

WE SHOW CHRISTIAN LOVE BY PRACTICING CLOSED COMMUNION

BY

BOB BEAVER

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF DIVINITY

PROF. STEPHEN GEIGER, ADVISOR

WISCONSIN LUTHERAN SEMINARY

MEQUON, WI

FEBRUARY 17, 2023

## CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	II
ABSTRACT.....	III
INTRODUCTION .....	IV
THE SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.....	1
Unity of Elements.....	1
1 Corinthians 11:23-26.....	2
1 Corinthians 10:16.....	5
1 Corinthians 11:27-29.....	6
Unity of Participants.....	9
John 8:31-32.....	10
Romans 16:17-18.....	11
2 John 10,11.....	14
2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.....	17
UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EXTRA-BIBLICAL VIEWS CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP.....	20
This is a Symbolic Meal.....	21
This is a Sacrifice.....	25
This is for Christians.....	27
COMMUNICATING THE SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY .....	30
Speaking to Individuals.....	31
Writing to Many.....	33
CONCLUSION.....	37

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 38

## ABSTRACT

As modern American culture places ever increasing emphasis on inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance, the Scriptural practice of closed communion is increasingly thought of as outdated and unloving. This, however, is simply untrue. With an exegesis of selected relevant passages and a study of doctrinal writings, part one of this paper presents the scriptural truth that by practicing closed communion Christians show love for God and their neighbor. This, however, is only half the battle.

Christians are not only instructed to hold to Christ's teaching (John 8:31) but to teach Christ's teaching (Matt 28:20). A Lutheran pastor must not only know the truth of Scripture but be ready to share it with others (1 Pet 3:15). Parts two and three of this paper will help the Lutheran pastor effectively communicate the biblical truths surrounding the loving practice of closed communion to visitors who do not understand them. Part two includes contrary viewpoints so that the pastor will understand opposing beliefs. Part three includes guidance for effective communication in individual and group settings.

## INTRODUCTION

The conversation is always necessary but can sometimes be uncomfortable. Someone who's not a member of your flock walks into your church and sits down on a communion Sunday. The Lord's body and blood will truly be present in worship. If the conversation isn't had, this visitor might join you and your flock in communion. Out of love for Christ who will truly be present, out of love for every word he has given you in Scripture, and out of love for this visitor who could unknowingly eat and drink to his harm, you will make an effort to have this always necessary, but sometimes uncomfortable, conversation. What will you say? How will you say it? How might the visitor react? This paper will argue that the practice of closed communion is Scriptural and loving and give insight as to how to effectively communicate closed communion practices by seeking to understand opposing views and offering tips for effective communication.

## THE SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS CONCERNING THE LORD'S SUPPER AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Before we begin to consider how to best communicate truths concerning church fellowship and the Lord's Supper, we must first understand what these truths are. This section of the paper will present the Biblical truths that the Lutheran pastor will seek to communicate to his members and guests pertaining to church fellowship and the Lord's Supper.

### **Unity of Elements**

Jesus knew what was going to happen to him on that night he celebrated the Passover for the last time. In a few hours one of his own would betray him. He would be beaten and mocked by the people he came to save. He would give his life as the atoning sacrifice for the sins of the world. But not yet. First, "Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread" (1 Co 11:23). First, Jesus instituted a new meal for his disciples to do in remembrance of him. Since then, Christians have celebrated and continue to celebrate this Supper instituted by the Lord. A close examination of selected passages which speak of the Lord's Supper will show that Scripture teaches this truth: when we participate in the Lord's Supper, we receive the very body and blood of the Lord. This section will also address the implications of this truth.

## 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Paul addressed many issues and abuses which were present in the congregation in Corinth when he wrote his first letter to this church. Among those abuses was the habit of celebrating the Lord's Supper that the Corinthians developed. When they got together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, more harm than good was done as some ate and drank their fill to the point of becoming drunk while others returned home hungry (1 Co 11:17-22). In response to these abuses, Paul passed on what he received from the Lord to the Corinthians. In verses 23-26 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul restated the truths concerning the Lord's Supper which he received from Christ. One truth contained in these verses is especially relevant here: Jesus Christ is present when we celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Christians have long debated Christ's presence in the sacrament. Some deny Christ is present at all, claiming Jesus simply used the bread and wine as symbols in this meal. Some claim Christ to be present, but only in a spiritual way. Some claim Christ is physically present. Many different beliefs will be evaluated later.

1 Corinthians 11:24 reads Τοῦτό μου ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. In a plain, natural translation this reads, "This is my body, which is for you." Τοῦτό can refer to nothing other than the bread which Jesus took, gave thanks for, broke, and gave to his disciples. No indication from context or usage indicates that ἐστὶν should be taken in anything other than its most common, literal sense, "is." Jesus took bread and said that it is σῶμα, "body". σῶμα at times is used to refer to the Church (Ro 12:5, 1 Co 12:13), but here and in the gospel records of the institution of the Lord's Supper σῶμα most naturally refers to Christ's own body. The rest of the phrase demands as much since Christ said the bread is my (μου) body. Furthermore, the body is τὸ ὑπὲρ

ὑμῶν, “on your behalf.” Here the repeated attributive article begins a descriptive phrase which lacks a verb. “Which is for you” is a fitting translation. It is also permissible to supply a more descriptive verb and translate “which is given for you.” Luke’s record (Lk 22:19) and Jesus’ action of giving this bread to his disciples support this translation.

The simplest meaning of the text can be read only one way. When Jesus said, “is” he meant “is.” Luther argued that no further evidence is needed or should be included in this matter. “Now, here stands the text<sup>1</sup>, stating clearly and lucidly that Christ gives his body to eat when he distributes the bread. On this we take our stand, and we also believe and teach that in the Supper we eat and take to ourselves Christ’s body truly and physically.<sup>2,3</sup>”

Thus, the plain and simple meaning of these words leave no room for any other reading or interpretation than “This is my body, which is for you” where *is* means *is* and *body* refers to Christ’s own body. This is the Lutheran teaching of the Lord’s Supper, which is “the doctrine of Scripture, because it accepts at full value both the words pertaining to the presence of the bread as also to the words pertaining to the presence of the body of Christ, without subtracting from them or adding to them.”<sup>4</sup>

---

1. The text Luther considered when he wrote this was actually not 1 Corinthians 11:24 specifically. He referred to Mt 26:26 and Mk 14:22. These passages both contain the phrase τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου. The differences between 1 Corinthians and the gospels are not of particular interest here, though one could note that μου is placed in an emphatic position in 1 Corinthians 11:24.

2. Luther’s goal in using the word “physically” was not to describe the exact manner in which Christ is present in the sacrament. Elsewhere, Luther wrote that “how this takes place or how he is in the bread, we do not know and are not meant to know.” Rather, Luther used this word to oppose the idea of representation set forth by Calvin and Zwingli.

3. LW 37:28-29

4. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol 3. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1953), 298.



If there is no reason to read the Scriptures which speak of the Lord's Supper in any manner except the one presented, why are there so many differing interpretations contrary to the plain and simple truth? The reason for these differences is the offense it presents to our human reason. People are not capable of understanding how what Scripture says can be true. As Lange wrote,

In the Lord's Supper, communicants truly receive the body and the blood of Christ. They cannot, however, point to the physical body and blood of Christ and identify its specific location as though it were locked up within the elements of bread and wine. ... The body and blood of Christ are present in the Sacrament *supernaturally*, that is, not exhibiting the natural properties of body and blood. ... The body and blood of Christ are present in the Sacrament *incomprehensibly*. They cannot be verified by human senses or understood by human reason.<sup>5</sup>

While many have gone to great lengths to try and grasp this incomprehensible truth, others hold that this is a fool's errand. Rather, it is better for us to remain silent where Scripture remains silent. On this matter Lenski wrote:

We refuse to answer the question regarding the *how* because the Lord withholds the answer. We could probably not have understood the real answer if it had been given because the giving of his body in the Sacrament is a divine act of omnipotence and of grace which is beyond mortal comprehension. The Lord declares *the fact*: "This is my body," and we take him at his word. He knows the mystery of this giving, we do not.<sup>6</sup>

Luther agrees that "how this takes place or how he is in the bread, we do not know and are not meant to know."<sup>7</sup>

---

5. Lyle Lange, *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine* (Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005), 510.

6. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 467.

7. LW 37:28,29

“It is by faith we believe that Christ’s body and blood are truly present, distributed, and received in the Sacrament. How this can be we leave up to God.”<sup>8</sup> Though we do not and cannot understand how this is, the fact remains: The body and blood of Christ are truly present when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Another passage that asserts this same truth will be assessed.

### 1 Corinthians 10:16

As was made clear in the above section, the very body and blood of Christ are present when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. 1 Corinthians 10:16 gives an explanation of the relationship between Christ’s body and blood and the earthly elements of bread and wine in the sacrament.

Paul described the relationship between Christ and the earthly elements as *κοινωνία*. According to Greek lexicons, fitting translations for *κοινωνία* include fellowship, communion, participation, and close association. The truth communicated in this passage is the existence of a deep oneness and unity between the body and blood of Christ and the bread and wine used in the sacrament. When a Christian eats and drinks the earthly elements of bread and wine in the Sacrament, he also eats and drinks the body and blood of Christ which have been united to them. This eating and drinking unites the Christian with Christ. Paul cited this truth as a reason for the Corinthians also not to express unity with pagans and their gods. “Is it not the case,” [Paul] argues, “that your reception of the sacramental cup and bread established an intimate fellowship and communion with Christ? If so, how can this fellowship be compatible with participation in

---

8. Lange, *God so Loved*, 511.

pagan festivals?”<sup>9</sup> As Christ’s body and blood have been united to the bread and wine in the Supper, it can be said that “believers participate in a vertical relationship with Jesus Christ – as Paul earlier wrote, we have fellowship with God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (1:9; see also 1 John 1:3).”<sup>10</sup> This special communion and unity with Christ can be thought of as a vertical fellowship with God. In the following verse, which will be addressed later, Paul wrote concerning a horizontal fellowship with other communicants.

A most wonderful thing occurs when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. We receive both the very body and blood of Christ which are united with the bread and wine and the forgiveness of sins which God promises. This truth has implications for those who receive the sacrament, which Paul stated in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

#### 1 Corinthians 11:27-29

On the one hand, Scripture teaches that the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace through which the Lord gives forgiveness and encouragement. On the other hand, Scripture also teaches that the Lord’s Supper can do significant harm to those who receive it unworthily. It is loving, therefore, to administer the Lord’s Supper in such a way that we give the body and blood of the Lord to those whom it will strengthen and not give the body and blood of the Lord to those whom it will harm. To do this, the question must be considered: How can we differentiate between these two outcomes? Paul gave guidance in this matter in 1 Corinthians 11:27-29.

---

9. Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2000), 340.

10. Simon Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 342.

Drawing from the principles Paul received from the Lord and passed on to the Corinthians (1 Co 11:23-26), Paul drew the following application: “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord (1 Co 11:27).” The use of the subjunctive mood (ἐσθίη, πίνη) in the protasis, the presence of ἄν, and the use of the future tense (ἔσται) in the apodosis make a future more vivid construction, by which Paul means to communicate, “If ever this should be the case, that someone should eat and drink the body and blood in an unworthy manner, then this most certainly will be the result, that he will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.” Even more emphasis is given to the guilty (ἔνοχος) status of the unworthy recipient, as it is placed before the verb in the apodosis. BDAG lists that ἔνοχος can anticipate “the person or thing against whom the sin has been committed.” Here, Christ’s own body and blood in the sacrament are the thing against which the sin has been committed. Furthermore, Paul wrote later in 11:29 that one who eats and drinks in such a way eats and drinks judgement (κρίμα) upon himself. Here again, the result of the sin, κρίμα, is given special emphasis as it is placed before the main verb of the sentence. Therefore, Christian love prohibits us from giving the sacrament to those who receive it unworthily. How, then, are we to determine who receives the Supper in such a way?

Paul described one manner in which we can unworthily receive the Lord’s body and blood with four words in 11:29, “μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.” Διακρίνων is a present, active, participle from the root διακρίνω. BDAG gives the following as basic meanings for this verb: separate, differentiate, judge, evaluate carefully. Failing to closely evaluate the body (τὸ σῶμα) constitutes unworthy reception. In this verse, τὸ σῶμα is in the immediate context of instruction concerning the Lord’s Supper and placed near the repeated mention of the body and blood of the

Lord. Therefore, it is most natural to interpret that when Paul here wrote τὸ σῶμα he referred to the body of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

There is a textual variant in this verse. Some manuscripts read τὸ σῶμα while others read τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου. There is considerable manuscript evidence for either option. It is more likely τοῦ κυρίου was added by mistake due to its frequent repetition or that it was inserted with intent to make a proper interpretation clearer than it is that τοῦ κυρίου was omitted. So, the given reading of τὸ σῶμα is to be preferred. The variant readings may give evidence that early Christians saw Paul's mention of τὸ σῶμα in this verse as referring to τὸ σῶμα τοῦ κυρίου present in the sacrament.

Based on the reasons listed above, this conclusion is drawn: a failure to discern that Christ's body and blood constitutes an unworthy reception of the body and blood of the Lord in the sacrament. This being the case, Paul commanded, "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup" (1 Co 11:28). BDAG suggested "put to the test" as an appropriate translation of the verb Paul used here (δοκιμαζέτω). In his other writings Paul used this word to encourage Christians to carefully examine their own faith (2 Co 13:5) and to carefully examine any new teaching or instruction they came across (1 Thes 5:21). Here, Paul sets such careful self-examination as a prerequisite for worthy reception of the Lord's Supper. "In light of Paul's admonition to examine oneself, only those who can do this should be given the Lord's Supper."<sup>11</sup>

The presence of Christ's own body in the sacrament greatly increases the joy and comfort of the Sacrament to those who recognize it and thus receive it worthily. This presence also

---

11. Lange, *God so Loved*, 521.

greatly increases the damage done to those who fail to recognize it and thus receive it unworthily. Concerning the Lord's Supper, the Scriptures teach that the body and blood of Christ's own body are truly present in a manner which we cannot, and should not, attempt to fully understand. The truth of the great benefits promised in the Lord's Supper and the warnings attached to it serve as part of the Scriptural basis for the practice of closed communion. Another Scriptural basis for this practice will now be considered.

### **Unity of Participants**

There is a deep expression of unity, fellowship, and communion between Christ and those who believe in him as He gives them the forgiveness of sins and his body and blood in the Lord's Supper. There is also a deep expression of unity, fellowship, and communion between all believers who gather to celebrate and receive the forgiveness of sins through this means of grace. Based on the truths about the Lord's Supper that he received from Christ, Paul drew the conclusion that "because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Co 10:17). Here Paul states the effect that the sacramental meal has upon Christians: "The Lord's Supper sustains and renews the believers in their identity as one body in Christ."<sup>12</sup> Because the Lord's Supper nourishes unity within a body of believers, it should only be celebrated within a body of believers who are unified in faith and doctrine. To do otherwise would be to use the sacrament outside of its intended purpose. The following study of selected

---

12. Matthew Harrison and John Pless, *Closed Communion? Admission to the Lord's Supper in Biblical Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis, Concordia, 2017), 488.

passages shows the Scriptural truths concerning fellowship within a body of believers and addresses the implications for believers that these truths have.

### John 8:31-32

The encouragement that Jesus gave in John 8:31-32 is of particular importance in this study. Speaking to a group of people who had faith in him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:31-32). Jesus’ audience were people in whom God had already worked faith. To such people, Jesus did not merely command them to “continue to believe, but believe according to the spirit of the word and in obedience to the word which he spoke.”<sup>13</sup> Lenski expounded upon the imperative Jesus gave, saying, “We must not overlook the implication in the verb ‘remain’ in my word. Jesus acknowledges that these men *are* now in his word; in other words, that they now embrace his word by faith. He uses the aorist subjunctive, μείνητε, actually and definitely remain, be fixed and established in his word.”<sup>14</sup>

Those who hold firmly to God’s Word are truly Christ’s disciples and know that God’s Word is truth. Adhering to this encouragement, Christ’s disciples will seek to understand and not deviate from the truths that God’s Word presents. After all, God’s Word is truth (Jn 17:17). There are, however, true disciples of Christ who either out of ignorance or weakness in faith do not have a proper understanding of God’s Word. The truths that God communicated in the

---

13. Lange, *God So Loved*, 287.

14. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistle to the Romans* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1943), 628.

following passages give instructions for the proper course of action to be taken by Christ's disciples concerning those who have deviated from the truth.

#### Romans 16:17-18

It is Christ's will that the whole Christian Church hold to his teaching and be united by it. Yet, throughout the Church's history and still today some can be found who support a teaching other than the truth which Christ taught. In Romans 16:17-18 Paul explained how such people are to blame for division in the Church and exposed the motives behind their actions.

As Paul concluded the letter with greetings, he included one last exhortation at the beginning of verse 17 as he wrote Παρακαλῶ, "I urge/encourage." As is often the case, there is an infinitive following the verb which specifies the action Paul encouraged. Paul wrote, "I encourage you ... to look out" (Παρακαλῶ ... σκοπεῖν). The verb used here "suggests the picture of a sentinel standing guard on a city wall, shielding his eyes and carefully scanning the horizon for any sign of approaching danger."<sup>15</sup> Paul encouraged the Romans to be on guard against "those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way" (τοὺς τὰς διχοστασίας καὶ τὰ σκάνδαλα ... ποιοῦντας). Here, the present active participle with the article (τοὺς ποιοῦντας) serves as a substantive describing the group which Paul warned against. Such people make two things: divisions (τὰς διχοστασίας) and obstacles (τὰ σκάνδαλα).

Were these two things left standing alone we could conclude that Paul here argued for ecumenism. But these two things are further described as "contrary to the teaching you have

---

15. Curtis A. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, Milwaukee, Northwestern, 1996, 248.



learned” (παρὰ τὴν διδαχὴν ἣν ὑμεῖς ἐμάθετε). Paul wanted the Romans to be on guard for anyone who made an obstacle by forsaking the truth of the gospel which they learned and ushering in a new, divisive false teaching.

After urging the Romans to be on guard, Paul gave a second command to “keep away from them” (ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ’ αὐτῶν). Having identified such persons, this was the next appropriate action. Hahn summarized the thought of Paul’s exhortation well: “Whatever the precise identity of these misguided teachers, the Romans must keep a lookout for anyone who contradicts the teaching of the apostles. Furthermore, they must keep their distance should persons of this description appear at their doorstep.”<sup>16</sup>

In verse 17, Paul gave instructions concerning what is to be done to combat false teachers. Paul then described the false teachers against whom the Romans were to stand guard. Moo noted that in verse 18, “What we have is a stock profile of typical false teachers. In addition to errors in doctrine, Paul says three things about them: (1) They serve themselves rather than Christ; (2) they are crafty and effective speakers; and (3) they create divisions in the church. Paul, in other words, describes the motives, the means, and the results of their ministry.”<sup>17</sup>

Describing the false teachers of the preceding verse, Paul said that they are not serving Christ, but rather their own stomachs (κοιλία). Paul used this word to refer to literal stomachs (1 Co 6:13), but he also used it to refer to a person’s inner desires. In Phil 3:19, ἡ κοιλία is the god of the enemies of those who “live as enemies of the cross of Christ.” Such people live not to serve God, but to serve whatever they have determined in themselves that they should do. In the

---

16. Scott Hahn, *Romans*, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 284.

17. Douglas Moo, *Romans*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 515.

same way, the false teachers warned against here do not serve Christ, but their own inward desires. For “falsehood proceeds, not from the new man, but from flesh, the old Adam, man’s sinful nature. In so far as people lend themselves to the spreading of error, they are following the dictates of their flesh, the friend and tool of the father of lies.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, the motives of false teachers are always errant and sinful.

However, these motives are usually not obvious, but hidden by smooth arguments (χρηστολογία) and flattery (εὐλογία). Paul warned that false teachers operate this way. The lie often sounds so good and the praise sounds so pure that those who proclaim them may even deceive themselves. After all, that is the effect these lies have. As Paul said, false teachers deceive (ἐξαπατῶσιν). Believing their own lies, “such teachers attempt to operate within the churches. They may view themselves as belonging there and even saving or restoring the true faith.”<sup>19</sup>

After exposing the selfish motives and deceitful tools that false teachers use, Paul stated the result produced by their error. “They deceive the minds of naïve people” (Romans 16:18). Paul said that such people were ἀκάκων, which BDAG translates “innocent” or “guiltless”. He referred to people who don’t know enough to differentiate between God’s truth set forth in the Scriptures and the lies pushed by false teachers in God’s name. The effect that the false teachers’ lies have on the innocent makes their actions even more egregious and ought to cause Christians to closely examine what they believe and teach so that they are not guilty of the same evil work.

Paul gave this instruction to safeguard the miracle which had taken place in the Roman Christians’ hearts. “In each of their lives, the gospel had proved itself to be the power of God

---

18. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 255.

19. Michael P. Middendorf, *Romans 9-16*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis, Concordia, 2016), 1581.

unto salvation. What could be more natural than that Paul should caution them against those who might disrupt and destroy that beautiful unity and fellowship by teaching a different gospel!”<sup>20</sup> Following Paul’s warning, Christians constantly stand watch looking for false teachers. When false teachers are identified, Christians will keep away from them recognizing the damaging effect that the falsehood they bring can have on their faith. Out of love for the truth of God’s Word and their own faith, Christians will not practice fellowship – at the altar or otherwise – with those who do not adhere to the truth of the gospel.

#### 2 John 10,11

In the previous Romans passage Paul instructed that we do not practice fellowship with false teachers. The apostle John also recognized the existence of such false teachers in 2 John and gave the same instruction, but with different rationale. We should not practice fellowship with false teachers because “anyone who welcomes him shares in his evil work” (2 Jn 11).

John’s instruction not to welcome applied to “anyone who comes to you and does not bring this teaching” (2 Jn 10). The preceding verses specify what sort of people John wrote about. John wrote about “deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh” (2 Jn 7). He also warned that “anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God” (2 Jn 9). The teaching of Christ mentioned here refers to all which Christ taught. It would be improper to say that the teaching of Christ is anything less

---

20. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 249.

that the whole counsel of God revealed in the Scriptures. This teaching, the whole counsel of God, is the mark of a true disciple and a faithful teacher.

Concerning false teachers who did not continue in the teaching of Christ, John's instructions were as follows: "Do not receive him into your home (μὴ λαμβάνετε αὐτὸν εἰς οἰκίαν) and do not welcome him (καὶ χαίρειν αὐτῷ μὴ λέγετε)."

"Missionaries were dependent on the hospitality of fellow Christians."<sup>21</sup> Just as John received Mary into his home (Jn 19:27), so also Christians would receive traveling teachers and preachers into their homes, albeit in a less permanent manner. Because missionaries were dependent upon this hospitality, "hospitality to false teachers would be equal to furthering false doctrine."<sup>22</sup> It's plain to see how such a close relationship with a false teacher could have placed the Christian at risk and sent a message of approval to the false teaching he brought. John's first instruction seems perfectly reasonable. His second instruction presents more of a challenge.

In addition to not showing hospitality to the false teacher, Christians were also not to "welcome him" (2 John 10). Literally, John's instruction was not to say (μὴ λέγετε) welcome (χαίρειν) to him. Χαίρειν is an infinitive form of the verb χαίρω, "to rejoice." According to BDAG, this word is used as a common greeting such as "welcome," or "good day." The angel Gabriel said χαίρειν to greet Mary when he announced Jesus' birth and the soldiers said χαίρειν with a mocking tone as they beat Jesus before his crucifixion. It is used as a common greeting in this context as well.

What are we to make of this instruction? Are we to be brutish and rude to all who deviate from the truth of Christ's teaching? Certainly not. "John is not talking, of course, about social

---

21. Robert G. Hoerber, ed., *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, (St. Louis: Concordia, 1984), 1933.

22. Hoerber, *Concordia Self-Study Bible*, 1933.

courtesy. He is not urging us to be uncivil or rude. John is speaking about religious fellowship.”<sup>23</sup> This becomes clear as John gave the rationale behind these instructions in verse 11, “Anyone who welcomes him shares (κοινωνεῖ) in his wicked work.” Just as Paul warned against being participants (κοινωνοὺς) with demons in 1 Corinthians 10, so John warned here against participating (κοινωνεῖ) in the evil works of false teachers. “In no way are we to give the impression that we approve of the teaching of a person who ‘does not continue in the teaching of Christ.’ In no way are we to support, encourage, or assist him in spreading his errors.”<sup>24</sup>

Though John’s instruction to not greet and receive people who need your hospitality may seem unloving, this is actually an appropriate display of Christian love. “The unloving thing would be to assist and accommodate their error.”<sup>25</sup> To do so would be to permit sin in their lives and invite it into your own. Therefore, “a strong stand of opposition to these evangelists of error is essential for the health of the church.”<sup>26</sup>

John’s instruction for us regarding false teachers is to give no indication that their falsehood is acceptable in any way. Simultaneously balancing this teaching with the law of Christian love is a task that every Christian will struggle to faithfully uphold. Akin approached this balance and the severe need for it saying, “Although there is to be no rudeness on the part of a believer, neither is there to be the slightest encouragement to these teachers who spread the

---

23. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 245.

24. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 245.

25. Daniel Akin, *1,2,3 John*, The New American Commentary, Vol. 38 (Broadman and Holman, 2001), 233.

26. Akin, *1,2,3 John*, 233.

cancer of false teaching. The issue of truth is crucial. It must be preserved at all cost. To act in any other manner would be spiritual suicide.”<sup>27</sup>

## 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

As he did in Romans 16, in these verses Paul warned the Thessalonians to take notice of and separate themselves from those who do not obey God’s Word. There, Paul expanded the motive of the false teachers. They do what they do to feed their own appetites. Here, Paul expanded on the motive of the congregation causing the separation: love.

Paul’s instruction to mark (σημειοῦσθε) and disassociate (μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι) is directed at anyone who does not obey (ὑπακούει) Paul’s instruction in the letter. Here we see the verb ἀκούω (to hear) with the prefix ὑπό (under). Having heard the content of the letter, Paul wished that the congregation would consider this teaching to be above them rather than thinking themselves above this teaching. The proper response to hearing the Word of God is to place oneself under it and obey it rather than placing oneself above it and failing to do what it says.

Should someone be continually living in disobedience to God’s Word, the proper course of action according to this passage is to take special note of them and then make the separation between congregation and the erring brother which Paul prescribed.

Now at the end of verse 14 Paul wrote the purpose of the separation, “in order that he might be ashamed” (ἵνα ἐντραπή). This verb is used to denote some kind of separation or difference. In Matthew and Mark this is the word Jesus used to describe the attitude that he

---

27. Akin, *1,2,3 John*, 233-234.

hoped the tenants would show his son. He thought that surely the servants would mark the difference between their status as servants and the son's status. Noting this difference, the servants would respect (ἐντραπήσονται) him. There, context dictates that this perceived difference or separation denoted honor. Here and elsewhere in Paul's letters context dictates that the separation denotes shame. For example, in Titus 2:8, Paul encouraged young men to guard their speech and conduct. There was to be a noticeable difference between the common way men acted and the way that Christian men acted. The purpose of this difference was so that those who opposed them would be put to shame (ἐντραπή). Also in 1 Corinthians 4:14, after a rather harsh rebuke, Paul used this word to clarify that his motive was not to shame (Οὐκ ἐντρέπων) them.

This shame has a twofold purpose. It is warranted and demanded by Paul because disobedience and error regarding God's Word is dangerous for the erring brother and for the congregation. "To ignore such a grave matter would leave a blemish on their own Christian character."<sup>28</sup> The congregation cannot allow false teaching to persist in their midst or in the life of an erring brother. Yet "the offender is not yet an enemy; he is still a brother, and as a brother he should be treated."<sup>29</sup> So, when an error appears in a congregation, the congregations cannot allow the false teaching to persist out of love for God's Word. Out of love for the erring brother, the congregation will draw a distinctive line between itself and the erring brother so that he might recognize his mistake and come back to the fold. Pieper summarized this truth well saying, "The Christian Church can and should have patience with the erring and seek through instruction

---

28. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 176.

29. Jahn, *Essays on Church Fellowship*, 177.

to remove the error. But never can or should the Church grant error equal right with the truth. If it does, it renounces the truth itself. It is the very nature of truth to antagonize error.”<sup>30</sup>

The study of the above passages has shown the scriptural truths concerning the Lord’s Supper and church fellowship. When we take the Lord’s Supper, we receive both the body and blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins. Also, our “attendance at the Lord’s Table with others is a declaration of our common faith.”<sup>31</sup> On the basis of these truths, Christian churches ought to practice closed communion, meaning that “we will commune with people who share our confession of faith.”<sup>32</sup>

---

30. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 425.

31. Lange, *God So Loved*, 553.

32. Lange, *God So Loved*, 553.



## UNDERSTANDING AND ADDRESSING EXTRA-BIBLICAL VIEWS CONCERNING THE LORD'S SUPPER AND CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

In the previous section, the Biblical truths regarding the Lord's Supper and church fellowship and their implications for practice were evaluated. These truths and practices, however, are not believed and exercised in every Christian church. Many extra-biblical views persist in many different church bodies. Naturally, these different beliefs produce different practices. For those who believe the biblical teaching regarding the Lord's Supper and church fellowship and seek to communicate this truth to others, knowledge of opposing views will prove beneficial. This section will seek to understand such opposing views and address them with Scriptural truths.

The purpose of this paper is to help pastors lovingly communicate these Scriptural truths to the individuals gathered in their churches. This section will present popular extra-biblical truths generally believed by other Christians or church bodies. Church bodies are not individuals. A pastor who assumes that an individual who belongs to another church body adheres closely to every doctrine professed by that church body hinders effective communication, as this is often not the case. Gerhard saw the importance of this truth as he wrote concerning the practice of church fellowship. Moving into this section of the paper, it is beneficial to keep the following portion of his writing in mind: "one must not evaluate whole churches on the basis of their pastors alone nor on the basis of a few people. Consequentially, one must not immediately

condemn whole churches if either their pastors or a few people depart from integrity and purity of doctrine, because ‘the ears of hearers are often more pure than the lips of teachers.’”<sup>33</sup>

### **This is a Symbolic Meal**

The first extra-Biblical view concerning the Lord’s Supper that will be addressed is commonly referred to as representation. A general introduction into this belief can be found in Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary’s dogmatics notes:

The sum and substance of the Reformed and Evangelical doctrine, which is a denial of the real presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament, may be summarized with two major points. (1) The Reformed and Evangelicals believe that while the communicant receives only bread and wine with his mouth, by the Holy Spirit his faith reaches into heaven to receive the body and blood of Christ, i.e., Christ himself and his blessings. (2) In their view, then, since there is only a spiritual reception of Christ that is accomplished through faith, unbelieving communicants do not partake of the body and blood of Christ at all. They merely receive bread and wine through the mouth.<sup>34</sup>

Reformed and Evangelicals differ on the manner of Christ’s presence, but generally share the belief that only bread and wine are present in the Lord’s Supper. This belief and the implications it has in practice will be further evaluated based on recent writings from Reformed and Evangelical scholars.

Craig Blomberg is a professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary. He authored the 1 Corinthians volume for *The NIV Application Commentary* series. Here, his position regarding Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper and its basis in human reason can be seen. He is of the

---

33. Johann Gerhard, *On the Church*, Vol. 15 of *Theological Commonplaces* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2010), 241.

34. *WLS Seminary Dogmatics Notes*, 264-265.

opinion that “no one sitting with Christ at the table would have thought he was saying that the bread was somehow a literal extension of his flesh or spirit. Rather the bread *symbolized* or *represented* his coming bodily death, an atoning sacrifice for the sake of all who would accept the forgiveness of sins it made available.”<sup>35</sup> His belief that Christ’s body and blood are not truly present in the Lord’s Supper would seem to affect his interpretation of Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:29. Having barred the possibility of the presence of Christ’s body and noting the Corinthian congregation’s lack of love in their gatherings, Blomberg concluded, “‘The body’ in verse 29 probably refers to the corporate body of Christ, the church, particularly since Paul does not refer to both body and blood in verse 26. Those who eat and drink in flagrant disregard of the physical needs of others in their fellowship risk incurring punishment from God.”<sup>36</sup>

Because Blomberg sees the sacrament as something that merely “symbolized and promotes fellowship and unity with the risen Christ,” he concluded that the sacrament “should be open to *all* believers but to believers *only*.”<sup>37</sup>

Kenneth Chafin, a former professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, also authored a commentary on 1 Corinthians. He and Blomberg share an opinion regarding the object of Paul’s warning against taking the Supper in an unworthy manner and sinning against the body. “The warning,” according to Chafin, “...was a reference to the divisiveness, the selfishness, and the drunkenness that had crept into the observance. Paul was in effect saying,

---

35. Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 229-230.

36. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 231.

37. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 199.

“Take a look at what you are doing. Do you think your activity is worthy of such a sacred rite?”<sup>38</sup>

The view held by Chafin and Blomberg that the “body” in 1 Corinthians 11:29 refers to the church and not Christ’s own body may stem from their representative or symbolic belief concerning the Lord’s Supper. Their view, however, is in the minority even among Reformed and Evangelistic scholars. There are some who properly understand Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:29 but still hold to a representative view of the Lord’s Supper. Kistemaker, a former professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary, wrote in his commentary on 1 Corinthians:

Almost all commentators understand this verse (v.29) in the light of its immediate context that speaks of the body of the Lord; they see a close connection between verses 27 and 29. Commentators understand that the better manuscripts omit the words *of the Lord* as modifiers of the term *body*. Yet they understand that this particular term is a shortened form of the full clause “the body and blood of the Lord” in verse 27. And last they doubt that Paul expects the reader to perceive that he means “the body of all believers” (10:16). Paul is referring to the body of the Lord which the Communion bread and cup represent.<sup>39</sup>

So, even among scholars who understand Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:29 as referring to Christ’s own body the belief that the bread and wine represent or symbolize Christ’s body and blood persists.

Among the Reformed and Evangelicals, “there is no question that in the Supper we commune with one another and with Christ. The question is *how*.”<sup>40</sup> For many, a

---

38. Kenneth Chafin, *1, 2 Corinthians*, The Communicator’s Commentary (Waco, World Books, 1985), 145.

39. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 403.

40. John Armstrong, *Understanding Four Views on the Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 38.

symbolic, representative, or spiritual communion is a sufficient enough answer. “Today most Protestants would say, in addition to the fact that the bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ, that Christ is also *spiritually present* in a special way as we partake of the bread and wine.”<sup>41</sup> Reformed and Evangelical Christians have come to a similar conclusion as they interpret the Biblical truths regarding the Lord’s Supper through the lens of history, reason, or whatever else they may find fitting. Herein lies the difference between their position and the Lutheran position. “Luther does not “interpret” the words at all, but takes them as they read. The Roman and Reformed teaching, however, rest on extensive and copious ‘interpretation’ of the words of institution.”<sup>42</sup> Such interpreting is improper, since “the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is ascertained not by deduction from extraneous passages of Holy Writ or by theological conclusion, but from the words of institution themselves, where it is clearly stated.”<sup>43</sup>

Christians gather in Reformed and Evangelical churches to hear the gospel and nourish the faith that God has given them. This is commendable and praiseworthy. Christians have devoted their lives to the study and proclamation of God’s Word in Reformed and Evangelical institutions. This, too, is commendable and praiseworthy. However, the deviation from the truth that these people have taken concerning the Lord’s Supper is neither commendable nor praiseworthy. A careful balance of Christian

---

41. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (London: Inter-Varsity, 2020), 1228.

42. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 337.

43. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, 373.

encouragement and reproach is appropriate when discussing these Scriptural truths with those who do not hold to them.

### **This is a Sacrifice**

If the belief that the bread and wine symbolize or represent Christ's body and blood were to be placed on a spectrum with all other Christian views concerning Christ's presence in the sacrament, the Catholic view of transubstantiation would be on the opposite side. "In rejecting the Real Presence of Christ's body and blood, the Protestants deny that which is offered in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In promoting transubstantiation, Roman Catholics create a doctrine which is not Biblical and leads to extremes by the faithful."<sup>44</sup>

Thomas A. Baima presented a Roman Catholic view in the comparative theology book *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*. He began by highlighting the communion which is shared in the Trinity. "To speak of communion," according to Baima, "it is necessary to speak of God, *who is communion itself*."<sup>45</sup> This communion was first extended to humans through Christ's incarnation, which is "nothing less than the communion of the divine and human in the God-Man, Jesus Christ." Thus, Baima concludes that "when I receive the body and blood of Christ in the sacrament, what I receive becomes part of me. And I become part of him. The unity of the sacred elements of Communion in my body unites me to his body. And unity

---

44. Gregory Jackson, *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant: A Doctrinal Comparison of Three Christian Confessions* (New Haven: Leader Publishing, 1993), 79.

45. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 121.

with the body of Christ makes me an adopted child of God.”<sup>46</sup> The Catholics see this as the result from the true body and blood of Christ being present in the Sacrament.

Concerning the presence of the body and blood, the Catholic view is that “Jesus meant what he said: “This is my body.” [Catholics] are saying that after the consecration, the accidents of bread and wine contain the reality of the body and blood, soul and divinity of Christ.”<sup>47</sup> Catholics have called this change “transubstantiation” or “conversion.” To explain how this conversion is possible, Catholics may use the term “adduction”, which “means that Christ is brought into the sacrament without leaving heaven, and his presence is effected in myriad places.”<sup>48</sup>

The Roman Catholic belief that Lord’s Supper is a sacrifice is the factor that differentiates their view of the sacrament from the others the most. The Catholic church teaches that “the Mass is a re-presentation now, in an unbloody manner, of the bloody sacrifice of the Cross over nineteen hundred years ago. Since it is a re-offering of Jesus on Calvary, the Mass is rightly referred to as “the holy Sacrifice of the Mass.”<sup>49</sup> Catholics believe in and cherish the sacrifice that Jesus made for their sins. However, they do not see this sacrifice as complete, but ongoing each time they celebrate the Lord’s Supper. This belief in an ongoing sacrifice has implications in the Catholic celebration of the Lord’s Supper. “The essential problem with portraying Holy Communion as a sacrifice is that it becomes man’s work for God, not a

---

46. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 123.

47. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 129.

48. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 129.

49. Jackson, *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant*, 82.

reception of God’s work for man.”<sup>50</sup> On this matter, it’s plain to see the Catholic error, for the Scriptures are clear. “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:10).

Of particular interest in this paper is the Catholic belief of who should be admitted to celebrate this sacrament. Catholics heed Paul’s warning in 1 Corinthians 11:29 and assume “the body” refers to the body of Christ. “St. Paul is very, very clear that if we eat and drink the Lord’s Supper without recognizing the body, we eat and drink damnation.”<sup>51</sup> With this in mind, Baima wrote, “While [Catholics] usually practice closed communion, there are specific occasions where we allow a limited intercommunion with other Christians.”<sup>52</sup> The Catholic church stands opposed to the Reformed and Evangelical view that all should be invited to the Lord’s Supper, regardless of faith or confession. So, it is likely that the scriptural truths concerning church fellowship will be more easily communicated to someone with Catholic beliefs than will the truths concerning the Lord’s Supper.

### **This is for Christians**

There is no shortage of differing opinions regarding the Lord’s Supper in Christianity today. However, the opinion that all people, believers and unbelievers alike, should receive the Lord’s Supper is uncommon. “Despite differences over some aspects of the Lord’s Supper, most

---

50. Jackson, *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant*, 83.

51. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 133.

52. John Armstrong, *Four Views*, 134.



Protestants would agree, first, that *only those who believe in Christ* should participate in it because it is a sign of being Christian and continuing in the Christian life.”<sup>53</sup> For such people, faith in Christ is the pre-requisite for receiving the Lord’s Supper. They may conclude that “if the Lord’s Table symbolizes and promotes fellowship and unity with the risen Christ, then it should be open to *all* believers but to believers *only*.”<sup>54</sup>

Some, like Blomberg and Chafin, cite 1 Corinthians 11 as a general encouragement to give the Lord’s Supper to all Christians. Addressing the warning Paul gave in 1 Corinthians 11, Chafin wrote: “The warning is not to come to it when we are insensitive to his presence, unloving to our fellow church members, or regretful for his great sacrifice on our behalf.”<sup>55</sup> This interpretation of Paul’s warning then leads to the conclusion that “Paul’s words include no restrictions that limit celebration to members of one local church, denomination, or theological tradition. Children old enough to profess faith should be welcomed, so that they do not feel like outsiders to the table.”<sup>56</sup> And furthermore, “those who are united in the biblical gospel have a responsibility to demonstrate that unity by breaking down the barriers that separate them, whether denominational, cultural, or traditional.”<sup>57</sup>

Anyone who believes this would naturally be deeply disturbed should they be asked to refrain from taking the Lord’s Supper. To someone who sees the Lord’s Supper as a great

---

53. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1229.

54. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 199.

55. Chafin, *1, 2 Corinthians*, 145.

56. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 235.

57. David Jackman, *The Message of John’s Letters*, ed. John R. W. Stott, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity, 1988), 186.

blessing Christ gave to all believers, anyone withholding that blessing, like a Lutheran pastor, would be seen as judgmental and unloving. To naturally follow what such people believe and teach, the Sacrament should be offered to all who have faith on the basis of Christian love.

Such a claim, however, is a wolf in sheep's clothing. The praise that this smooth argument claims to offer to sounds appealing on the surface but is in fact a dangerous deviation from the truth of God's Word. In his essay entitled "Who Should be Admitted to the Lord's Supper", Pieper exposed the disservice that this falsehood does to God's Word and the danger it presents to those who believe it. "In vain is love appealed to in defense of 'open communion'. The fact is that this practice is contrary both to love of God and love of the neighbor. For it ignores God's order which we find in Scripture regarding the use of the Supper, and it leads the neighbor to sin by partaking unworthily of the Sacrament."<sup>58</sup>

The Word of God is clear. It teaches that those who practice closed communion properly understand and employ the scriptural doctrines concerning the Lord's Supper and church fellowship. Those who practice open communion err against these doctrines. While this can be plainly seen, a pastor does well not to consider this a simple issue. Those who err in this area may still have deep, genuine faith and love for Christ. Such persons would naturally be deeply offended if a pastor would give the impression that on the basis of this error their faith and love were null and void. It is a Christian's goal to build up faith and to tear down falsehood. Doing this while dealing with these doctrines requires care and precision when communicating what the Bible teaches to those who believe differently. The final section of this paper will provide insights and guidance for this very task.

---

58. Matthew C. Harrison and John T Pless, ed., *Closed Communion? Admission to the Lord's Supper in Biblical Lutheran Perspective* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2017),466.

COMMUNICATING THE SCRIPTURAL TRUTHS CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER  
TO THOSE WHO BELIEVE DIFFERENTLY

In the previous sections, the Scriptural truths concerning the Lord’s Supper and church fellowship were approached based on exegesis and dogmatics. In this section, these truths will be approached pastorally. When dealing with these truths in the realm of pastoral theology, “The heart of Christ’s presence is *not* a doctrine, it is a promise: ‘Here I am for you.’ ... What matters most to us is just this: Christ promises to show up. His body and blood are truly present with the bread and wine. What could be more glorious, more comforting than that?”<sup>59</sup>

By God’s grace, we know these truths and enjoy the wonderful comfort that Christ’s promise gives us when we receive the sacrament. Unfortunately, many do not. Many Christians see the Lord’s Supper as merely a symbolic act or as a work of their own righteousness. “What a great tragedy it is that such people go their whole lives without hearing this promise!”<sup>60</sup> “That is why Lutherans are so adamant about this point in their discussions with other Christians.”<sup>61</sup> Because we know the comfort that is ours by Christ’s promise in the sacrament, naturally we desire to share this great comfort with others. Sharing the comforts that come from the truths of Scripture will look differently when speaking to individuals and when writing to many people.

---

59. Timothy Wengert, *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 110.

60. Wengert, *Parish Practice*, 110.

61. Wengert, *Parish Practice*, 110.

### **Speaking to Individuals**

Just as with any conversation, there are challenges that hinder communication in a one-on-one conversation about the Lord's Supper between Christians who believe differently. One obvious, but not to be overlooked, challenge is simply the fact that they believe differently. Both parties are convinced that their beliefs in the sacrament are correct and the other party's beliefs are wrong. Each party naturally brings their own understanding of the matter to the table. These preconceived positions "are another block to clear communication." Kenneth Erickson explained the discomfort individuals feel in this situation and the problem it poses to communication. He notes that beliefs different to mine can feel "threatening to me." He goes on to explain that "human nature resists discomfort."<sup>62</sup> Feeling threatened and uncomfortable can naturally lead us to an unwillingness to listen and communicate.

In such cases these feelings can develop into another communication barrier. Generally, "people see and hear only what they want to see and hear."<sup>63</sup> People have a tendency to do what they want. They reinforce their wants by selecting to take in media that supports what they want. While it is good for a Christian to reinforce their conviction in the truth of God's Word, an unwillingness to listen to those with erring convictions demonstrates a lack of love and hinders communication.

While the barriers naturally born from different beliefs are brought into conversation by everyone, pastors specifically are likely to hinder communication in a different way. Because it

---

62. Kenneth Erickson, *The Power of Communication for richer interpersonal relationships* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1973), 12.

63. Dick Innes, *I Hate Witnessing: A Handbook for Effective Christian Communication* (Ventura CA: Regal Books, 1978), 142.

is a pastor's job to preach and teach the truth of God's Word, a pastor will be well versed in the truth of God's Word. He will communicate these truths again and again as different people, members or otherwise, question him about what the Bible teaches. After all, he is the natural person to go to for answers to Scriptural questions. So, a pastor will be tempted to serve as "an answer authority"<sup>64</sup> and "impose unrequested advice" to try to bring a quick resolution to an issue he has seen many times before. Giving into this temptation may hinder communication and result in a one-sided lecture rather than a one-on-one conversation. Erickson noted this as a general truth: "If a dialog takes place according to my prior plans, it's headed for failure."<sup>65</sup>

What can be done to overcome these challenges? While there are any number of tips and tricks that pastors can and should be aware of, one quality has the greatest impact on effective communication: empathy. "Empathy is to enter another person's world. It is to get under his skin and to know not only what he is thinking but also what he is feeling, and to feel it with him."<sup>66</sup> "Empathy is a form of Christian love in which we mentally walk in the shoes of another person."<sup>67</sup> As it is commonly said, "People don't care about how much you know until they know how much you care." Through genuine, empathetic, Christian love, pastors can break through conversational barriers and effectively communicate Scriptural truths.

---

64. Erickson, *The Power of Communication*, 17.

65. Erickson, *The Power of Communication*, 19.

66. Innes, *I Hate Witnessing*, 96.

67. Erickson, *The Power of Communication*, 18.

### **Writing to Many**

Of course, it may be impossible to have a one-on-one conversation with every church visitor in many settings. So, public statements are frequently utilized to communicate these important truths to every worshipper. In this realm of communication, there is no dialog, only a one-sided statement from church to worshipper. When crafting such a statement, a pastor will choose his words in a way that effectively communicates the most important truths concerning the Lord's Supper and is tailored for easy reception by his audience.

Communion statements are usually thought of as intended for visitors, but the statement will also be read by members of the congregation. In some churches where visitors are infrequent, the statement might only be read by members of the congregation. This being the case, a pastor may choose to shift his purpose to reflect his audience. Is it helpful for the congregation to be reminded of the truths professed at the altar? Is it appropriate to include a note in everyone's worship folder that targets visitors if there are few or only one visitor present? A pastor will keep his audience in mind when crafting a communion statement.

A pastor should also be realistic when considering the purpose of the communion statement in his worship folder. If the goal is to effectively communicate Scriptural doctrine regarding fellowship and the sacrament, a pastor would be mistaken should he think that a half-page summary of these doctrines sufficiently meets that goal. Such a task is made impossible by the barriers presented by communication by print. Will everyone read it? Will everyone understand the terms used? Does its length incline the worshipper to avoid reading it? This is not to say long and thorough statements are not helpful but rather that such statements may be better utilized when they are written in a way that achieves a specific, reasonable purpose as determined by the pastor.

In churches where a conversation with every visitor is impossible, pastors may rely upon a statement in the worship folder to communicate to them the Scriptural truths regarding the sacrament. In their Guidelines for Congregational, District, and Synodical Communion Statements, The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod provided the following sample statement for this purpose:

The Lord's Supper is celebrated at this congregation in the confession and glad confidence that, as he says, our Lord gives into our mouths not only bread and wine but his very body and blood to eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins and to strengthen our union with him and with one another. Our Lord invites to his table those who trust his words, repent of all sin, and set aside any refusal to forgive and love as he forgives and loves us, that they may show forth his death until he comes.

Because those who eat and drink our Lord's body and blood unworthily do so to their great harm and because Holy Communion is a confession of the faith which is confessed at this altar, any who are not yet instructed, in doubt, or who hold a confession differing from that of this congregation and The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, and yet desire to receive the sacrament, are asked first to speak with the pastor or an usher.

For further study, see Matthew 5:23f.; 10:32f.; 18:15-35; 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:17-34.”<sup>68</sup>

This statement emphasizes the importance of three major components to such a statement: the nature of the Supper, its reception by individuals, and the confession made by the church at the Supper.<sup>69</sup> Every pastor wishes to communicate these things to their visitors, but is a written announcement in the worship folder the best way to do so? Can we assume that church visitors will know what is meant by and understand every doctrinal reference in the statement?

---

68. Harrison and Pless, *Closed Communion?*, 482-83.

69. Harrison and Pless, *Closed Communion?*, 483. The Lutheran Church Missouri Synod published these guidelines in 2015. Included in these guidelines was the above model communion card statement. The intention was that the sample statement be used by pastors “as [they] evaluate and/or develop [their] own announcements,” and suggested that emphasis be placed on these three aspects of the Lord's Supper as they did so.

This seems unlikely in a time where Biblical literacy is declining so rapidly. The length of the statement and breadth of its scope may be a barrier to communication. It does, however, achieve the purpose for which it was written, “to serve as a widely acceptable starting point in the development of guidelines for other additional communion statements and for consideration of the matter of admission policies.”<sup>70</sup>

When Paul T. McCain, a Missouri Synod pastor, saw a decline in the practice of closed communion across Christianity, he published a study intended to “assist the pastor and congregation to practice closed communion.”<sup>71</sup> The study includes doctrinal statements, sample communion statements for worship folders, sermons, Bible studies, and notes centered around the doctrines of church fellowship and communion. He saw the purpose of a communion statement not only to “give witness to the church’s high regard to the Sacrament of the Altar,” but also to “express a congenial invitation for the visitor to become part of the church’s fellowship and confession.”<sup>72</sup> While it is true that visitors who do not share a church’s beliefs are not welcome at their altars, McCain questions, “Is this really what we want to express? No, of course not! We want nothing more for the visitor than that he or she would join our Confessional fellowship around the Gospel purely preached, according to all its articles, and the Sacraments rightly administered, according to Christ’s institution.”<sup>73</sup> With this goal in mind, McCain states

---

70. Harrison and Pless, *Closed Communion?*, 482.

71. Paul T McCain, *Communion Fellowship: A Resource for Understanding, Implementing, and Retaining the Practice of Closed Communion in the Lutheran Parish* (Waverly IA: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, Incorporated, 1992), 1.

72. McCain, *Communion Fellowship*, 6.

73. McCain, *Communion Fellowship*, 6.



that “the visitor should not be singled out for any negative statement, but should be requested to speak with the pastor.”<sup>74</sup>

A communion statement which has been written with visitors in mind should have a specific, singular purpose: to communicate love for them. It is loving to tell visitors of the joy we feel as we welcome them in our doors to hear the gospel. It is loving to tell visitors the truth about the bread, wine, body, blood, and forgiveness in the Supper. It is loving to warn visitors about the danger the sacrament does when unworthily received. It is loving to tell visitors about the joy we share as a body of believers with hearts and minds made one by a common faith. It is loving to tell visitors all these things, but effectively communicating all these things in a single announcement is a great challenge. Therefore, a pastor will use discretion to emphasize the truths he deems necessary while considering the restrictions that the nature of a written statement presents. Part of this statement will certainly include a loving invitation to an opportunity where these truths can be effectively communicated outside of a worship service. The following is a sample statement written with the intent of welcoming visitors, stating biblical truths, and inviting visitors to speak with the pastor:

“Welcome to [church’s name]! We’re happy to have you with us in worship. At this point in our service, we’re going to celebrate the Lord’s Supper. In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus promises to give his body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. We believe that as we take the Lord’s Supper together, we express our unity of faith in Jesus’ promises. If you would like to take communion with us, Pastor [Pastor’s name] welcomes you to ask him about joining us in the future!”

---

74. McCain, *Communion Fellowship*, 6.

## CONCLUSION

It is a tremendous blessing that God has given faith to countless souls. It is a tragedy that so many do not understand or reject the truths about fellowship that God handed us in the Scriptures. It is a tremendous blessing that so many Christians love their Savior and find deep significance in the sacrament where Christ gives himself to them and for them. It is a tragedy that so many Christians do not understand or reject the truths about this sacrament that God handed us in the Scriptures. What is a pastor who loves God's Word and who loves those who don't understand it to do about these tragedies? He will rightfully employ the Scriptural teachings concerning the Lord's Supper and church fellowship by practicing closed communion. He will improve his understanding of these truths and his ability to effectively communicate them. He will be wise in the way he acts toward outsiders, make the most of every opportunity, and let his conversation be always full of grace, so that he may know how to answer everyone (Col 4:5,6).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akin, Daniel L. *1,2,3 John*. Vol. 38. The New American Commentary. Broadman and Holman: 2001.
- Armstrong, John H. *Understanding Four Views on the Lord's Supper*. Counterpoints. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007.
- Blomberg, Craig. *1 Corinthians*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- Chafin, Kenneth L. *1, 2 Corinthians. The Communicator's Commentary*. Waco: Word Books, 1985.
- Erickson, Kenneth. *The Power of Communication for Richer Interpersonal Relationships*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1973.
- Gerhard, Johann. *On the Church*. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. Vol. 15 of *Theological Commonplaces*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2010.
- Grudem, Wayne. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Inter-Varsity, 2020.
- Jackman, David. *The Message of John's Letters*. Edited by John R. W. Stott. The Bible Speaks Today. Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1988.
- Jackson, Gregory. *Catholic, Lutheran, Protestant: A Doctrinal Comparison of Three Christian Confessions*. New Haven: Leader Publishing, 1993.
- Jahn, Curtis A. *Essays on Church Fellowship*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 1996.
- Hahn, Scott W. *Romans. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Harrison, Matthew C. and Pless, John T. *Closed Communion? Admission to the Lord's Supper in Biblical Lutheran Perspective*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2017.
- Hoerber, Robert G., ed. *Concordia Self-Study Bible*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1984.
- Innes, Dick. *I Hate Witnessing: A Handbook for Effective Christian Communication*. Ventura CA: Regal Books, 1978.

- Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993.
- Lange, Lyle W. *God So Loved the World: A Study of Christian Doctrine*. Milwaukee: Northwestern, 2005.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961.
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1943.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works: Word and Sacrament III*. Edited by Helmut T Lehmann. Translated by Theodore G Tappert. 37. Vol. 37. Fortress Press, 1967.
- Lockwood, Gregory J. *1 Corinthians*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 2000.
- McCain, Paul T. *Communion Fellowship: A Resource for Understanding, Implementing, and Retaining the Practice of Closed Communion in the Lutheran Parish*. Waverly IA: The International Foundation for Lutheran Confessional Research, Incorporated, 1992.
- Middendorf, Michael P. *Romans 9-16*. Concordia Commentary. St. Louis: Concordia, 2016.
- Moo, Douglas J. *Romans*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000.
- Pieper, F. *Christian Dogmatics*. Vol 3. St. Louis: Concordia, 1953.
- Wengert, Timothy J. *A Formula for Parish Practice: Using the Formula of Concord in Congregations*. Lutheran Quarterly Books. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.
- WLS Seminary Dogmatics Notes*.