

# THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

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(1) In the Lord's Supper, God nourishes his pilgrim people...

- By the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16)
- Through the mediation of the Spirit (John 6:55-56; 1 Corinthians 12:13)
- In loving fellowship and communion (1 Corinthians 11:33)
- By multi-sensory participation (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- In response to his Word (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)
- With a covenant meal (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Rev. 19:9)

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- With a covenant meal (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Rev. 19:9)
  - In the institution of the Lord's Supper, "Jesus understood his own blood as having covenant-ratification significance." (Thomas, 578)
  - "The Supper underlines a deep undercurrent of covenantal consciousness on the part of Jesus. He viewed his Messiahship as the fulfillment of the projected trajectory of covenantal allusions in the Old Testament... He came to inaugurate and ratify the new covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah and elaborated on in 2 Corinthians 3:5-18 and more fully in Hebrews 8:1-10:18." (Thomas, 580)

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- With a covenant meal (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Rev. 19:9)
  - “The Lord’s Supper is not only a communion or fellowship meal (1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:17-34) but also a covenant meal, not unlike the one mentioned in Exod. 24:11. In fact, when Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper, he uses the language of Exodus 24 with regard to the ‘blood of the covenant’ (Matt. 26:28; Exod. 24:8). Jesus further connects the Lord’s Supper to the ancient covenant meal tradition when he states that he will partake of it again with his disciples when it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God; just as the covenant meals were eaten in the presence of God, Christ himself – true God and true man – is present in the meal.” (Senn, 126)

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- With a covenant meal (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Rev. 19:9)
  - The meal in Exodus 24 came *after* the Word of God was given to Moses and then to the people, as a form of covenant ratification.
  - ***When we partake of the Lord's Supper, it is a form of covenant renewal and ratification.***

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- With a covenant meal (Matthew 26:29; 1 Corinthians 11:25; Rev. 19:9)
  - “When, in my late thirties, I experienced the reception of the elements while standing in a circle with the whole community around the perimeter of the sanctuary, I finally felt the full meaning of ‘comm-union.’ I looked around and saw the faces of people about whom I cared deeply, people experiencing the spectrum of emotions from joy to sorrow. The fullness of our shared humanity, our common struggles and triumphs, and our promise to each other walk this journey together made a special connection for me... Covenant and connection are carried throughout the history of our faith. Our God who created us, delivers us, invites us, and redeems us issues the promise of what all humans crave: to know we are not alone.”  
(McFee, 300-301)

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(2) The Lord's Supper is a means of grace that strengthens our union with Christ.

\*Excerpts from Smith, Kalantzis, Calvin, and Schmemmann

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- In his book *Evangelical, Sacramental, and Pentecostal*, Gordon Smith includes John 15:4 in his discussion of our union with Christ, “Abide in me as I abide in you.” Smith believes that the power for the Christian life does not come from knowledge and insight, but from the ascended Lord and the indwelling Holy Spirit.
- In addition, Smith believes that the essence of being a Christian is not just becoming “Christlike,” but rather being “united with Christ.” Smith would agree with Nevin that the Christian life is not merely of a moral nature, but of an organic nature, a real participation in the life of Christ. For Smith, we can abide in Christ and strengthen our union with him through the Word, through the sacraments, and through the Spirit. For the sacramental Christian, “physical and tangible things can be and indeed are a means by which we are drawn into the life of God.” We are not fed only by the Word, but also through the material means that God provides. (Smith, 17)



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- In his essay, “For You Have Been Planted Together with Christ,” George Kalantzis describes how we are united to Christ, not just as individuals, but as the church. We do not live the Christian life alone; we are part of the body, branches connected to the vine.
- Kalantzis notes that as we receive Christ by faith, we join a new family. Thus, the church “is not primarily an institution but rather a body formed by the Eucharist and the celebration of the Eucharist.” The sacrament of the Lord’s Supper strengthens our union with Christ, personally and communally. (*Come, Let Us Eat Together*, 195)

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- Kalantzis notes that Calvin devoted the whole of book four of the *Institutes* to the doctrine of the church (which includes the sacraments). He further notes that Calvin titled the first chapter of book four, “The True Church with Which as Mother of All the Godly We Must Keep Unity.” (*Come, Let us Eat Together*, 192).
- He then quotes Calvin, quoting Cyprian (3<sup>rd</sup> century bishop of Carthage), saying, “I shall start, then, with the church, into whose bosom God is pleased to gather his sons, not only that they may be nourished by her help and ministry as long as they are infants and children, but also that they may be guided by her motherly care until they mature and at last reach the goal of faith. ‘For what God has joined together, it is not lawful to put asunder’ (Mark 10:9), so that, for those to whom he is Father the church may also be Mother.” (*Institutes*, IV.i.1)

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- For Schmemmann and the Orthodox faith, our union with Christ is most clearly experienced through the divine liturgy as a journey to our ascended Lord which climaxes in the Eucharist. In the Orthodox faith, our union with Christ is our real participation in heavenly realities. (*For the Life of the World*, 28)
- Interestingly, Calvin's view is similar. Informed by Colossians 3:1-3, he writes, "If we are lifted up to heaven with our eyes and minds, to seek Christ there in the glory of his Kingdom, as the symbols invite us to him in his wholeness, so under the symbol of bread we shall be fed by his body, under the symbol of wine we shall separately drink his blood, to enjoy him at last in his wholeness." (*Institutes*, IV.xvii.18)

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## **A few takeaways:**

- (1) In the Lord's Supper, God nourishes his pilgrim people by the body and blood of Christ, through the mediation of the Spirit, in loving fellowship and communion, by multi-sensory participation, in response to his Word, with a covenant meal.
- (2) The Lord's Supper is a means of grace that strengthens our union with Christ.
- (3) This union is not merely of a moral nature, but of an organic nature, a real participation in the life of Christ.
- (4) We do not experience this union alone, but with the body of Christ.
- (5) God uses the church to foster this union and to provide motherly care.
- (6) Our union is strengthened in corporate worship, especially through the Lord's Supper, as we seek the things that are above.