Remembering the Big Picture of the Worship Service, Embodied in the Lord's Supper

From our Worship Guide: "In the Covenant Meal, we both remember the sacrificial life of Christ's atonement and partake of Christ's ascended presence by the Holy Spirit. No extent of space separates us from the life-giving power of God since we have "fellowship" (*koinonia*) with Christ through his body and blood. All Christians being united to Christ are united to each other in love and have communion in each other's

gifts and graces. We celebrate the Lord's Supper weekly because it is Christ's gift of himself to the Church that makes manifest the truths of the Word we just heard preached. The sacrament is a sign and seal that those in Christ truly belong to Him. We affirm our unity in faith since faith is the God-given vehicle by which we're connected to Christ in heaven. All members of the global Church are welcome to feast together at the Table of our Lord Jesus Christ."

*From James Torrance: "The worship and mission of the church are the **gift of participating** through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's communion with the Father and the Son's mission from the Father to the world . . . There is **only one true Priest** through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. . . There is only one offering which is truly acceptable to God, and it is not ours. . . . That is why the Reformers, in their critique of certain medieval concepts of priesthood, stressed the sole priesthood of Christ, and reinterpreted the church as a **royal priesthood participating in the priesthood of Christ**. . . . Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, presenting himself **in our humanity** through the Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind. . . . He receives the Spirit from the Father for us, vicariously, in his humanity, that out of his fullness he might baptize the church by the Spirit at Pentecost into a life of **shared communion, mission, and service**." - *Worship, Community, and the Triune God of Grace**

What happens in the Supper?

29.7 - "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 are to their outward senses."

- This is the famous Reformed understanding of "**real, spiritual presence**"
 - Baptists (following Zwingli) omit the "real" part, believing it's simply a memorial. But why such great promises attached to participating in it and warnings to those unworthy?
 - Catholics (and maybe Lutherans) omit the "spiritual" part, believing in transubstantiation such that the elements change physically, thus losing the point of the sacrament and its spiritual relation (which Augustine taught!) since they collapse the two. The Supper isn't "pointing" beyond itself anymore, it simply has become the body and blood.