

A Proper Perspective

- First we need to consider the nature and observation of the Lord's Supper.
 - The Lord's Supper is an ongoing rite, one of two ordinances instituted by Jesus Christ, which the church is to observe between his first and second comings and in anticipation of his return.
 - This celebration involves symbolic elements—bread that is broken, a cup of wine (or grape juice), and the distribution of both elements to the church: these actions vividly portray the broken body of Christ and the poured out blood of Christ—his vicarious sacrifice on behalf of sinners through which they experience the forgiveness of sins—and the church's appropriation of Christ's salvific work.
 - The church observes the Lord's Supper in remembrance of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross of Calvary, and of Jesus' blood that ratified the church's new covenant relationship with God.



A Proper Perspective

- Nature and observation of the Lord's Supper (Cont).
 - More than mere remembrance, however, this ordinance is a participation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ; that is, as the church celebrates the Lord's Supper, Christ and all of the salvific benefits associated with his sacrificial death are present.
 - Included in this understanding is an ontological claim about Christ's presence in observances of the Lord's Supper, a presence that is neither mysterious nor magical but is grounded on the divine attribute of omnipresence.
 - Theologically, divine omnipresence as *ontological presence* means that "God is present in the totality of his being at each point of space."



A Proper Perspective

- Nature and observation of the Lord's Supper (Cont).
- More about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.
 - Additionally, divine omnipresence as *spiritual or moral presence* means that God is present in different ways at different times and places to bless his obedient people and judge those who are against him.
 - We should likely embrace both the ontological presence of Christ in observances of the Lord's Supper, as well as the particular manifestation of his spiritual or moral presence (1) to bless proper celebrations of the Lord's Supper and (2) to judge improper celebrations of the ordinance (as exemplified in the Lord's retribution against the divided Corinthians; 1 Cor 11:29-31).



A Proper Perspective

- Nature and observation of the Lord's Supper (Cont).
- More about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper.
 - It shouldn't surprise us that Christ would be with us in in the Lord's Supper if He is present with us in other things.
 - For example, Christ promised his spiritual or moral presence to accompany his church as it carries out the Great Commission (Matt 28:20) and as it engages in church discipline (Matt 18:20).
 - In summation, it is symbolic and yet it is a true participation in Christ as Christ is present via ontological omnipresence AND spiritual/moral presence.



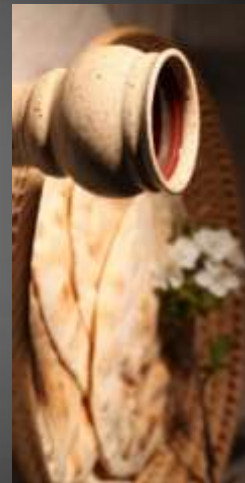
A Proper Perspective

- Nature and observation of the Lord's Supper (Cont).
- As great blessing for his people who observe the ordinance in a worthy manner, the benefits of Christ's presence include the following:
 - The reenactment of gospel rescue—his broken body, his shed blood—confronts the still-sinful members of the church who eat the bread and drink the cup; thus, an awareness or conviction of sin is relieved through the saving grace of Christ.
 - A uniting with Christ and bonding with fellow Christians takes place through joint participation in the celebration.
 - At the beginning of the celebration, there is one loaf that also symbolizes the one body.
 - The church is further benefited as the ordinance both portrays and nurtures the unity of the body of Christ.
 - Consequently, the observance of the Lord's Supper is to be preceded by self-examination to ensure that those who intend to participate do so in a worthy manner (not as worthy people).



A Proper Perspective

- Regular Observation (How Often?).
 - In one sense, Paul's point about "as often" as the church administers the ordinance (1 Cor. 11:36) leaves the matter of frequency to the church's decision.
 - At one extreme, the church does not have the option of deciding it will never observe this ordinance, because Jesus commanded that the church celebrate the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him.
 - At the other extreme, the church must repudiate the idea that its members may administer the ordinance privately to themselves everyday.
 - This is not a private ordinance, but it is done by the whole body.
- So answering this question requires a look at both the biblical principles involved and textual clues.



A Proper Perspective

- Regular Observation (How Often?).
 - Because of what it does—proclaims the gospel message of Christ’s death, fosters remembrance of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, signals the new covenant relationship with God, benefits Christians as they participate in the body and blood of Christ through the presence of Christ and his salvific work, and portrays and stimulates unity in the church—the Lord’s Supper warrants very frequent observation.
 - The early church did it every week. This continued through most of church history. That provides a biblical precedent and historical precedent.
 - It was only with Calvin that the Lord’s Supper ceased to be practiced weekly. This was against Calvin’s view.
 - The rulers of Geneva mandated 4 times per year. Calvin wanted it weekly. Presbyterians to this day do it quarterly.
 - Most Baptists do it monthly.



A Proper Perspective

- Regular Observation (How Often?).
- You can’t categorically tell the Presbyterians or Baptists they are wrong, but you can challenge them.
 - To the Presbyterian: Doing it quarterly because of a 500 year old decision from Genevian magistrates is not a good reason.
 - To the Baptist: If the Lord’s Supper does all that I said it does in the aforementioned slides, then why shouldn’t it be every time we gather on the Lord’s Day? Whose day? The Lord’s!
- A close look at 1 Cor 11 also assumes weekly observance.



A Proper Perspective

- Regular Observation (How Often?).
- 1 Corinthians 11:17-20; 33-44.
 - 11:17-20 – Now in giving this instruction I do not praise you, since **you come together** not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For to begin with, I hear that **when you come together as a church** there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰ **When you come together**, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.
 - 11:33-34 – Therefore, my brothers and sisters, **when you come together** to eat, welcome one another. ³⁴ If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that **when you gather together** you will not come under judgment. I will give instructions about the other matters whenever I come.
- It is clear that every time the church gathers together, it takes the Lord's Supper. And it is supposed to do it correctly!



A Proper Perspective

- What elements?
 - With the expansion of the church into lands outside of the Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, and European areas in which Christianity has traditionally flourished, an impetus to adopt elements other than bread and wine (or grape juice) has called into question the proper means with which to celebrate the Lord's Supper.
 - For example, some propose rice cakes and saki. Others popcorn and coke.
 - However, bread and wine are the dominically- and biblically-prescribed elements and must therefore be retained in the church's observation of this ordinance.
 - The elements communicate necessary gospel truths. Unleavened bread = sinless Christ. Crushed grapes = Christ's blood. Passover elements = redemption from slavery. All of this is lost when people make up what elements they want to use.
 - Spatio-temporal aspect of church puts contemporary church in continuity with the historic church if we use the elements that have been handed down for 2,000 years.



A Proper Perspective

- Who can participate in Communion?
- There are three different views: Close, Closed, and Open.
 - I advocate *close communion*; that is, participation in the Lord's Supper should be reserved for baptized members in good standing in their respective churches.
 - This view contrasts with both *closed communion* and *open communion*.



Closed Communion.

- The Lord's Supper should be restricted (*closed*) to baptized members in good standing of a particular church: because it is a local church ordinance—thus each local church is responsible for administering the Lord's Supper properly and only to those who can and should rightly participate—its celebration should be reserved for the baptized members in good standing of the local church that administers it.
- Non-Christians, unbaptized Christians, and baptized members in good standing of any and all churches other than the particular local church, are excluded from participation in the Lord's Supper

A Proper Perspective

- Who can participate in Communion?
- Open Communion.
 - The Lord's Supper should be served (*open*) to all genuine Christians; "all pious persons, baptized or unbaptized, have a right to the Lord's supper."
 - The application of this view means that a church about to administer the ordinance invites all Christians present in the assembly to participate, whether or not they have been baptized, whether or not they are members of the church serving the Lord's Supper, and (possibly) whether or not they are members in good standing in their respective churches.



Close Communion.

- Participation in the Lord's Supper should be reserved for baptized members in good standing in their respective churches.
- In contrast to closed communion, close communion does not insist that all participants must be members of the local church observing the ordinance.
- In contrast to open communion, close communion insists that those who participate be baptized Christians.

A Proper Perspective

- Instructions should be given before the Lord's Supper is administered (regardless of what position you hold on who can take it).
 - People need to know and understand if they are able to partake. Don't leave people confused.
- So how should we participate? It is participation in "a worthy manner."
 - It is very important to note what 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 does *not* exclude: it does not prohibit *unworthy participants* from observing the Lord's Supper: who could ever be sufficiently worthy to share in the body and blood of Jesus Christ?
 - But everyone cleansed by the blood of Christ is worthy.
 - Rather, the passage bars *unworthy participation*: the problem in the church of Corinth was one of divisiveness: rather than "discerning the body" (v. 29)—that is, "the unity and interdependence of people in the church, which is the body of Christ"—the wealthier Corinthians were disrespectful of their poorer brothers and sisters during the celebration, thus making a mockery of the *Lord's Supper*.



A Proper Perspective

- Worthy Participation (Cont.).
 - Accordingly, the self-assessment prior to participating in the Lord's Supper is not for searching out remaining sins; these should be confessed and repented of promptly, not accumulated and dismissed quickly and inconsiderately before sharing in the Lord's Supper.
 - This cuts against the grain of normal practice. Churches give people like 15 seconds of silence to confess sins and participate. This is not what this text has in mind.
 - Rather, the self-examination is for the purpose of detecting broken relationships, division-causing behavior, disrespect, and mistreatment of brothers and sisters in Christ: if self-assessment reveals these problems, the Christian should refrain from participating in the Lord's Supper and act decisively and promptly to rectify the mistreatment of others and reconcile broken relationships.
- If this is taught properly, worthy participation would be the result.



A Proper Perspective

- The Lord's Supper is a symbol of unity.
 - It was in the context of an agape feast; using one loaf of bread.
 - It was a community event. You start with one loaf of bread, vividly portraying the unity of the body of Christ. Start with one cup too.
- The Lord's Supper is also a proleptic celebration.
 - The eschatological character of the church finds tangible expression in the celebration of the Lord's Supper: both Jesus (Matt. 26:29) and Paul expressed this anticipatory nature of the ordinance (1 Cor. 11:26).
 - This eschatological depth of the Lord's Supper needs to find expression in the church's observation; this can be accomplished with particular regard to the atmosphere in which the ordinance is administered: it should be a celebration.
 - With proper soberness. It is not a funeral, not a time to feel sorry for Jesus who died. Neither is it a time for morbid introspection; neither is it a celebration of its own good fellowship.
 - Rather, the Lord's Supper is a proleptic celebration of victory because Jesus, through his sacrificial death that has defeated sin and death, will return to establish the kingdom of God in its fullness; while the atmosphere in which the church administers the Lord's Supper must be decorous and respectful, it should also express a vibrant celebration of both past and future realities wrought by Jesus Christ.

A Few Extras Points

- A wedding is NOT the place for the Lord's Supper. It celebrates the Lord, not a marriage.
- Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as "first communion" for a group of catechumens that were baptized as infants.
- Communion does not forgive sins.
- The bread needs to be unleavened!
- Communion is NOT something you can just do with your family. It is an ordinance given to the local church.
- Communion should be treated holy.
 - Example of Zwingli.

