

Frequency of Communion

Principles & Parts of Worship

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Well, it has been a while since we've been in this study on the "Principles & Parts of Worship." You have to go back to last September when we were considering the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and you can go online if you desire and listen to those sermons again. But we began with the question what is the Lord's Supper, and then moved to consider how the Supper is to be administered, how we benefit from the Lord's Supper feeding by faith upon Christ, and then two sermons on the important place of preparation for the Lord's Supper, and that left me with two other matters that I wanted to address. The first is the frequency of the Lord's Supper, how often should we observe it; and the second is admission to the Lord's Supper, who should come, and particularly addressing the age at which people may come to the Lord's Table.

Well, today I want to look at the frequency of the Lord's Supper, how often should we observe the Lord's Supper, and if you were to take a glance at churches in the present day and churches throughout history, you would immediately be confronted with a variety of opinions. In our churches, as in the history of the Reformed churches, it belongs to each Kirk Session to appoint the frequency of Communion as they determine in the local congregation. And that immediately tells you that we do not understand that the frequency of Communion is specifically prescribed by the word of God; it's not regulated, say, as the elements are, that we have to use bread and wine. The frequency of Communion we do not recognize to be regulated in that way, specifically required so that you must have Communion X amount of times every year.

Historically in the Scottish church, Communion has been observed in Communion seasons and so you would have five days, Thursday through Monday, and Thursday through Saturday would be preparatory, Sunday would be Communion, Monday would be thanksgiving. And these seasons would be held at points throughout the year with a particular concentrated focus. Now we do not argue that the Bible prescribes a five day Communion season. That's not the point. But rather this is a way to establish principles that the Bible teaches us about Communion and observe them in other services to help with preparation, thanksgiving, etc.

Now these have been infrequent in congregations but they didn't just function in congregations, they functioned in presbyteries. So a Communion season began in

presbyteries and this congregation would have theirs maybe two weeks later the next, two weeks later the next, and visitation and participation in other congregations was encouraged as an expression of the visible unity and fellowship of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. So if you go back to Ulster in the 17th century, Holywood and Bangor, eight miles apart, each appointed their own Communion seasons but each closed so that they would attend the other's Communion season. Fellowship with other believers around the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Recently in Reformed churches, however, there has been a push for weekly Communion and it is argued that the Bible requires this and that any other approach to it, and these are quotes, is deficient, partial obedience to the word of God, starving God's people of spiritual food, a misunderstanding of biblical liturgy in making preaching the high point of the service, and it is also taught that to have a sermon without the sacrament is not technically worship at all. Now not everyone who holds to weekly Communion teaches this but it is becoming more and more common to teach it. Try throwing out something against it on social media and you'll see. These are bold claims, brethren, and if they're true, we should reform our practice of less than weekly Communion immediately but out contention is that they're not true, and in some respects they are downright dangerous.

I want to interact with a few of these views as we examine what the Bible does teach about frequency of Communion, and the way that we'll go about it is, first of all, to examine the claim. Many argue for weekly observance and as I present those arguments to you, then in the second place we'll move on to establish that the Bible does not mandate weekly observance. And then having done that, we'll come to application and that is we observe periodic observance of the Lord's Supper. So then gird up your minds, brethren.

Many argue for weekly observance. Now some of you may have encountered this revived interest in weekly Communion and some of you may be more or less sympathetic to it. For myself, I was particularly drawn to it about a decade ago, influenced by the White Horse Inn, the teaching of people like Michael Horton, Keith Mathison would be another, and reading articles like "Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper at least weekly," I found the argument at first compelling. Both the men that I have mentioned teach that Communion should be observed at least weekly, at least weekly, and they're consistent because ultimately, as we'll see, the argument leads to the point where you have to have the Lord's Supper in every service. Why just once a week? The argument is ultimately that we should have the Lord's Supper in every service.

Well, let's look at the argument. How do they build it? First of all, New Testament texts. New Testament texts beginning at Acts 2, please turn to Acts 2 and we'll look at verse 42 and verse 46. Acts 2:42, "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Verse 46, "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart." So the argument here is the baptized believers after the day of Pentecost continued in the doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers, and these are worship elements, and then when we come to verse 46,

you have the added detail given that this was done daily. It's claimed that breaking of bread is Luke's phrase for the Lord's Supper and therefore these verses teach regular, even daily observance of the Supper. When they met, they had it.

Then if you turn to Acts 20 and look there at verse 6 and verse 7, Paul moves from Philippi to Troas, "And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight." So the day wasn't mentioned in Acts 2 but here at day is mentioned, namely the first day of the week, and so if breaking bread means to observe the Lord's Supper, here the argument goes the apostolic church did it every first day of the week, because when Paul went to Troas, the congregation met to break bread and he preached unto them.

Turn then to 1 Corinthians 11:17 and then verse 20. "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse." Then verse 20, "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper," and so on. So here Paul is speaking of the church coming together, verse 17, verse 20. When they do the Lord's Supper is involved because he speaks of that in verse 20 to correct the observance of it, and so the conclusion is when the church comes together, it always comes together to observe the Lord's Supper. And when you come to verse 26, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come," that's read into every time you come together, you observe the Lord's Supper and therefore you do it every week as often as you do it.

So these are the main texts that are used to support the practice. The second argument is early church practice. So there's an appeal to the scriptures and then there's an appeal to history and so quotations will be brought from writers such as Justin Martyr in the 2nd century where he speaks of the church gathering, bring bread, bring wine, bring water, and thus we have evidence there that the church is gathering every week to observe Communion. And then the document known as the Didache, and on the Lord's own day gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks, first confessing your transgressions that your sacrifice may be pure. I don't need to say anything more about that. The logic is here it is in the scriptures, here it is in the early church.

Thirdly, the argument from Old Testament liturgy. The argument from Old Testament liturgy and this, brethren, is predominant in the new wave of weekly Communion in Reformed churches. The argument from Old Testament liturgy and it goes like this: in every epoch of church history, the liturgy of worship moves to a climax in a fellowship meal. In every epoch of church history, the liturgy of worship moves to a climax in a fellowship meal of Communion. You can read this online. You'll get in people like Doug Wilson, James Jordan, they're heavily influential in promoting this view. And so the liturgy moves from a call to worship, the next thing is the confession of sin, the pronouncement of absolution after the confession of sin, then comes consecration which apparently is under the word of the Lord, and so God is speaking and we're bringing the

whole of our lives under the word of God. After consecration comes Communion. We fellowship at the Table and then the end is commissioned, we're sent back out into the world.

Now there's some real helpful truth in that. It's not all wrong. There is a flow to our services, we call to worship and we close with a benediction. The argument is that this is the way it must be and it must always include these things. How do they establish it? Well, they go to passages such as Leviticus 9. This is one of the key passages that you'll hear, Leviticus 9, and they'll note the liturgy of that day. The first thing that you're confronted with there in verse 2 is the sin offering. Leviticus 9:2, "And he said unto Aaron, Take thee a young calf for a sin offering." And so this sin offering in the liturgy is our confession of sin, and then we receive the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Jesus.

What comes next? The burnt offering, verse 2 again, "and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD." The burnt offering is the symbol of consecration, wholehearted surrender. This is linked to the reading and preaching of the word of God in a worship service.

After the burnt offering comes the peace offering in verse 4, "Also a bullock and a ram for peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD." Now the other sacrifices were not eaten but the peace offering was and so you have confession, consecration, Table fellowship. The peace offering, then, equates to the Lord's Supper and thus when the church meets, we have to go through this liturgy of worship, this process every time, and all the elements must be there. The liturgy must end with the peace offering and if not, it is deficient. So our worship is lacking here. People will tell you that straight off, "Our worship is lacking. It is partial obedience to the word of the Lord because we do not end in Table fellowship."

The fourth aspect to the argument is sacramental theology. Now again, a lot of this we agree with 100% but it's how it's used in the argument that you'll see we don't agree with. Sacramental theology. First thing here, the Supper is a means of grace. Amen. 100% we believe the Supper is a means of grace. Christ and his benefits are represented, sealed, and applied to believers. Believers feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ by faith really and spiritually in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. 100% with you in this, but perhaps this is the most common argument that you've heard, because the Supper is a means of grace, who wouldn't want to partake of it as often as possible? Who wouldn't want to partake of it every week? You can just extend that, every day, every service? Now you can see there's a degree of force in that argument. It is appealing to people when they hear it. To summarize it, it really goes like this: the more frequently we observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the more grace we get, therefore, observe the Lord's Supper as often as you can.

That's the argument, but now linked to this is a stress on the objective nature of the sacrament, a heavy stress on the objective nature of the sacrament. In other words, the Supper is all about what Christ has done – amen to that – and what Christ is doing in the

sacrament. But how is it used? More objective push out the subjective. The Supper is not about you, therefore, come as much as you can, partake as much as you can and you will receive as much as you get. The Supper is not for naval gazing; self-reflection discouraged; no tears allowed. Why? Because, remember earlier in the liturgy when you confessed your sins and you rose up and the minister pronounced some kind of absolution assuring you of the forgiveness of your sins? You've dealt with that. It's done. Now you come to the Table forgiven to smile and rejoice and give thanks.

Now some of that is true but it's very very one-sided. Then we have the relation of the sacrament to the word. They say that the word is sealed by the sacrament – and listen carefully – without the sacrament, the word is not sealed. Without the sacrament, the word is not sealed. The word and sacrament need each other. The sacrament depends on the word, yes, and the word depends on the sacrament. And so you hear frequently today, "We're a word and sacrament church. We're a word and sacrament church." Well, I would hope so but in what sense? In what sense are we a word and sacrament church because that term has come to mean something very different than what it used to mean in Reformed circles, so much so that you have dominant Reformed teachers today saying things like this: preaching without the Lord's Supper is a glorified Bible study because the word depends on the sacrament. Preaching depends upon the sacrament to be preaching. Worship depends upon the Communion service to be properly worship.

Well, for these reasons above, they argue the church should observe Communion weekly. All I would say at this point is that this is not what the Reformed church taught or practiced historically. It is not what is clearly set down in all of the Reformed Confessions and all of the Reformed Directories of Worship, those things being set down after careful debate in the church, while you will find arguments for weekly Communion notably by John Calvin. You will also discover that no Reformed church in France, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Scotland, or early America, none of them ever adopted the practice. The arguments that we see today increasingly agree more with a Lutheran or Anglican approach to this subject and they are very similar to 19th century Mercersburg theology which was a trajectory towards high church sacramentalism and, brethren, the fruit of this is never good.

Well, then, some say weekly Communion is required. Secondly, we're saying the Bible does not require weekly Communion. The Bible does not require weekly Communion and what I want to do here is simply go through the four points that we looked at and answer them. So let's begin where they begin: what does the New Testament teach, these New Testament texts? Well, if you turn again to Acts 2:42, you will find, like our brethren find, that there was a continuance in the breaking of bread. Acts 2 and the term "breaking of bread."

Now it's claimed that that term is Luke's term for the Lord's Supper but if you're thinking maybe an obvious objection might be this, it only speaks of bread, and the Supper is bread and wine. And maybe you might reply, as many will do and it's a fair reply, but this could be a synecdoche, in other words, it's using one part to speak of the whole. We grant that, perhaps that's what's going on there. The bigger problem is that this is not Luke's

exclusive term for the Lord's Supper, in fact, this is a term that Luke uses to speak of meals in general, not just the Lord's Supper in particular. And so if you were to go back to the gospel of Luke 24:30-31, Jesus meets the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and he opens the scriptures to them, and then at the end of it, he has a meal with them. He breaks bread. Now it's not the Lord's Supper but Jesus takes bread and gives thanks and breaks it.

What about Acts 20? We looked at it earlier. Verse 7, Paul comes to Troas, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," that's the Lord's Supper we're told. Well, look at verse 11 in the same place, on the same day, "When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed." After the breaking of bread and preaching, Eutychus fell out the window and he's raised up to life again. It's been a long day. It's after midnight. What's Paul doing in verse 11? He's having a meal. He's having a meal.

Acts 27:35-36, again this is Luke writing but this time Paul after a shipwreck, what does he do? Verse 35, "And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat." What does that sound like? It sounds a lot like the Lord's Supper, doesn't it? But it's not. It's Paul eating with a group of pagans on his way to Rome but yet he takes bread, he gives thanks, he breaks it.

Do you see what I'm saying here? Taking it all back to Acts 2, what does the breaking of bread refer to? And the answer is it is not conclusive, and furthermore when you come to verse 46 of Acts 2, they're doing it daily in houses. Listen, 3,000 people have just been converted. They're in one city and there are 12 apostles. Now if you believe this is a sacrament, I do trust that you believe that not everybody can administer a sacrament, especially high church people are going to be of that conviction. But what's going on here? Are 12 apostles running around the city to small house groups ministering the sacrament of the Lord's Supper? I don't think that's a very tenable position. Furthermore, if it is the Lord's Supper, which is not proved by these texts, then it is daily observance of the Lord's Supper that you are arguing is mandated by these verses. Daily observance. So never mind weekly, daily observance if that's the apostolic practice, or every service of worship, however, if it's not the Lord's Supper but a fellowship meal, which we know the believers engaged in and often had the Lord's Supper in conjunction with it, if that's what it's speaking about, brethren, we do it weekly, every week in this place we have a fellowship meal between services.

What about Acts 20 where the day is mentioned, the first day of the week? Well, we're told because they met on the first day of the week there and they met to break bread, this is the pattern for the church at all times. But it concludes a bit too much, does it not? The apostle comes into town. On that day, we're told they met together to break bread. We're not told that they did it the previous week. We're not told that this was their weekly fixed pattern that they did this without fail every Lord's Day, but yet the conclusion is drawn and the text is offered as a prescription that this is what the church must do.

1 Corinthians 11:20, the church comes together. We're not told how frequently it's referring to, and Paul goes on to say, "When you come together, this is not how you should keep the Lord's Supper." But you see, people come to the text with the conclusion already fixed. They believe that it teaches weekly Communion and then they go to use the text to establish their conclusion. Well, read it again at your own leisure, brethren, and do you know what you'll find? You'll find it doesn't say anything about the frequency of Communion.

We're not to add to the word of God, we're not to bring our presumptions to the word of God and then establish them as conclusions. The only thing that we're told about frequency is "as often as ye do this." There was the opportunity for Paul to say, "When you do this every week, do it like this," but he didn't. He says, "as often as ye do it, do it like this." He doesn't tell them how often.

So too much is claimed from these texts of scripture. Secondly, what does the early church prove? Well, appeal is made to Justin Martyr, the Didache, and so on that weekly Communion was or may have been observed in the early church, but those claims do not prove to us what must be. They describe what was or what may have been but they do not warrant what must be. Furthermore, some of these claims are disputed by scholars. I'm not in a position to give you a conclusion on that, but what we do know is at the same time the early church was progressing into an increasingly erroneous view of the sacraments which I trust you would object to if you're not Roman Catholic here this morning. An increasing sacramentalism with superstitions added to the rite, the idea that the sacraments simply worked automatically, and by the fourth century the Table was an altar hidden behind a curtain and a holy place; the priest went behind the curtain, performed his magic and came out holding the literal body and blood of Christ. My point is history shows us what may have been done or was done but it is not in and of itself enough to teach us what should be done; we need to determine that from the Bible alone.

So then what about the third argument? What does Old Testament liturgy actually establish? Now remember I said that this has become a dominant argument in the new wave of weekly Communion advocacy and it is often employed in a rather condescending way to our simple and bare and lacking church service. But you know, we are a liturgical church and you're not. Well, that's not true. We are a liturgical church but our liturgy is just simple. Well, they say it's deficient, it's lacking. Well, let's examine their claims from Old Testament liturgy. Remember the pattern, Leviticus 9, sin offering is confession, burnt offering is consecration, that's the word, a little tenuous, and then the peace offering, the fellowship meal. This must be done or must it? Well, a number of responses to that. First of all, Leviticus 9 and other passages are not examples of weekly worship. Leviticus 9 and other passages are not examples of weekly worship. This chapter describes what took place at the first ordination of the first Aaronic priest and it had a number of things beyond what took place weekly in the tabernacle or in the temple. That's the first thing.

Secondly, ordinary daily and sabbath worship in the temple consisted of a burnt offering alone being offered morning and evening. Now on the sabbath there was an extra one offered but it was a burnt offering.

So week after week in the tabernacle, in the temple, Leviticus 9 wasn't happening. The liturgy of Leviticus 9 was not happening and ironically in the scheme that is used to teach weekly Communion, this weekly offering of the burnt offering which represents the word of God, that's what was being done morning and evening, week after week, week after week. There was no weekly peace offering. There was no weekly fellowship meal, which by their argument makes the ordinary weekly worship of the temple in the Old Testament deficient. Mark it well.

Thirdly, most weekly sabbath worship in the Old Testament did not involve sacrifices of any kind. Most weekly worship in the Old Testament did not involve sacrifices of any kind. In Leviticus 23:3, a holy convocation was appointed to take place every sabbath and it occurred locally in all the tribal regions where people would gather together to worship the Lord and to receive instruction out of his law by local Levites and priests, and out of that synagogue worship is what developed. This was the staple weekly worship of Israelite believers for centuries. Most of the year they didn't go near the temple at all, yet they had the word week after week, month after month, year after year.

Well, this doesn't count apparently because it's only really the time when everybody went up to Jerusalem and gathered as the whole church that was really worship. That's the argument that comes back. We find Jesus carrying on the Old Testament principle, he doesn't go to the temple every week either. Where is he found? In the synagogue worshiping God, singing psalms, teaching the word of God himself, hearing the word of God at the mouths of others, and it appears that he did not imagine that this was deficient or that the worship of the synagogue was somehow merely a glorified Bible study because it didn't have the peace offering at the end of it. Jesus is perfectly fulfilling the fourth commandment to remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy with all of its public and private exercises of worship.

Fourthly, the occasions where the liturgy that they refer to was in place was periodic. The occasions where the liturgy that they refer to was in place was periodic: Leviticus 9, 2 Chronicles 29, Hezekiah's reform, the reinstatement of the Passover, etc. But aside from these occasions, you're going to find it in the three annual feasts the people had to go to Jerusalem to keep: the Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Day of Atonement, which was arguably the most important day of the Jewish calendar, didn't have any peace offerings. It was a sin offering, an offering for sin and guilt. Again, a deficient liturgy on the Day of Atonement, it didn't take you to the Table fellowship.

Well, apart from that, the worshiper might go up with his own free will offerings at other times but the point is with regard to this argument from liturgy to frequency in the Old Testament church, you would have engaged in that liturgy three to four times per year. Three to four times per year.

Now again I want to go back to this charge of deficient, deficiency. That would have been even more deficient in the Old Testament, brethren, when they did not have the word of God that you and I have, when they did not have the full light of the gospel that you and I have, and that they were utterly dependent upon signs and symbols and sacrifices and types and shadows in ways that you and I are not dependent upon. Even more deficient it would have been in the Old Testament. And God could have appointed the full liturgy to be done in all the local synagogues if he had so desired but he didn't.

Fourthly, what the sacramental theology implies. The push for weekly Communion, as I said, is linked to a particular view of the nature and function of the sacrament. We agree that the sacrament is a means of grace 100%, but it is a mistake to conclude that because the Lord's Supper is a means of grace it therefore must be observed weekly. That is a mistake. Baptism is a sacrament and it is a means of grace but baptism is not to be repeated every week. Now already we hear the objections, "You cannot compare the two. Baptism was only to be observed once. The Lord's Supper was to be observed repeatedly." We get it but here's the principle, brethren, the fundamental principle, the benefit of a sacrament is evidently not linked to how many times you observe it. That's fundamental otherwise we would be baptizing over and over and over and over and over again.

Now add to this that the Old Testament sacraments that the Lord's Supper answers to were observed periodically and it establishes that point even further. Did the Old Testament church not need sacraments? Wow, yes, they did. Did the Old Testament church not need grace every day and every week? Yes, they did. But did God tie their need of the means of grace, of this means of grace, did he tie it to frequency or did he tie it to seasonal intensity? I hope the answer is obvious. You see, it is not a case of saying it's a means of grace, thus more frequent, more grace, therefore give it to me weekly or daily or as much as I need the word of God.

The Supper is a means of grace but be careful. Furthermore, the Supper is not the primary means of grace, the preaching of the word is, and this is where the new emphasis is most dangerous. There is such a unique way that Christ has communicated to us in the Lord's Supper that people are starting to lose the balance and relation between these two things. Word and sacrament used to mean that the sacraments are nothing without the word. You hear men say today, "I'm a minister of word and sacrament. I'm a minister of word and sacrament." Well, of course, they are but what did men used to say? "I'm a minister of the word." Why? Because to say that was to say that you were a minister of the word and sacrament because the sacrament was a visible word. That's why the apostles in Acts 6 say, "Get the deacons, we will give ourselves to the prayer and," what? "Ministry of the word."

Listen carefully, word and sacrament now does not mean merely that sacraments are nothing without the word, word and sacrament today means the word cannot stand alone but it must have the sacrament with it. I'm not making this up. One of the most popular books on this subject is by Keith Mathison. Listen to what he says without the word the sacrament is merely an empty sign. Amen. Without the sacrament, the word is not

properly sealed. Get that, without the sacrament the word is not properly sealed and does not have its full intended effect. It's a lecture, it's a glorified Bible study.

The Supper has taken on, at least psychologically in the minds of men, the primary means of grace because it defines and determines everything else and everything must move toward Communion. Think of it, call, confession, consecration, that's the word bit, Communion is at the Table. It's as if there is no Communion with Christ in the preaching of the word of God where the Bible says, no, the preaching of the word of God is the principal means of Communion with Jesus Christ. Ah, but the Lord Jesus Christ is really and spiritually present in the Lord's Supper. He is but listen, friends, Jesus Christ is really and spiritually present in the preaching of the gospel. John 6, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood, he's the one who has part in me." It doesn't mention the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at all but it does mention the word. He says, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." You know, brethren, I have a high view of the Lord's Supper, listen to the other sermons in this series, but never never to challenge the primacy of the preaching of the word of God. This agrees with the emphasis in the New Testament where the Lord's Supper is, in comparison, barely spoken of in comparison to the word of God.

So you've got the breaking of bread in Acts 2, you've got it in Acts 20, what is it speaking about? "Well, it's debatable." Do you know what's not debatable? Read the rest of the book of Acts, it's preaching, teaching, opening, alleging. It's the word, the word, the word. Go to the epistles, how many epistles deal with the Lord's Supper? One, 1 Corinthians to correct a problem and abuse of the Lord's Supper. And the same epistle begins with an appeal by the apostle, "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel." Well, of course, Jesus sent him to baptize but he's saying, "Don't get these things mixed up in your mind. Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel." Then you go to the pastoral epistles. If you're expecting to hear about, "Make sure you have the Lord's Supper every week," you think Paul's going to deal with that when he writes to Timothy and Titus, "Here's how to establish the church." Do you know what you find? "Study the word. Teach the word. Read the word. Preach the word." Brethren, that's the emphasis of the New Testament. That's the emphasis of the New Testament. When you look at the New Testament, you wonder how did we get here from there? How did we get here from there?

So in summary for these and other reasons, we find the argument that the church must observe the Lord's Supper weekly to have no warrant or compelling mandate in scripture. Thirdly, we practice periodic or seasonal observance. I want to take you back to the beginning here. I had to deal with the argument for weekly Communion not because I believe to observe the Supper weekly is sinful, but because I believe, and we as a church believe, that frequency is a matter to be regulated by the local Kirk Session. That follows the Directory for the public worship of God. And so a Session could choose to have it more frequently, maybe at times of blessing, maybe in times of persecution, or a Session could choose to have it less frequently, or in history sometimes to put it in suspension because of the scandals that were in the church. They said, right, "The church is such a

mess, no Lord's Supper until we get it dealt with." But you see, the point is, it's the elders making a judgment call in the congregation.

The reason that we hold to periodic observance is, first of all, because of the biblical pattern. Because of the biblical pattern. There's no command or authoritative example in scripture mandating weekly Communion, and those who push the argument really do make a case for having the Lord's Supper every service, and I want you to observe something because some of them recognized that and are consistent with their views. How many worship services do they have a week? One. The evening service doesn't exist in many of these churches. Why? Because you would have to have the full liturgy again. You can't have midweek worship. Why? Because you can't have worship without the whole liturgy and the liturgy is so wonderful that you just need to do it once on the Lord's Supper and our worship is so defective and barren and bare and deficient and yet we manage to have three services a week. You wonder where the deficiency really is, don't you?

They're consistent because a worship service without Communion isn't worship. Brethren, it's not the pattern from scripture. I hope you see what the pattern from scripture is, moving from the Old Testament into the New, weekly worship focused upon the reading and preaching of the word, the symbols in the temple, the practice in the synagogues with seasonal, periodic observance of sacramental ordinances, times that God comes and seals his covenant in a particular way where we renew covenant with God and the nature of that sealing and renewal in scripture is less frequent, more specific, and more intensive. It's not means of grace, more frequent, more grace.

Secondly, the reason that we observe periodic observance is the relation of the word to the sacrament. Now you know we place an emphasis on preparation and I'll come to that, and sometimes that's the argument that people hear most, "Why do you have periodic observance?" Well, we need time to prepare but more fundamental to that is the relationship that I described above of word and sacrament, the primacy of the word of God in this regard, that without the word the sacrament is silent. Without the word the sacrament is silent. Now I'll agree with this but in practice weekly Communion observance adds the sacrament to the end of the service where the preaching could be about anything. "Children, obey your parents." Now let's come to the Lord's Table, let's read two verses, let's pray, and have the Lord's Supper. Remember, without the word the sacrament is silent. The word stands alone, the sacrament does not. The sacrament stands upon the word.

Brethren, this is why we have a concentrated focus in our Communion observance and our preaching coming to the Lord's Supper, not just about preparation but about feeding on Christ in the Lord's Supper. That's why our Communion observance is wholly devoted to the doctrine of Christ's suffering, death and resurrection. Why? Because the Supper is silent without the word. It stands upon the word, and on the contrary, the more of the word you put into the Supper, the Supper is speaking louder to the church. Now we don't give that concentrated focus in that way to the atonement every single week we gather here, but we come to these periods of observance where we sharpen our gaze and we

come to feed upon the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's because of the relation to word and sacrament and filling the sacrament with the significance of the word.

Finally, the place of preparation, we've looked at this previously. General preparation for worship, then specific preparation for particular ordinances, you find it in the Old Testament, you find it in the New Testament, 1 Corinthians 11:28, "let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." You can review the previous two sermons. But listen to Larger Catechism 171. How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper to prepare themselves before they come to it? They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's Supper are before they come to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves if their being in Christ, of their sins and wants, of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance, love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong, of their desires after Christ and of their new obedience, and by renewing the exercises of these great graces by serious meditation and fervent prayer. We quite simply with our forefathers in the faith don't believe that that can be efficiently and proficiently done in relation to weekly Communion observance, so we practice periodic observance and the frequency might change but this is the principle: frequency is not regulated and prescribed as weekly. We do not believe the Bible teaches this as a requirement but rather the biblical pattern is periodic observance of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

May the Lord bless his word to us. Please stand as we pray.