

# All Together at the Lord's Table

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by David Schrock

In marriage a husband pledges to love and serve his wife, while the wife responds by promising to love and submit to her husband. The vows are made individually, but in context, they blend together to create a melodic harmony that binds the couple together.

Something similar can be said of our relationship with the Lord. In response to the gospel, each person must individually respond, but not in their own self-styled way. Repentance from sin and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ are the only way we enter into covenant relationship with God.

For this reason, the new covenant is singular not plural; all who find salvation enter into the same covenant. And since the new covenant has been given to the church made up of Jews and Gentiles, it is in the local church where we enjoy and experience the new covenant together.

## Eating with One Another

In the Lord's Supper we take hold of the bread and cup as part of a body of believers who eat the same spiritual food and drink the same spiritual drink. As Paul could say of the worshipers who "fellowshipped" with demons by eating food offered to them (1 Cor 10:18–21), so Christians fellowship with Christ when we partake of his meal. But it's not just him we fellowship with; it's the whole body.

The Lord's Supper is horizontal as well as vertical. Because the covenant meal is given to the whole church, it should never be taken alone, in a segmented small group, or in a private setting of our own choosing. The Lord's Supper is entrusted to the church and shared by the whole body—whether that's 15 believers hiding in a house church in China, or 3000 saints sitting on cushioned pews in an air conditioned megachurch.

To say it differently, the Lord's Supper is not an additive Christians have the authority to throw into their devotional recipes. The Lord's Supper is the church's meal. It can't be taken outside the church, anymore than ice can be taken into the desert sun.

The reason: As soon as the Lord's Supper leaves the local church it loses its shelf life. Outside the church, the Lord's Supper lasts as long as ice does under the shade of a desert cactus. For the first few (dozen) times, you might be able to find spiritual encouragement from the practice. But eventually, the Lord's Supper divorced from discipline, membership, spiritual oversight, and mutual accountability will lose all its meaning and message.

## Setting the Lord's Table

For the Lord's Supper to endure and edify, it requires a few basic elements to be present—elements that protect the bread and the cup.

**First, the message of the gospel must be present.** Even though the Lord's Supper is the gospel made edible, it requires words to explain its meaning. Just like a nutrition label explains what's in the food you eat, so the Word of God must explain what we are (and are not) eating in the Lord's Supper. Sure, there are churches that have lost the Gospel and the Word of God, but as the pillar and buttress of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), the best hope for preserving the

gospel is the local church. God creates churches as gospel communities and in that context the Lord's Supper is to be found.

***Second, the members of the church must be present and engaged.*** The Lord's Supper is not for everyone, but for born again believers who have publicly identified themselves with the Lord through baptism. When a church serves the Lord's Supper, all its members should all present. Or to reverse course, the Lord's Supper should be such a priority in the Christian's life that they are present and prepared when the Supper is served.

***Third, the endorsement of the church must be present.*** Because the Lord's Supper is given from the Lord to the church, individuals cannot demand the elements. Rather, it is the church who has the right to admit people to and restrict people from the Table. It is at the Lord's Table where the unrepentant are disciplined and the repentant are restored.

Whether we realize it or not, this is a significant part of the symbolism. Because the Lord's Supper is not a self-serve salad bar, we pass out the elements; we don't just open the table to serve yourself. Likewise, children who have not made a profession of faith and unbelieving friends who visit are welcome to watch the Lord's Supper in action, but they are instructed not to partake.

Why? Because the Lord's table is reserved for members of the new covenant, i.e., those who have identified themselves with Christ by faith and baptism. Accordingly, the church and its elders have the responsibility to "fence the table."

In our setting (with plates passing down the rows) this doesn't look like a violent reaction when a parent serves their toddler communion, or when an unchurched visitor takes a handful from the tray. But neither does it mean that such an action would go unaddressed. At a later time, the meaning of the Lord's Supper would need to be revisited with that ostensibly earnest but misdirected person.

## **Holding Up One Another as We Hold the Bread of Life**

For all of the ways the Lord's Supper proclaims grace to us as individuals and in all the ways we personally examine ourselves and renew our vows each time we put bread and wine to our lips, the Lord's Supper is ultimately a corporate act. For this reason, we invite all our members to join us at the Lord's Table this Sunday. And for those who are not covenant members of our church (or another church of like faith and practice), we encourage you to consider what steps God would have you take to publicly identify yourself with Christ and his church.

Maybe that's trusting in Christ? Maybe that's undergoing baptism? Maybe that's being vocal about your fellowship with God's people. Wherever you find yourself in your walk with God, know that the Lord's Supper is a meal that not only calls you to hold fast to Christ; it also calls us to hold fast to one another in the body of Christ.

This Sunday, we who are partakers of that covenant meet him at his Table. I look forward to seeing you there! And I pray the Lord may use our community meal to strengthen our love for him and one another.

For His Glory and your joy, Pastor David