

**Transforming Encounter: Baptism, Lord's Supper, and Assembly**  
**John Mark Hicks, Prepared for North Davis University**  
**North Davis Church of Christ, Arlington, Texas (February 2, 2008)**

**Objectives:**

1. To shift our thinking about these “ordinances” from an anthropocentric orientation (“what we do”) to a theocentric one (“what God does”).
2. To renew our experience of these “ordinances” as means of grace by which God communes with us, transforms us, and empowers us for his mission in the world.

**Books:**

John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Orange, CA: New Leaf Books, 2002).

John Mark Hicks and Greg Taylor, *Down in the River to Pray: Revisioning Baptism as God's Transforming Work* (Siloam Springs, AR: Leafwood Publishers, 2004).

John Mark Hicks, Johnny Melton, and Bobby Valentine, *A Gathered People: Revisioning the Assembly as Transforming Encounter* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2007).

**Schedule:**

- 1            Divine “Ordinances” or “Sacraments”?  
              Text: Matthew 28:18-20  
              Focus: Communal Moments of Divine Action
- 2            Divine Community—Participating in the Divine Life  
              Text: John 17:20-26  
              Focus: Inclusion of Humanity in the Divine Fellowship
- 3            Israel—Baptized into Moses in the Sea  
              Texts: 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Exodus 15; Leviticus 15  
              Focus: God Redeems and Cleanses his People
- 4            Israel—Assembled at the Mountain  
              Texts: Exodus 19; 24:1-11; Leviticus 23  
              Focus: God Calls His People into Assemblies Sanctified by his Presence
- 5            Israel—Eating with God at Table  
              Texts: Exodus 24:1-11; Leviticus 3, 7  
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- 6            Jesus—Baptized with Sinners in the Jordan  
              Texts: Luke 3:1-21  
              Focus: The Baptism of Jesus is the first Christian Baptism.
- 7            Jesus—Participant and Fulfillment of Assembly  
              Texts: John 4:1-24  
              Focus: Jesus is the True Temple of God in whom We Worship
- 8            Jesus—Eating with Sinners at Table  
              Texts: Luke 5:27-32; 9:10-17; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 22:7-38.

Focus: Jesus Sits at Table with Sinners.

- 9 Church—Eating with Jesus at Table  
 Texts: Luke 24:13-35; Acts 20:7-12  
 Focus: The Living Jesus Hosts the Table in the Church.
- 10 Church—Baptized in Water and Spirit  
 Texts: Acts 2:37-41; Acts 9:1-19 [Acts 22:10-16]; Acts 10:24-48  
 Focus: God Receives His People through Water and Spirit.
- 11 Church—Assembled in the Spirit as Community  
 Texts: Acts 2:42-47  
 Focus: The Heart of Christian Assembly is Word and Table.
- 12 History of Baptism—From Discipleship to Citizenship  
 Text: Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:11-15  
 Focus: Infant Baptism shifted the meaning of the rite.
- 13 History of Assembly—From Mystery to Penance  
 Text: Hebrews 12:22-24  
 Focus: Assembly Shifted from Mystical Experience to Legal Formalism.
- 14 History of Lord’s Supper—From Table to Altar  
 Text: 1 Corinthians 11:28-33  
 Focus: The Mass Shifted the Focus from Communion to Forgiveness.
- 15 The Stone-Campbell Movement’s Restoration Agenda  
 Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17  
 Focus: Restoring to the Church the Original Intent of the Sacraments.
- 16 The Stone-Campbell Movement’s Legal Atmosphere  
 Text: Ephesians 2:8-10  
 Focus: Positive Law Transformed the Sacraments into Legalities.
- 17 Theology of Baptism—God’s Work and Our Discipleship  
 Text: Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:11-15; Galatians 3:26-29  
 Focus: Baptism is our Participation in and Identification with the Gospel.
- 18 Theology of Assembly—A Relational Love-Fest  
 Text: Hebrews 10:19-25  
 Focus: Assembly is a Gospel Experience and Witness.
- 19 Theology of Lord’s Supper—Communing with God and Each Other  
 Text: 1 Corinthians 10:14-17  
 Focus: The Lord’s Supper is Communion in the Gospel.
- 20 Divine Encounter—Sacramental Grace  
 Text: Matthew 18:15-20  
 Focus: God Transforms his People through “Holy Moments”

## 1 Divine “Ordinances” or “Sacraments”?

**Text:** Matthew 28:18-20

**Focus:** Communal Moments of Divine Action

### **Objectives:**

1. While we tend to think individualistically about these divine commandments, they are actually communal in character.
2. While we tend to think anthropocentrically about these divine commandments (e.g., these are commands we obey), they are more fundamentally something God does.
3. The language of “sacrament” reorients our thinking away from individualistic human-centeredness to communal God-centeredness.

### **Teaching Points:**

1. Jesus calls his disciples to “make disciples” (Matthew 28:18-20).
  - a. Jesus expects his disciples to continue his ministry of discipling.
  - b. Discipling involves
    - i. Teaching and
    - ii. Baptizing
  - c. Continued discipling means to teach and practice what Jesus had taught and practiced in his ministry.
  - d. This continued discipling among the nations results in the formation of a community that follows Jesus.
2. Baptism, Lord’s Supper and Assembly are present in the Gospel of Matthew itself—these moments are rooted in the ministry of Jesus himself.
  - a. Baptism is present in the baptism of Jesus himself (Matthew 3:13-17).
  - b. The Lord’s Supper is instituted at Jesus’ last Passover table (Matthew 26:26-30).
  - c. Assembly (“gathered people” as church) is assumed in the communal life of the people of God (Matthew 18:15-20) and is represented in the ministry of the Jesus by the community of twelve who are sent to the lost sheep of Israel.
3. Defining “sacrament” is problematic but significant for understanding Baptism, Lord’s Supper and Assembly as divine encounters.
  - a. Definition: “by faith God gives grace through material symbols in the power of the Spirit by whom we participate in the future” (*Gathered People*, p. 12).
  - b. This involves six key points (cf. *Gathered People*, pp. 141-143).
    - i. Material creation—concrete realities (water, bread/wine, people).

- ii. Symbol--symbolizes something beyond itself; it points to a reality beyond itself.
  - iii. Means of Grace—God gives grace through these moments.
  - iv. Eschatological—we experience the future in these moments.
  - v. Through Faith—we receive God’s work through trusting in Christ.
  - vi. Spirit—God acts by means of his Spirit to effect his gracious intent.
- c. It is problematic because “sacrament” carries lots of baggage (i.e., “magical powers” or something like that), but it is significant because “sacrament” means that God does something while “ordinance” means we do something.
  - d. In this series we want to stress how God encounters us—what God does—in these gracious moments.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Identify the key terms in the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20? How does this text relate to the topics of baptism, Lord’s Supper and assembly?
2. What is helpful or problematic about the definition of “sacrament” offered in the reading material?
3. Why do many prefer the term “ordinance” in place of the term “sacrament”? What are the pros/cons or irrelevancy of such a discussion?
4. How does it reorient our thinking about baptism, the Lord’s Supper and assembly when we ask, “What does God do in this?” rather than “What do we do in this?”

**Text Readings:**

*A Gathered People*, pp. 9-16.

## 2            **Divine Community—Participating in the Divine Life**

**Text:** John 17:20-26

**Focus:** Inclusion of Humanity in the Divine Fellowship

**Objectives:**

1. To understand that the sacraments are moments of embodying the unity between God and humanity as well as embodying the unity within the community of God.
2. Since the sacraments are concrete moments of participating in the divine community through the fellowship of the community, it is important to think about how we practice these gifts to stress their unitive function.

**Teaching Points:**

1. God’s actions in the world are intended to include us in the fellowship of his loving Triune community (John 17:20-26; see my article below “Triune Love”).
  - a. The Father loved the Son before the creation of the world.
  - b. The intent of the Father and Son is to share their love for each other with others—those they have created.
  - c. This sharing of love is the inclusion of humanity in the fellowship of the divine oneness.
2. Jesus prays that believers will mutually indwell each other just as the divine community dwells within believers and believers dwell in that community.
  - a. This “mutual indwelling” or “interpenetration” (the Greeks call it *perichoresis*) is the very nature of oneness between God and humanity and among humanity. It is shared *agape*; it is communion.
  - b. God seeks to unite humanity with his own oneness and the church is to model that unity in its own life.
  - c. The unity of the Father and Son is the model of unity for the church; the church should be one just as the Father and Son are one.
3. The sacraments offer a visible, concrete, communal means of embodying that unity as we bear witness to God’s redemptive intent for the cosmos.
  - a. We are baptized into the one body of Christ and drink of the one Spirit who makes us one despite our gender, racial and economic differences (1 Corinthians 12:13).
  - b. We eat and drink as the one body of Christ as we share in the one bread (Christ) who makes us one though we are many members (1 Corinthians 10:16-17).
  - c. We gather in assembly as the one body of Christ to praise the Father with one voice despite our differences of opinions and ethnic distinctions (Romans 15:5-6).

**Discussion Questions:**

3. What is the Triune mission, according to John 17:20-26?
4. How is “mutual indwelling” related to “oneness” (unity)?
5. How should each of the sacraments embody this unity?
6. In your experience, does the present practice of the sacraments bear witness to this unity? How might we practice them differently in order to emphasize their unitive character?

**Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table*, pp. 13-24.

*Down in the River to Pray*, pp. 17-25.

“Triune Love” at <http://johnmarkhicks.wordpress.com/2008/03/31/triune-love-the-roots-of-a-missional-theology/>

### 3 Israel—Baptized into Moses in the Sea

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 10:1-4; Exodus 15; Leviticus 15

**Focus:** God Redeems and Cleanses His People

**Objectives:**

1. To understand that baptism as a redemptive and cleansing water ritual has roots in the story of Israel.
2. To understand that water rituals were an important part of Israel's piety in both the Torah and at the time of Jesus as they not only represented cleansing but also involved the whole person (body and soul) in dedication to God.

**Teaching Points:**

1. Israel was baptized into Moses in the Sea (1 Cor 10:1-5). This involves:
  - a. A celebration of redemption—God has acted for his people. Their baptism in the Red Sea was a divine act. They followed Moses through the water but God delivered them by his own hand.
  - b. An identity marker—Israel has now committed itself to following Moses. Just as disciples are baptized into Christ, so Israel was baptized into Moses. They share a oneness—a common community, a common identity as the people of God.
  - c. A new relationship—Israel has embarked on a new journey which will take them through the wilderness to Mount Sinai.
2. Israel was required to continually cleanse themselves through water rituals.
  - a. Immersion in water as a religious rite was prescribed by the Torah of Israel (Lev 15). The rite involved “whole body” which Judaism always regarded as an immersion.
  - b. The function of these rituals was cleansing—not a moral absolution but rather a ceremonial cleansing from some form of physical defilement. The cleansing enables worshippers to approach God with ceremonial cleanliness. The immersions symbolized God's continual sanctification of his people as his own—including their bodies and not just their spirits.
  - c. First century Judaism stressed these rituals, even to the point of immersing beds and utensils (Mark 7:4). Many immersed themselves daily in private *mikva'ot* (baptismal pools; some were located in the basements of homes). Apparently devout Jews, and especially priests, immersed themselves in the *mikva'ot* that surrounded the temple mount. Luke 11:38 alludes to this practical of habitual and repeated immersions.
3. The most typological of these rites was the water ritual of the High Priest on the Day of Atonement.

- a. Hebrews is aware of these ceremonial immersions (Heb 6:2; 9:9). They are, however, fulfilled in Christian baptism.
- b. The preacher in Hebrews draws the typology of the High Priest's immersions on the Day of Atonement—he bathed (immersed) himself before he put on his sacred garments (Lev 16:4) and after he took them off (Lev 16:24). He must be cleansed by a water ritual prior to entrance into the Holy of Holies.
- c. In the same way, believers have their bodies washed in pure water before they draw near to God in assembling with the people of God (Heb 10:22). As priests, we enter the Holy of Holies with cleansed bodies and souls—washed (immersed) in water and sprinkled by the blood of Jesus.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How do we experience the Exodus in our own baptism? What does the song of Exodus 15 mean in our own experience?
2. Why is water such a dynamic and pervasive image in Israel's history and practice? Have contemporary Christians lost the dynamic character of that image? Has it become too static for us?
3. How does Israel's relation to water and its rituals enhance your own understanding of Christianity's water ritual?

### **Text Readings:**

*Down in the River to Pray*, pp. 31-46

*Come to the Table*, pp. 103-107

On Jewish baptismal pools, see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikvah> and <http://jesus-messiah.com/html/mikveh.html>

#### 4 Israel—Assembled at the Mountain

**Text:** Exodus 19; 24:1-11; Leviticus 23

**Focus:** God Calls His People into Assemblies Sanctified by his Presence

**Objectives:**

1. To understand that assembly was the beginning of God’s dwelling among his people and the mode by which Israel as a community experienced the presence of God among his people.
2. To understand that assembly was not mere ritual for Israel but a communing presence of God that sustained Israel’s uniqueness in the world and empowered their transformed living.

**Teaching Points:**

1. God brought Israel to Mount Sinai to enter into covenant with them (Ex 19).
  - a. The day God entered into covenant with Israel is called the “day of assembly” (Deut 4:40; 9:10; 18:16).
  - b. Israel assembled before God at Mount Sinai. God spoke with them. They agreed to become God’s people and obey his covenant. At Sinai they became a holy nation and a royal priesthood (Ex 19:6).
2. God assembled with Israel at Mount Sinai to give his presence (Ex 24; Lev 9)
  - a. Exodus 24 is the climatic moment of this “day of assembly.” After Israel agrees to keep the covenant and sacrificial offerings are made, the elders of Israel along with Moses and Aaron ascend Mount Sinai to commune with God—they eat and drink with God; they see God! They experience holy, communing presence.
  - b. A sacrificial ritual was required prior to the union of God and his people by his own holy presence. In Leviticus 9 Israel draws near to God through burnt offering, sin offering and fellowship offering as God then draws near to Israel. In the end, the glory of God appears to all the people as they are assembled for the inauguration of the priesthood of Israel.
3. God called his people to regular and frequent assemblies with him (Lev 23).
  - a. Whenever Israel assembled, they assembled in the presence of the holy one. Their assemblies are called “sacred assemblies” or “holy convocations.” They became the rhythm of life for Israel’s faith.
  - b. Every time Israel assembled—whether Sabbath, Pentecost, Passover—they experienced again the mountain top experience of Mount Sinai where the elder saw (experienced the presence of) God.

- c. Assembly, then, is a moment when Israel comes “before the face of God” or “comes into the presence of God” The Psalms relish the experience of assembly with the saints in the presence of God.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. How does Israel’s “holy mountain” experience shape your understanding of the “mountain” experience of Christians in assembly?
2. What is the significance of Israel’s “sacred assemblies” for its life and relationship with God? How does Israel’s life teach us about how we approach our assemblies?
3. Does assembly in and of itself constitute divine acceptance? Reflect on Amos 5:21-24 as he describes the sacred assemblies of Israel at his time. What is the significance of Amos’ denunciation for us?

**Text Readings:**

*A Gathered People*, pp. 35-60  
*Come to the Table*, 30-34

## 5 Israel—Eating with God at Table

**Text:** Exodus 24:1-11; Leviticus 3, 7

**Focus:** God Eats with His People in Peace and Communion

### Objectives:

1. To understand that the sacrificial ritual of Israel included eating the animal at a table in the presence of God as an act of joy, peace and communion.
2. To see the Lord's Supper as a table rather than an altar on the analogy of the table experience of Israel.
3. To appreciate the covenantal meaning of the table—communion, commitment, renewal, peace and relationship.

### Teaching Points:

1. Exodus 24 is Israel's experience of eating with God on the mountain in assembly.
  - a. It is the "day of assembly" and the elders are on the mountain where they see God. There they "ate and drank."
  - b. They carried the meat and drink of the fellowship offering where they ate in God's presence. This was communion with God; sitting at table with God.
  - c. It is also a covenant meal—they ate in covenant with God based on the blood of the covenant that had been shed in the sacrificial offering. They enjoy covenantal relationship and peace as they ate the sacrificial meat of that offering on the mountain.
  - d. Whenever Israel ate fellowship offerings in assembly they relived this moment and it functioned as a covenant renewal (Joshua 8:30-35 with the instructions of Deut 27:1-8).
2. The "Fellowship" (Peace, Whole, Well-Being) Offering" was the only sacrifice where the worshippers actually ate the animal themselves (Lev 3, 7).
  - a. The term "fellowship" is difficult to translate. It means something like wholeness, well-being, peace, fullness, sharing or communion. It is an offering that is shared and thus represents peace, wholeness, well-being and communion among those who eat it. Israel ate the sacrifice (1 Cor 10:17).
  - b. The offering is shared with God (the fat is burned on the altar), the priests (who receive a portion of the animal to eat), and the community (the worshipper shares the meal with others as the meat is to be eaten within two days). It is a communal experience of thanksgiving, fellowship and peace.
  - c. The fellowship meal—either as part of a vow or as a thanksgiving—usually involved bread (a grain offering) and drink (drink offering). For

example, Hanna celebrated the gift of Samuel with a bull, wine and bread (1 Sam 1:24).

- d. Paul counseled that we should learn the meaning of the Lord's Supper from the communion that existed when Israel ate their sacrifices (1 Cor 10:17). Just as Israel had their thank offering, so the church gives thanks when it eats in communion with God and others.
3. The Fellowship Offering was part of every festival in Israel and was the constant experience of Israel's communion with God.
    - a. The fellowship meal was eaten in the presence of God and always with great rejoicing (cf. Deut 27:7).
    - b. The great festivals involved thousands of animals as thousands of people ate and rejoiced in the communion of God with his people (cf. 2 Chr 30:21-27).
    - c. The Psalms reflect occasions when Israel assembled to eat thank offerings and drink before the Lord at times of thanksgiving and renewal (Psalms 50; 116).

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is a "covenant meal"? What does it mean and signify? How is the Lord's Supper in the church a moment of covenant renewal just as Israel's festivals were moments of covenant renewal?
2. What is the atmosphere and meaning of the fellowship meal in Israel? How should this shape our understanding and experience of the Lord's Supper?
3. In your reading of the biblical texts for this lesson, how do you understand the distinction between the altar (where the animal is sacrificed) and the table (where the animal is eaten)? Is the Lord's Supper a table or an altar? What is the difference?

#### **Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table, 25-49.*

## 6 Jesus—Baptized with Sinners in the Jordan

**Texts:** Luke 3:1-22

**Focus:** The Baptism of Jesus is the first Christian Baptism.

**Objectives:**

1. To understand our identity as disciples of Jesus: we follow Jesus into the water and then follow him in his kingdom ministry even to the cross.
2. To appreciate the difference but continuities between Levitical immersions, the baptism of John, and the baptism of Jesus.
3. To embrace the fullness of baptism as an act of discipleship.

**Teaching Points:**

1. The baptism of John the Baptist participated in Jewish water rituals but pointed beyond them.
  - a. John’s baptism was not unusual in Jewish circles—immersions in water were a daily experience in Judaism.
  - b. But John’s baptism was not simply ceremonial, but moral. It was a “baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3).
    - i. Those who were baptized confessed their sin and asked how repentance would change their lives—no more extortion, no more abuse, etc.
    - ii. Those who refused to be baptized considered themselves righteous (cf. Luke 7:28-30).
  - c. Nevertheless, John’s baptism was not the fullness of Christian baptism because it did not involve the gift of the Holy Spirit.
2. Jesus’ baptism inaugurates a new age in the world.
  - a. Jesus identifies with sinners in the old age through his baptism.
    - i. Jesus underwent a ritual designed for sinners. He became one of us even in our baptism.
    - ii. His humility and identification with his people anticipate his willingness to be “numbered with the transgressors” as he hung on the cross (Luke 22:37).
  - b. Jesus commits himself to the new age and the suffering by which he will bring the new age into the world.
    - i. Jesus’ baptism anticipates his baptism in suffering—Luke even uses the word “baptism” for this suffering (Luke 12:50).
    - ii. His baptism is his commitment to complete his obedience to God by suffering the cross. The temptations of Luke 4:1-11 were intended to divert Jesus from his mission and to offer him an alternative to the way of the cross. His baptism is his commitment.

- c. Jesus receives the Spirit of the new age which empowers him for ministry in the old age. Jesus is himself baptized in the Spirit of God.
    - i. The Spirit is the power of Jesus' ministry and the means by which Jesus works in the world. It is the presence of the new age; the presence of the future. The Spirit anoints him for his messianic (kingdom) ministry (Luke 4:18-19).
    - ii. The Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness (Luke 4:1), empowers Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:14), and fills him with joy (Luke 10:21).
    - iii. The Spirit is the presence of God with Jesus as he becomes the instrument by which the kingdom of God invades the old age.
3. We follow Jesus into the water.
    - a. Our baptism is confession and repentance of our sin.
    - b. Our baptism is a commitment to minister in the kingdom of God.
    - c. Our baptism is a reception of the Holy Spirit who empowers our ministry in the kingdom.
  4. Instead of incessant debates about baptism, perhaps we should all simply follow Jesus into the water. When one claims to be a disciple of Jesus, how can they be a disciple if they have not followed him into the water? And how can those who have followed him into the water claim to be a disciple if they are not willing to take up their cross daily and follow him to the cross?

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In listening to teaching about the baptism of Jesus, what emphases have you generally heard?
2. What does it mean to say that the baptism is the "first Christian baptism"? How does Jesus' baptism relate to our baptism?
3. How does the baptism of Jesus shape our understanding of discipleship?
4. Would it be sufficient to ground our baptism in this thought—"I was baptized because Jesus was baptized, and I am a disciple of Jesus"?

### **Text Readings:**

*Down in the River to Pray*, 47-55

Listen to Hicks' sermon on this topic at

[http://www.godtube.com/view\\_video.php?viewkey=48139567aa5f3d103bb9](http://www.godtube.com/view_video.php?viewkey=48139567aa5f3d103bb9)

## 7 Jesus—Participant and Fulfillment of Assembly

**Text:** John 4:1-24

**Focus:** Jesus is the True Temple of God in whom We Worship

### Objectives:

1. To understand that we assemble to worship the Father in the true reality that Jesus brings and by the power of the Spirit he bestows.
2. To experience the meaning of worship as relationship with the Father through Jesus and the Spirit, and thus relocate the focus of assembly from legality (doing it right) to relationality (experiencing divine presence).

### Teaching Points:

1. Jesus is the true worshipper who participates with his people in approaching the Father who sits on the throne.
  - a. Worship is not only assembly, but it is life as well. Jesus embodied the fullness of life for us and thus his total devotion to the will of the Father was also his offering of worship (Ps 40:6-10 with Heb 10:5-10).
  - b. But Jesus also participated in the community of worship through assembly with the saints.
    - i. In the Gospel of John we see Jesus attending the festivals of Israel (John 2:13, 23; 5:1; 7:14; 10:22; 11:55). These festivals, however, find their fulfillment in Jesus as he is the true bread, the true light and the true lamb of God.
    - ii. Jesus regularly attended the synagogue—it was his weekly habit (Luke 4:16; John 6:59).
    - iii. Even now, Jesus joins the saints around the throne of God assembled to praise the Father (Heb 2:12).
2. Jesus is the truth in which we worship. He is the center and fulfillment of all assembly means. He is the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).
  - a. Jesus is the new temple of God—his body is the sanctuary of God (John 2:12). His temple will replace the Jerusalem temple. In this sense he is the fulfillment of our worship.
  - b. Jesus becomes the locus of our approach to the Father. He embodies the presence of God in his own body and life. Thus, we approach the Father through Jesus. In this sense he is the center of our worship.
3. We are called to worship the Father in Spirit and in Truth.
  - a. The Father is the ultimate object of worship. He is the source and goal of all things, and our worship ultimately flows from him and back to him.
  - b. We worship the Father “in truth,” that is, in the reality that Jesus brings.

- i. “Truth” does not stand in contrast with “false” since Jews offered “true” (Scriptural) worship in the Hebrew Bible (2 Chr 31:21).
- ii. Rather, “truth” here contrasts with “type” or “shadow” which is a major focus of the Gospel of John. Note the chart below.

Moses	Jesus
Law	Grace and Truth (1:17)
Manna in the Desert	Bread of Life (6:35)
Water in the Desert	Living Water (7:38)
Light in the Desert	Light of the World (8:12)
Jerusalem Temple	New Temple (2:21)
Shadow	Reality
“in Jerusalem”	“in Spirit and in Truth”

- c. We worship the Father “in Spirit,” that is, in the animation and power of the indwelling Spirit who is a fountain of living water in our hearts.
  - i. “Spirit” in the Gospel of John is the Holy Spirit (1:32; 3:5-6; 3:34; cf. 6:63; 7:38-39) and not a reference to the human attitudes since devout Hebrews offered worship “in spirit” in the Hebrew Bible (Jos 24:14).
  - ii. The living water that wells up to eternal life is the work of the Spirit—the presence of the living God who gives us life (4:10-12; 7:38-39).
  - iii. We do not worship on a mountain but in the Spirit who animates our souls and brings us into the new temple of God (Jesus). By the Spirit we are lifted into the presence of God to worship the Father.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Are our assemblies more theocentric (worshipping the Father) or Christocentric (worshipping Jesus)? How should we relate these two?
2. What does it mean to say that Jesus is the center and fulfillment of our worship?
3. How does the above interpretation of John 4:24 differ from traditional readings? What is the significance of this alternative reading in contrast to the traditional one?
4. How might the above reading of John 4:24 not only shape our understanding of assembly, but also shape our understanding of life as worship?

### Text Readings:

*A Gathered People*, 25-32, 131-136.

Listen to Hicks’ July 15<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> sermons on this topic at

<http://www.sycamoreview.tv/?n=Main.2007>

## 8 Jesus—Eating with Sinners at Table

**Text:** Luke 5:27-32; 9:10-17; 11:37-54; 14:1-24; 22:7-38.

**Focus:** Jesus Sits at Table with Sinners

### Objectives:

1. To connect the Lord's Supper with the table ministry of Jesus so that we see continuity between his ministry and the institution of the Lord's Supper in terms of kingdom table etiquette.
2. To broaden our understanding of the Lord's Supper as involving much more than the language of "this is my body" and "this is my blood." It is a table that embodies the table ministry of Jesus.

### Teaching Points:

1. Just as God sat at table with Israel, so Jesus—God in the flesh—sits at table with his people.
  - a. The significance of the table ministry of Jesus, especially in the Gospel of Luke, is often undervalued and unrealized within the Christian community.
  - b. See the chart in *Come to the Table*, p. 55. Table fellowship is a pervasive theme in the ministry of Jesus and the place where he does most of his teaching in the Gospel of Luke.
  - c. The table is a place of evangelism, reconciliation, service, discipleship, spiritual formation, thanksgiving and mission.
2. The table in the ministry of Jesus is missional in character.
  - a. Jesus eats with sinners as well as the "righteous" (Luke 5:27-37; 11:37-54)—embracing the former and rebuking the latter.
  - b. Jesus invites the marginalized—the poor, the blind, the lame—to the table (Luke 14:1-24).
  - c. Jesus ministers to the hungry, diseased and lost at the table (Luke 9:10-17). It is his messianic ministry (Luke 4:18-19).
  - d. The table ministry of Jesus culminates in the experience of the Last Supper with the disciples.
3. The table of Jesus at the Last Supper anticipates the table in the kingdom of God (Luke 22:7-38).
  - a. Jesus is the sacrificial victim who is eaten at this table.
    - i. Jesus gives his body and blood to his disciples through bread and wine—the body is "for you" and the blood is "for you."
    - ii. This is an offer of grace, even for Judas who still sits at the table that evening. At the table, Jesus gives himself.

- b. Jesus is the host of the table.
  - i. Jesus hosts this meal, just as he did in Luke 9 and will again in Luke 24.
  - ii. He invites to his table; he “officiates” at his table. There are no clergy around the table of God as Jesus himself is the host.
  - iii. As host, he gives his presence to the table—it is his peace, communion, and relationship. He invites the disciples to sit at his table in his kingdom.
  
- c. Jesus is the servant of the table.
  - i. As the disciples argue about greatness in the kingdom of God, Jesus demonstrates greatness through serving (waiting) on the table.
  - ii. His service is demonstrated through the offer of his body and blood for their sakes even as they argue about their own position in the kingdom.
  - iii. This service is something Jesus will continue at the messianic banquet in the new heaven and new earth; Jesus will still serve his table in the future world to come (Luke 12:35-37).

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What does your table look like in your daily ministry of the kingdom? With whom do you eat? Is your table a missional one like the table of Jesus?
2. How should the table ministry of Jesus shape our understanding of the Lord’s Supper? How does the table ministry of Jesus demonstrate a kingdom table etiquette?
3. Which dimension of the Lord’s Supper most resonates with your experience of the table—victim, host or servant? Why?

**Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table*, pp. 53-81.

## 9 Church—Eating with Jesus at Table

**Text:** Luke 24:13-35; Acts 20:7-12

**Focus:** The Living Jesus Hosts the Table in the Church.

### Objectives:

1. To experience the Lord's Supper in terms of resurrection and hope rather than merely memory and sorrow for our sin.
2. To experience the Lord's Supper as a taste of the future as we sit with the resurrected Jesus who guarantees our future.

### Teaching Points:

1. Jesus breaks bread with his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35).
  - a. It is still "Friday" for the two disciples walking to Emmaus as they relive the tragic experience of the weekend. They convey this hopelessness to the stranger they meet on the road who rebukes them with Scripture and the prospect of glory for the one who suffered.
  - b. Invited to stay in their home, the stranger assumes the role of host at the table. When he breaks the bread, the disciples recognize Jesus. The disciples encounter the living Christ through the breaking of the bread.
  - c. The journey to Emmaus is a journey of Word (Scripture) and Table (breaking bread). The story of Jesus is interpreted for them through Scripture and then experienced by them at the Table. Their "Friday" has now become "Sunday." Their hopelessness has turned to joy; their mourning has turned into dancing.
2. Jesus breaks bread with his disciples in Troas (Acts 20:7-12).
  - a. The language of Acts 20:7-12 is the language of Luke 24 as Luke intentionally draws his readers back to the resurrection story of his earlier volume (see the chart on p. 94 of *Come to the Table*).
  - b. Luke tells this story because it involves a concrete example of eating at the table with one who has been resurrected—the young man Eutyches who fell out the window but was raised from the dead.
  - c. The conjunction of first day of the week, resurrection and breaking of bread underscore the theological connection. These three ideas converge—on the first day of the week we experience again the resurrection of Jesus through the breaking of the bread.
3. The central idea of the Lord's Supper in Luke-Acts is the presence of the living host who gives grace, comfort and hope to his people in the midst of a tragic world.
  - a. The response of the disciples in both Luke 24 and Acts 20 reflect the intent of the breaking of bread—they rejoiced and were comforted.

- b. The central act of God in the Lord's Supper is the presence of the living host who assures us of the future. God is present at the table by his Spirit in the person of Christ the Lord.
- c. The table is not only a time of memory, but it is also the experience of the future. At the table we experience the future reality of the resurrection present in the reality of the living host—Jesus.
- d. Tragedy surrounds us—we all live with “Fridays” of one sort or another. But “Sunday” is the day of hope. Breaking bread can transform our “Fridays” into “Sundays” as we encounter the Living Christ at the table.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the experience of the disciples at Emmaus and Troas in relation to the Lord's Supper? What is the atmosphere or mood of their breaking of bread?
2. How should the resurrection function in our understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper? Why do we tend to concentrate more on the victim (death) character of the Supper than we do the host (resurrection) dimension of the Supper?
3. Does your experience of the Lord's Supper tend to transform your “Fridays” into “Sundays”? Does it tend to move you from despair to hope? Why or why not?

**Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table*, pp. 83-99.

## 10 Church—Baptized in Water and Spirit

**Text:** Acts 2:37-41; Acts 9:1-19 [Acts 22:10-16]; Acts 10:24-48

**Focus:** God Receives His People through Water and Spirit.

### Objectives:

1. To understand that baptism for the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit are both part of the conversion narrative.
2. To understand the importance of the Holy Spirit as part of kingdom life in relation to baptism.

### Teaching Points:

1. Pentecost is the inauguration of the new community of disciples in Luke-Acts. Acts 2 is foundational for understanding this new community.
  - a. God pours out his Spirit upon “all flesh”—Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female (cf. Gal. 3:28)—and whoever calls on the name of God will be saved. Quoting Joel 2, Peter announces the restoration of Israel by the pouring out of the Spirit on Pentecost.
  - b. In response to this outpouring and Peter’s sermon, the crowd asks, “What shall we do?” Peter’s response is the lens through which we should read the rest of the narrative of Acts.
    - i. The human response to God’s act of grace in pouring out his Spirit and in the redemptive work of Jesus is repentance and baptism.
    - ii. God’s response to the human faith and obedience is the remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit.
    - iii. This promise—redemption and gift of the Spirit—extends to all future generations.
  - c. It is important to see Acts 2:38 in continuity with the baptisms of John and Jesus. The baptism of John was “for the remission of sins” but it was in the baptism of Jesus that Spirit was given. Now, in Acts 2:38, faith-repentance and baptism are connected with both the remission of sins and with the gift of the Spirit.
  - d. The Spirit who was poured out on the day of Pentecost is now poured out upon each believer who repents and is baptized (cf. Titus 3:5-6 for similar language). The presence of the Spirit is equally important with the promise of remission, perhaps more important in terms of the significance of the Spirit’s presence for transformation and kingdom ministry.
2. The narratives of conversion recorded in Acts consistently highlight the presence hearing the good news of Jesus, believing it, repenting, being baptized,

and the gift of the Holy Spirit. See the chart on page 56 of *Down in the River to Pray*.

- a. It is important to recognize the differences in these narratives—in the case of Cornelius the Spirit is received before baptism but in the case of the Samaritans the Spirit is received after baptism.
  - b. At the same time, it is important to recognize that no conversion narrative is complete until both baptism and the Spirit are received.
  - c. The conversion narratives of both Paul and Cornelius emphasize both baptism and the Spirit.
    - i. Ananias came to Paul that he might receive the Spirit and he baptized him to wash away his sins.
    - ii. Cornelius was baptized in the Holy Spirit and then was commanded to be baptized in water.
    - iii. One without the other is incomplete; those who had the Spirit but were unimmersed were commanded to be immersed and those who were immersed but did not have the Spirit (as in the Samaritans) were ultimately given the Spirit.
  - d. God baptizes his people in both water and Spirit (John 3:5; Titus 3:5; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13).
3. When talking about baptism in Acts, the Holy Spirit is often overlooked or devalued. But more is said about the Spirit in Acts than is said about baptism.
- a. Those who obey received the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:32).
  - b. The Spirit is present to comfort with joy, transform into the image of Christ, and to empower for ministry. The Spirit is the presence of the new age in the old age; it is the presence of the future kingdom of God.
  - c. The pouring out of the Spirit in Acts 2 is the signal and means by which God will restore Israel through the new community of disciples, bear witness to his redemptive presence in the world, and transform his people.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the relationship between the Spirit and baptism in Luke-Acts—beginning with the baptism of Jesus through the baptism of Cornelius? Is there a “ordinary pattern” there? Why is there diversity?
2. What is the significance of the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts? Why is this an important point for the early church?
3. How might we balance the presentation of baptism in water and the pouring out of the Spirit in our contemporary teaching and understanding? Which should receive greater significance or stress?

### **Text Readings:**

*Down in the River to Pray*, pp. 55-69.

## 11 Church—Assembled in the Spirit as Community

**Text:** Acts 2:42-47

**Focus:** The Heart of Christian Assembly is Word and Table.

### Objectives:

1. To see the connection between the ministry of Jesus and the communal life of the early church.
2. To understand the devotion and practice of the disciples focused on the Word and Table—the teaching of the apostles and fellowship.

### Teaching Points:

1. The early church in Acts follows the ministry of Jesus in Luke: what Jesus did in Luke, the early church does in Acts.
  - a. In conjunction with the 120 who waited for the promised Holy Spirit in Acts 1, 3000 newly baptized people formed a new community as disciples of Jesus the Messiah (Acts 2:41).
  - b. These disciples followed Jesus. They continued the ministry of Jesus—both as individuals and as an assembled body. They are the presence of Jesus in the world to bear witness to the kingdom of God.
  - c. What Jesus “began to do and to teach” (Acts 1:2), the church continued to do and to teach. They taught the good news of the kingdom of God and practiced it—which is the content of the Gospel of Luke.
  - d. “Word” (teaching) and “Table” (table fellowship) characterized the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke.
2. Acts 2:42 provides a succinct summary of the habits of the early church and their devotion to them.
  - a. Acts 2:42 is actually two general activities—teaching and fellowship, but the second one is characterized by two further activities—breaking of bread and prayer.
  - b. The disciples were devoted to the teaching of the apostles. This is teaching about the kingdom of God and Jesus the Messiah (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 19:8; 28:23, 31). If we want to know what the apostles taught, then we read what Jesus taught in Luke and the sermons in Acts.
  - c. The disciples were devoted to fellowship. The term is a broad one that includes any kind of sharing. But Acts 2:42 identifies two ways in which this fellowship was expressed.
    - i. “Breaking of Bread”—this is the language of Luke 24:30,35 as well as Luke 9:16 and 22:19. Jesus is revealed in the breaking of the bread—it is the meal at which Jesus sits as host in his kingdom. Acts 20:7-12 is another occasion for the breaking of

- bread in the church (cf. 1 Cor 10:16 as well). The church continued the table fellowship of the ministry of Jesus.
- ii. “Prayers”—the Jerusalem church was a praying church (cf. Acts 4:23-31; 12:12). The church continued the prayer life of Jesus’ ministry as Jesus had taught them to pray (Luke 11:1-12).
  - d. To read more about how one might understand and apply Acts 2:42 as well as a historical example of how some Stone-Campbell forefathers like David Lipscomb and James A. Harding used this text, see John Mark Hicks and Bobby Valentine, *Kingdom Come*, pp. 75-141.
3. Acts 2:43-47 summarizes how the early church lived out Acts 2:42.
    - a. Word: the disciples gathered in the temple daily to hear the teaching of the apostles and to pray together. Apostolic miracles authenticated their teaching.
    - b. Table: the disciples also gathered in their homes daily to break bread together. This fellowship included sharing not only their food but other resources with each other as they sold their possessions to give to the needy. Sharing with the poor is part of the fellowship of Jesus’ community.
    - c. Both of these activities are characterized as “praising God” and a good reputation in the community. Practicing the kingdom of God through word and table honors God and builds relationships within the community.

### Discussion Questions:

1. When you hear the phrase “apostle’s teaching,” what sort of teaching do you think it has in mind? What does it mean to teach about the kingdom of God? Or, to teach about Jesus?
2. When you hear the word “fellowship,” what does that bring to mind? What was the content of the “fellowship” in Acts 2? How do you define and practice “fellowship” in your congregational life?
3. Since the communal life of the Jerusalem church was characterized as a devotion to Word and Table, how is this reflected in your own congregational life? What emphases are present and what are missing?
4. The relationship between Word and Table, how does the Table embody the Word and how does the Word interpret the Table? How do they give meaning to each other?

### Text Readings:

*Come to the Table*, pp. 88-93.

*A Gathered People*, pp. 61-70.

A sermon series on Acts 2:42 by John Mark Hicks is available at

<http://www.sycamoreview.tv/?n=Main.2007> under the months of May and June.

## 12 History of Baptism—From Discipleship to Citizenship

**Text:** Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 2:11-15

**Focus:** Infant Baptism shifted the meaning of the rite.

### Objectives:

1. To understand the nature of the shift from believer's baptism to infant baptism in the history of the early church.
2. To emphasize that the nature of faith as expressed in baptism is one of personal trust and commitment to follow Jesus—it is an act of discipleship.

### Teaching Points:

1. The practice of baptism in the first three centuries was fairly standard (see *Down in the River to Pray*, 94-102).
  - a. Baptism was practiced as a means of grace—God forgave sin, bestowed the Holy Spirit, and ushered them into the communion of the saints through baptism. The church never wavered in this understanding.
  - b. Baptism was administered to adult believers—faith, including the renunciation of Satan and appropriate catechism, was necessary for baptism.
  - c. Baptism was, like Jewish water rituals, was administered by immersion. This was the normative practice though exceptions were made for the unavailability of water or sickness.
2. Infant baptism shifted the significance of baptism in the church.
  - a. Infant baptism began to appear by the end of the second century, was sanctioned by several key leaders (Cyprian) in the middle of the third century, was administered in emergency situations through the third and fourth centuries, and by the fifth century was becoming the norm among Christian families (cf. *Down in the River*, pp. 100-105).
  - b. The origin of infant baptism is probably the use of emergency baptisms for dying children. Joined with the rise of catechizing young children (five-seven years old), the baptism of infants and young children ultimately became the norm in both the Eastern and Western churches.
  - c. The most significant element of this development is sometimes called the “Constantinian Shift.”
    - i. In 313 Christianity became a legal religion but in 389 it became the only legal religion. The convergence of church and state ultimately created the identification of birth with Christianity—to be born in a Christian nation is to be a Christ.
    - ii. Consequently, infant baptism came to be identified not only with membership in the church but citizenship in the state. To be

“Christian,” then, was a matter of national status rather than discipleship.

- iii. This entailed a shift from thinking about baptism as a commitment to discipleship (following Jesus) to thinking about it as membership (and thus citizenship) in the church.
  - iv. Consequently, when some rejected infant baptism in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they were executed as traitors to the state (cf. *Down in the River*, pp. 109-110, 123-126).
  - v. In a “free church” culture (as the United States), the citizenship dimension is exchanged for a sense of “membership in the church.”
3. What is the faith that is necessary for baptism? Is it mere passivity or is an act of discipleship?
- a. The New Testament picture includes faith as the means by which we receive the grace God gives through baptism (Gal 3:26-29; Col 2:12).
  - b. Those who baptize infants usually locate the “faith” necessary for baptism in one of the following three places:
    - i. The faith of the church itself is sufficient for one who brings a child to baptism committed to raise it (Eastern Orthodox).
    - ii. The child has a kind of “infant faith”—a faith that does not resist the grace of God in baptism. The child passively receives what God gives (Lutherans).
    - iii. The faith of the parents is sufficient to bring a child to baptism (Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists).
  - c. In the New Testament faith is the trust and commitment of the one following Jesus. To believe and be baptized is an act of discipleship through which God gives his grace; it involves personal response and not mere passivity.

### Discussion Questions:

1. How might infant baptism contribute—and it is not the only contributor, of course—to a kind of “I’m a Christian but I don’t practice” attitude?
2. How do you think of the “faith” that is necessary for effectual baptism? How would you define it? What is that one must believe? See *Down in the River*, p. 251-253.
3. What interested or surprised you most about the history surveyed in this lesson?

### Text Readings:

*Down in the River to Pray*, pp. 93-130.

### 13 History of Assembly—From Mystery to Penance

**Text:** Hebrews 12:22-24

**Focus:** Assembly Shifted from Mystical Experience to Legal Formalism.

**Objectives:**

1. To gain a broad picture of the development of Christian liturgy through the eyes of Eastern, Western and Protestant Christianity.
2. To provoke reflection on the nature of mystery in the Christian assembly and how this relates to our liturgical practices in the context of Christian history.

**Teaching Points:**

1. The early church, before the Constantinian Shift and the building of churches, met in homes. It was a rather informal and simple liturgy.
  - a. The account of Justin Martyr offers a simply Word and Table liturgy (*A Gathered People*, pp. 82-83).
  - b. Tertullian in the late second century offers another simple account (*A Gathered People*, p. 85).
2. The Eastern and Western regions of the church developed differently.
  - a. The Eastern Church (Orthodox), in concert with its oriental cultural climate, stressed the mystery of the assembly. The assembly is the moment when heaven comes down to earth and believers join the heavenly hosts around the throne of God. It is celebrative, joyous and filled with thanksgiving—it is the boldness to enter the throne room of God to worship him.
  - b. The Western Church (Roman Catholic), in concert with its Roman “law and order” cultural climate, stressed the legal forms and means for the sake of the remission of sins. The liturgy became penitential and focused on the Mass rather than the Word. The mood of the assembly became solemn.
  - c. The Protestant Reformation, in concert with its genesis to give believers assurance through the forgiveness of sins, stressed the confession of sin and the forgiveness of sins in the assembly. Ultimately, Protestants stressed the Word of assurance more than the Table, and they continued the solemn atmosphere of the Western church.
  - d. The Protestant Reformation also introduced further “legal” discussions about what is scriptural in the assembly and what is not. The legal debates, though present previous to the Reformation, was enhanced by divergent understandings at the time of the Protestant Reformation (e.g., debates over liturgy, instruments, Psalm-singing, incense, etc.).

3. Hebrews 12:22-24 calls us to see the mystery of the assembly—a moment of encounter with God where we commune with him rather than cower in fear of his judgment.
  - a. Legal formality does not necessarily rule out mystery or the experience of the mysterious presence of God, but it can shift the focus of the assembly. Legal formality tends to stress the rules that guide human acts rather than stressing the mysterious presence of God.
  - b. The preacher in Hebrews reminds us that we come to the heavenly mountain when we assemble—we come to God, to Jesus, to the angels, to the saints who have gone before, to the saints scattered around the world. We come together in a way that transcends time and space as all the people of God are gathered around the throne.
  - c. Assembly—Word and Table—is primarily about God’s mysterious act of union and communion than it is the legal formalities of our rituals and procedures.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What “worship traditions” (or liturgical habits) exist in the practices of your congregation’s assembly? How do they compare with the history of the church briefly surveyed here?
2. Does formal liturgy tend to obscure or enhance the mysterious presence of God in the assembly? What principle should guide us in discerning when formalities undermine our experience of this presence?
3. Where is the emphasis in your congregation’s assembly—rules, formality, traditions, presence, penitence, thanksgiving, solemnity? How do Word and Table contribute to these emphases?

**Text Readings:**

*A Gathered People*, pp. 81-105, 146-147

## 14 History of Lord's Supper—From Table to Altar

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 11:28-33

**Focus:** The Mass Shifted the Focus from Communion to Forgiveness.

### Objectives:

1. To see the development of the Western church's practice of the Supper that moved us from "table" to "altar."
2. To understand that eating the Supper worthily means to eat it in a way that proclaims the gospel.

### Teaching Points:

1. The practice of the early church was to eat a meal with the bread and wine. This continued in the early second century.
  - a. Ultimately, the meal was separated from the bread and wine so that by the end of the second century the church assembled for the "Lord's Supper" on Sunday morning but for an "Agape meal" on Sunday evening.
  - b. The reasons for this change were probably many, but a few may be:
    - i. Roman edicts sometimes forbade groups eating meals together because the Roman authorities were suspicious of political activities.
    - ii. Meals in the Greco-Roman culture were often occasions for drunken parties and difficult to control due to the cultural mores of the time—as is the case in 1 Corinthians 11.
    - iii. Christians began to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus at sunrise on Sunday which was inappropriate for a meal and therefore kept the meal in the evening. Sunrise and evening assemblies permitted workers to participate whereas at other times in the day they could not.
    - iv. The shift from home to dedicated building also contributed to the shift from table (meal) to altar (bread/wine). Ultimately, tables were not permitted in the church buildings.
  - c. The distinction between the bread/wine (Lord's Supper) and the meal (table) eased the move to describe the Lord's Supper as an "altar." Altar, rather than table, became the primary way of describing the Lord's Supper. This was also aided by the rise—in the West—of the view that the Supper is a sacrifice itself.
2. The Western Church emphasized the "altar" understanding of the Lord's Supper.
  - a. The Mass (the liturgy of the table) became an altar as the church taught that the Mass was an offering of the sacrifice of Jesus.

- b. The Mass, then, became a penitential act—a confession of sin, a confession of unworthiness, and a means of the forgiveness of sins.
  - c. The practice of the Mass became a private, solemn and individual moment in the life of the believer.
  - d. The Protestant churches, while rejecting the sacrifice of the mass, continued the altar atmosphere of confession and forgiveness. Some Protestants—the Puritans—introduced silence into the practice of the Supper (no singing or music during the Supper).
3. The Lord’s Supper, however, is not an “altar” but it is a “table.”
- a. The New Testament never refers to the Supper as an altar. Rather, it is the Lord’s supper, or the Lord’s table, or the cup of the Lord (1 Cor 10-11). The Christian altar is the cross, but the table is where we eat the sacrifice (not where it is offered).
  - b. The altar mentality has encouraged a solemn, introspective and penitential approach to the Lord’s Supper when the Supper is more about communion, thanksgiving and joy.
  - c. 1 Corinthians 11:28-33 is often used to support the introspective and solemn practice of the Supper.
    - i. But “worthiness” is not about personal worth, but it is about the manner in which the community eats the supper.
    - ii. The problem is not that the Corinthians were not sufficiently introspective or concentrating on the cross when they ate, but that they were eating and drinking in such a way that it denied the unity of the body in Christ.
    - iii. The Supper should proclaim the gospel but when we eat in such a way that denies the gospel (such as excluding the poor), then we eat in an unworthy manner.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How did separating the bread/wine from the meal transform the practice and meaning of the Lord’s Supper?
2. How did the introduction of altar imagery transform the practice and meaning of the Lord’s Supper?
3. What is the best way to think about the “worthiness” of the manner in which the Lord’s Supper should be practiced? What does this mean for your congregation?

### **Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table*, pp. 116-125, 129-138, 175-178  
*A Gathered People*, pp. 84, 87, 89, 91, 94-95, 102-103

## 15 The Stone-Campbell Movement's Restoration Agenda

**Text:** 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

**Focus:** Restoring to the Church the Original Intent of the Sacraments.

### Objectives:

1. To understand the intent of the Stone-Campbell Movement to restore the ordinances of the New Testament church for purpose of restoring their power in the life of the community.
2. To orient our own understanding of the ordinances toward transformation rather than mere legal conformation to the biblical texts.

### Teaching Points:

1. 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17 calls the church to hear and obey the “traditions” that Paul handed down to the Christian community in Thessalonica. It is the gospel which he preached and practiced. The community of faith must embrace the truth of the gospel and obey the traditions of the apostles. This is the genesis thought of the Stone-Campbell Restoration Movement.
2. Alexander Campbell saw his movement as a “RESTORATION OF THE ORDINANCES OF THE NEW INSTITUTION TO THEIR PLACE AND POWER” (*Millennial Harbinger*, 1843, 9).
  - a. Campbell was distressed by the divisions within Christianity and saw the need for a simple and clear basis of unity. He decided that the Bible alone should be the basis of unity and he found that platform in the explicit commands and clear examples of the New Testament (he excluded inferences as a basis for unity).
  - b. His restoration movement, then, sought to lay the basis for union between Christians on the words and practices of the New Testament.
  - c. He identified three ordinances: Baptism, the Lord’s Supper, and the Lord’s Day. They are the “indispensable provisions of remedial mercy” that are necessary for the “perfection of the Christian state and the Christian character” (quoted in *A Gathered People*, p. 10).
3. He pursued this restoration of the ordinances through two series of essays in the *Christian Baptist*.
  - a. The first series of thirty-two articles was, begun in 1825, was “A Restoration of the Ancient Order of Things” (*A Gathered People*, pp. 113-114). This outlined Campbell’s agenda for the restoration of a New Testament church in his time. The essays are basically about the church: worship (including a series on “breaking bread”), organization, and discipline. Specifically, Campbell articulates an understanding of the worship assembly that would become standard in Churches of Christ—he

- enumerates what came to be called the “five acts of worship” (though he did not use that phrase himself).
- b. The second series of ten articles was entitled, begun in 1828, was “A Restoration of the Ancient Gospel” (*Down in the River*, p. 137). In this series Campbell articulated his understanding of baptism as a means of grace for the remission of sins.
  - c. These articles are available at <http://www.mun.ca/rels/restmov/texts/acampbell/tcb/TCB00.HTM>.
4. His interest in this series was not merely the reintroduction of the ordinances in terms of their form, but to restore them to their purpose and “power.”
- a. For Campbell these ordinances were theocentric—God “is present” with his people “by his Spirit in their hearts and in all the institutions of his kingdom” (*Millennial Harbinger*, 1834), 422.
  - b. The ordinances were means by which God worked in the lives of his people to generate assurance, comfort, joy and peace. They are God’s testimony to his people and they are means of his presence. The ordinances assure the people of God of his love and means by which he communes with them (cf. the paragraph at the bottom of p. 112 in *A Gathered People*).
  - c. The purpose of the ordinances, then, is not mere external formality or a test of loyalty and obedience. Rather, the ordinances are modes of spiritual formation by which God transforms his people into his own image.

### Discussion Questions:

1. What does the concept of “restoration” mean to you? Are there biblical roots to this idea?
2. How did Campbell conceive of “restoration” and to what end?
3. What are the purposes of the “ordinances”? What is their function in the life of the community of faith? Do we think of them primarily in legal terms (do them right!) or in terms of spiritual formation (how they shape us into the image of God)?

### Text Readings:

*A Gathered People*, pp. 108-118  
*Down in the River to Pray*, pp. 131-145  
*Come to the Table*, 135-136

## 16 The Stone-Campbell Movement's Legal Atmosphere

**Text:** Ephesians 2:8-10

**Focus:** Positive Law Transformed the Sacraments into Legalities.

### Objectives:

1. To understand the how the legal hermeneutic of the Stone-Campbell Movement hardened our understanding of the sacraments.
2. To appreciate that the goal of the sacraments is more important than the means.

### Teaching Points:

1. The ordinances of the New Testament church were called “positive ordinances” by Alexander Campbell because they are commanded by “positive law.”
  - a. The distinction between moral and positive law goes back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Moral law is the moral order embedded in the universe (or, in the nature of God). Positive law is a legal construct to facilitate particular ends.
  - b. Christians (including Alexander Campbell) adopted this distinction.
    - i. Moral law is something that is rooted in the character of God. For example, “don’t commit adultery” is rooted in God’s own faithfulness—he is faithful, so humans should be faithful. “Don’t lie” is rooted in God’s own truthfulness, etc.
    - ii. Positive law, however, is legal construct that God invents to serve his ends. For example, he invented “don’t eat from that one tree in the Garden” as a test of loyalty for Adam and Eve. He invented Israel’s sacrificial system. And, he invented Baptism, Lord’s Supper and Lord’s Day as Christian “positive ordinances.”
    - iii. Positive ordinances are governed by positive law. Consequently, they must be obeyed as given without change or adjustment in order to be valid.
2. When positive law is given priority, it reshapes how we understand the ordinances or sacraments. The concern to “get it right” becomes more important than the encounter with God. The church becomes more anthropocentric (concentrating on what we do) rather than theocentric (experiencing what God is doing).
  - a. When positive law dominates our baptismal theology, then baptism becomes a “line in the sand” rather than a means by which God transforms his people into his image. Baptism becomes more important than transformation; the means becomes more important than the goal.
  - b. When positive law dominates our worship assemblies, then attendance and the right performance of the “acts of worship” becomes the primary

goal rather than transforming encounter with God. The worship assembly becomes a test of loyalty rather than a means of transforming us into God's image.

- c. When positive law dominates the Lord's Supper, then the focus becomes concentrating on the right thing, doing the appropriate introspection, and reproducing the exact ritual rather than encountering the living Christ as the host of the table. The Lord's Supper becomes our occasion to remember rather than the means by which God communes with us.
3. The purpose of the sacraments/ordinances should have priority over their legal dimensions—grace through faith for good works is the priority (Eph 2:8-10).
    - a. Positive law became more important than moral law. Moral law is difficult to obey because of our sinful natures and it takes mature discernment to see the applications of moral laws. But positive law is clear, explicit and not subject to misunderstanding. Therefore, positive law is more suited to a test of loyalty—if one does not obey positive law, then they have a spirit of disobedience.
    - b. This is the foundation for many discussions within the Stone-Campbell Movement, especially in Churches of Christ. It is why we are more gracious to moral failings than we are doctrinal ones; why instrumental music divides the Stone-Campbell Movement but whether one might kill another human being in war does not.
    - c. But it substitutes the means for the goal. The goal of God is our transformation into his image. He gives us these means—not as legal tests of loyalty—as mediums through which we experience his transforming power. The forms in which he offers them are important for the function—the forms in which God gives them are best suited for the function he has in mind, but the function is ultimately more important than the form.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In what ways have you seen this legal (positive law) understanding of the sacraments affect your relationship with God and others? How has it affected the practices of your congregation?
2. What is more important—the means or the goal? What is more important—doing the means right or effecting the goal?
3. How does Ephesians 2:8-10 give us a perspective from which to engage this discussion of legalities vs. transformation?

### **Text Readings:**

*Down in the River to Pray*, 145-150, 154-157, 179-199

*A Gathered People*, 118-125

“Churches of Christ and the Lord's Supper” at

<http://www.disciples.org/ccu/dialogues/dialoguedocuments/2007JohnMarkHicks.html>

## 17 Theology of Baptism—God’s Work and Our Discipleship

**Text:** Romans 6:1-11; Colossians 2:11-15; Galatians 3:26-29

**Focus:** Baptism is our Participation in and Identification with the Gospel.

### Objectives:

1. Baptism primarily emphasizes the divine act of God in the gospel.
2. Baptism is our identification with the work of God in the gospel—that identity transcends all other earthly identities.

### Teaching Points:

1. Through baptism we participate in the gospel (Romans 6:1-11).
  - a. The language “through baptism” is an expression of means—baptism is a means of grace, the medium through which God (Rom 6:3; cf. Titus 3:5).
  - b. Baptism is a burial into the death of Christ where we died to sin by the death of Christ. We do not put ourselves to death, but the death of Jesus kills our sinful selves (the old person). By grace, we participate in the death which crucifies the body of sin.
  - c. Baptism is a resurrection with Christ so that the life we live is no longer our own, but it is the life of Jesus. We do not raise ourselves to life, but the resurrection of Jesus gives our dead bodies life and empowers us to live a new life.
  - d. Thus, we are dead to sin (by the death of Jesus) and alive to God (by the resurrection of Jesus).
2. Through baptism we experience the work of the gospel (Colossians 2:11-15).
  - a. We are circumcised—regenerated, changed, transformed—by the death of Jesus.
  - b. We are made alive—forgiven of our sin, participating in the triumph over evil powers—by the death and resurrection of Jesus.
  - c. This experience of the gospel is “through faith in the power (work) of God.” Baptism is faith directed toward the divine work—faith in what God has done for his people.
  - d. The effectual power of baptism is not primarily what we believe about baptism, but our trust in what God has done in the death and resurrection of Jesus.
3. Through baptism we identify with Christ and become one with his people (Galatians 3:26-29).
  - a. By faith we are the children of God—we are children of Abraham and heirs of the promise through faith.

- b. This faith is clothed with Christ when we are baptized into Christ (“into Christ” is the language of Romans 6 and Matthew 28:19 as well).
- c. Our identity in Christ means oneness with the people of God—a oneness that transcends all finite, human distinctions. Our identity is the kingdom of God in Christ rather than any human identity we might find here where it is ethnic, nationalistic, economic or gender.
  - i. Neither Jew nor Gentile.
  - ii. Neither Male nor Female
  - iii. Neither Slave nor Free

**Discussion Questions:**

1. In these biblical texts where do you see the emphasis on the divine act of God in baptism? Where do you see the emphasis on the gospel as the fundamental orientating perspective?
2. How does our baptismal identity transcend all other identities we have in the world? Why is this important for the church in contemporary culture?
3. How should our baptism shape our ethics and commitments in the world?

**Text Readings:**

*Down in the River to Pray*, 71-91, 157-178

## 18 Theology of Assembly—A Relational Love-Fest

**Text:** Hebrews 10:19-25

**Focus:** Assembly is a Gospel Experience and Witness.

### Objectives:

1. To understand that our assemblies are entrances into the throne room of God where we encounter his loving presence.
2. To experience assembly as a relational and mutual festival of love—God loves us and we love him as we love each other.
3. To reorient our thinking about assembly as relational rather than primarily legal.

### Teaching Points:

1. We enter the Holy of Holies through the gospel—through the priestly work of Jesus.
  - a. Hebrews 10:19-21, on the analogy of the Jerusalem temple, stresses our own entrance into the presence of God through Jesus.
  - b. The gospel work of Jesus is the basis for our boldness to go before God's throne and to enter his Holy dwelling place.
  - c. Assembly is other-worldly as we are taken by the Spirit into the heavenly city of God to share the heavenly reality with all the saints and hosts of heaven (Heb 12:22-24).
2. Our entrance into the Holy of Holies is the experience of God's person—his love and faithfulness.
  - a. Hebrews 10:22-25 offers three purposes of assembling:
    - i. Through assembly we draw near to God. This is a Hebraic expression that means to enter his presence; to encounter and experience God.
    - ii. Through assembly we profess our faith in the community and in the presence of God because we know God is faithful.
    - iii. Through assembly we encourage each other and stimulate each other to love and good works because we know God is loving toward us.
  - b. But we will miss something if we simply think in terms of three points. Rather, the central idea is an encounter between God and his people where his people are encouraged and transformed. They—as an assembled people—are participants in the mission of God and are sent from the presence of God to minister in the kingdom.
    - i. God is an active participant in the assembly—he delights in his people, loves them, and communes with them (cf. Zephaniah 3:17). God is no mere spectator passively receiving worship.

Rather, he is an active transformer enjoying communion with his people.

- ii. The assembly is an assembly of God with his people and not simply an assembly of the people. It is a fully mutual experience between God and his people—both love and enjoy each other, and both share the same mission in the world.
3. Our assemblies are regulated by this gospel. Law does not regulate our assemblies, but the person, character and work of God in Jesus should shape our assemblies.
    - a. Church history has witnessed many divisions over worship style and practices. Much of this debate has been about “legalities” and authority.
    - b. The basic principle of the Christian journey is to “walk worthy of the gospel” and this includes our assemblies which are to reflect the glory of God in the world.
    - c. We regulate the assembly not by specifics of positive law (since Scripture does not give us any “positive” laws for worship), but regulate the assemblies so that they embody, experience and bear witness to the gospel of Jesus.
    - d. The “worship wars” of the last decades miss the point—it is not about which style is legal or illegal, but about which style best contextualizes the gospels for that the people who are assembled to enter the presence of God.

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Where do the saints assemble? How would understanding the “throne room” context of our assemblies change our attitudes toward the assembly? What attitudes should we have given our entrance into the Holy of Holies?
2. What happens in our assemblies? What is the essence of the assembly event?
3. How is God active in the assembly? What is God doing? Or, is he merely passive as we watches us assemble?
4. How is the assembly regulated? What makes the difference between a faithful assembly and an unfaithful one?

### **Text Readings:**

*A Gathered People*, 129-171.

## 19 Theology of Lord's Supper—Communing with God and Each Other

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 10:14-17

**Focus:** The Lord's Supper is Communion in the Gospel.

### Objectives:

1. To understand that communion is the central action of the Lord's Supper.
2. To understand that communion is both horizontal and vertical.
3. To experience communion as a divine act that constitutes many members as the one body of Christ.

### Teaching Points:

1. The table is a communion with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, the gospel of God.
  - a. Whatever the meaning of "this is my body" and "this is my blood," 1 Corinthians 10:16 characterizes its meaning as one of communion or participation or sharing.
  - b. To eat and drink is to share in the body and blood of Christ; it is an experience of the gospel. It may mean that we share in the benefits of the altar—we share the reality that the gospel enacts for us. We commune with God; we sit at table with God in peace and fellowship.
  - c. There is an active mutuality here—God communes with us through the blood and body of Christ and we commune with God through the bread and wine. God is not a spectator at his own table.
2. The table is a communion with each other through the gospel.
  - a. The table is as much horizontal (in relation to each other) in orientation as it is vertical (in relation to God). The two cannot be separated—communion with God is communion with each other.
  - b. This is the problem in 1 Corinthians 11.
    - i. There were divisions within the body, primarily between rich and poor (though there were other distinctions between believers in Corinth as well).
    - ii. They ate in such a way they denied the unity of the body; they denied their fellowship in the gospel. Consequently, what they ate was not the "Lord's Supper" but their own supper.
    - iii. The gospel unites believers, transcends distinctions of rich/poor, slave/free, Jew/Gentile, male/female. The table is a gospel table where these distinctions are inappropriate as they divide the table.
    - iv. The table should be a horizontal fellowship that is worthy of the gospel.

- c. The practice of the table must embody this horizontal fellowship. To ignore the communal dimension of the table is to deny the gospel.
3. The table visibly constitutes the unity of the church—a unity within the community of believers and a unity with Christ himself.
- a. The text affirms that because we all partake of the one bread that we are therefore one body. When the assembly eats from the same table, they give concrete witness to the oneness of the body. We, in some fashion, become the body of Christ in that visible act of eating and drinking together.
  - b. There is one bread and there is one body though we are many members. The one bread makes the many members one body.
  - c. This has implications for ethics within the community.
    - i. United with Christ we cannot unite with another table—the table of demons, an idolatrous table.
    - ii. United with Christ we constitute a community of people distinct from other communities. We cannot serve two masters.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Why do we so often experience the Lord's Supper as primarily or almost solely with God? And why is this communion with God often characterized as memory or cognitive? Is communion more than what happens in the mind?
2. Why has the Lord's Supper been so divisive in Christian history? What is it about our attitudes or understandings that are so divisive?
3. How can we enhance the horizontal or communal dimension of the Supper in our assemblies?

#### **Text Readings:**

*Come to the Table*, 101-113, 139-142, 151-158  
*A Gathered People*, 70-79.

## 20      **Divine Encounter—Sacramental Grace**

**Text:** Matthew 18:15-20.

**Focus:** God Transforms his People through “Holy Moments”

### **Objectives:**

1. To summarize some of the sacramental themes the series has discussed over the past weeks.
2. To correlate the three “sacraments” so that we see the relationship between them.
3. To emphasize the theocentric nature of these moments but at the same time their transformative and discipleship orientation.

### **Teaching Points:**

1. Assembly “into the name of Jesus” is assembly in the presence of Jesus who assures us of God’s good news for us (Matthew 18:15-20).
  - a. While the context of Matthew 18:15-20 is church discipline, the principle articulated in verses 19-20 is broader.
  - b. The principle is that whenever disciples are gathered “into the name of Jesus” (gathered as disciples devoted to following him, devoted to worshipping him) to pray (or worship), then Jesus is present among them. He is still Immanuel in their midst even though he is no longer present in the flesh.
  - c. The presence of Jesus is the divine assurance of God’s commitment to his people. God will answer prayer because Jesus is present.
2. Baptism is our entrance into this community of faith—our entrance into the fellowship of the divine community (Matthew 28:18-20).
  - a. Disciples are formed by baptism and teaching.
  - b. Baptism is described as “into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” The phrase “into the name” is the same as that found in Matthew 18:20. It signifies belonging, community, dedication and identification.
  - c. Through baptism we enter into a relationship with the divine community—we belong, we share the mission, and we dedication ourselves to the “name” (identity) of the Triune God. We become participants in the divine life.
3. The Table is our experience of the peace and communion of the divine community (Matthew 26:30).
  - a. We sit at the table with Jesus and eat with him (Matthew 26:29).
  - b. It is a kingdom table which involves covenantal relationship—it is a new covenant in the blood of Jesus (the gospel).

- c. This covenantal relationship is both our witness and commitment to the kingdom of God but also God's witness and commitment to us. The table bears witness to the grace of God among us and our willingness to participate in the gospel of suffering for the sake of the kingdom.
4. These are moments of gospel grace—the good news that God has renewed fellowship with his people.
    - a. He invites them into fellowship through baptism, gathers them to himself in assembly and eats with them at the table.
    - b. The Father reconciles us to himself through the good news of Jesus. This good news is given to us in concrete form through water, assembly and table.
    - c. These concrete moments assure us of God's presence, love and goal for us. In this sense, they are sacramental holy moments (cf. *A Gathered People*, 10-12, 141-143). They transform us and empower us for participation in God's kingdom mission.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the divine act in each of these sacraments? How is it transformational?
2. What is the human act in each of these sacraments? How is it missional?
3. What is the correlation between the three sacraments—how do they relate to each other?
4. Why has God give us such concrete, physical means to experience him?

**Text Readings:**

*A Gathered People*, 136-149

*Come to the Table*, 143-149

*Down in the River*, 167-177