

A Letter regarding the Frequency of Observance of the Lord's Supper
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It was brought to my attention several weeks ago that the reason the church were observing the Lord's Supper less frequently was because the ritual was perceived to be less friendly (less understandable?) to unbelievers. I suspect the rationale was that if we desire to be more open to newcomers who might be less familiar with the Lord's Supper, we might consider reducing the times per month that we observe it. Unfortunately, with that thinking we pit "evangelism" against the Lord's Supper.

What is odd about such thinking is that it is the very opposite of what Jesus and Paul said of the Lord's Supper. Cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26 "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death until he comes.*" That word "proclaim" is used throughout the NT to refer to the proclamation of the Gospel message. It therefore seems that one of the benefits of observing the Lord's Supper is that it is a powerful visual demonstration of the very Gospel that unbelievers need to hear and receive. Contrary to any thinking that the Lord's Supper is counterproductive to evangelism, the Bible indicates that the Lord's Supper is a means of evangelism. It is reasonable to still discuss the frequency of the Lord's Supper but not on the grounds that it inhibits evangelism.

Regardless of the text of Scripture that is being preached on any given Sunday and regardless of the theme of the worship music we sing (often such texts and themes are directed, as is most of Scripture, toward believers), the Lord's Supper gives us occasion to reiterate visually, tactilely, and orally the basic message of the cross. That I submit is evangelism at its best.

Now most importantly, The Lord's Supper is a means of grace. There is mystery in this but not magic.

I must start with what that does not mean. Sacramentalism is a view that, when blessed, the bread and the cup bring God's saving grace to the recipient even if the recipient doesn't believe. In other words the bread and cup become inherently and automatically effective. This we reject as totally unbiblical and damning to souls.

So if we reject such a magical view, what do we accept? When we say something is a "means of grace" we declare that by that "something" God grants His grace to us whereby we are spiritually benefited. When, for example, seeking to hear from God, we humbly read God's Word, the Holy Spirit supernaturally minister's God's grace to us nurturing our faith. The reading of the Word of God with faith becomes a means of grace.

Likewise, as we participate in the Lord's Supper, humbly seeking the Lord Jesus in faith, He comes to us in the bread and cup. As I said earlier, He is not physically present, but He is really and truly spiritually present. Pastor and theologian, Robert Letham, wrote, "Thus in the (Lord's Supper) the Holy Spirit unites the faithful (people) to the person of Christ as they eat and drink the signs, the physical elements of bread and wine. There is an inseparable (joining) of sign and reality. As truly as we eat the bread and drink the wine, so we feed on Christ by faith...The role of those who take the bread and cup is, therefore, to believe and receive." (Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 28-29)

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus says it is like eating His flesh and drinking His blood. In other words, by faith we are taking Him in, trusting Him, reaffirming our faith, declaring anew our belief and trust in Him. And in that He ministers His grace to us to believe. There is a mysterious synergy in this that we cannot fully explain.

He offers us Himself in the bread and cup.

We obey and eat and drink, believing Him.

He ministers His grace to us to trust Him more fully.

In a well-known passage in John 6, after miraculously feeding bread to thousands of people, Jesus refers to Himself as the bread of life. Then Jesus says plainly, *“For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:40 – Emphasis Added) The point is that He, in His very person, is the life they need. But to press the point that it is Jesus, Himself, that they need, He uses metaphors for what He has already said, when He says again, *“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:54) Certainly you see the parallel between verses 54 and 40. When we trust in Jesus He does not physically come into us but He does truly come into us spiritually.

Likewise, when we come to Jesus' words, in the Lord's Supper, about the bread being His body and the drink being His blood, we see that He is not saying that He is physically present in the bread and drink or that He physically enters us in the bread and drink. He is saying that He is spiritually present and He comes to us. The ingesting of the bread and drink corresponds to the spiritual indwelling of Christ in us. He is part of our very spiritual beings, as food becomes part of our physical beings. This is a mystery to be sure but no less declared by God's word.

Until the day we see Him face to face, there could be no sweeter, more intimate, fellowship with Jesus than what He offers us in the bread and cup. He comes to us – He comes into us to commune with us, reassure us, and strengthen us.

Speaking to your pastoral concern for the “saved” and “unsaved,” I urge you to reconsider the frequency of observance of the Lord's Supper.