

## Who Can Receive the Lord's Supper? An Argument for Close Communion

The question of “who is admitted to the Lord’s Table is the very core of polity.”<sup>1</sup> As Ligon Duncan explains, both ecclesiology “and the doctrine of the sacraments res[t] on a biblical-theological understanding of what constitutes the church.”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the way in which one puts together the biblical-theological storyline of Scripture has significant ramifications on one’s definition of the church. Though some may prefer the term, “ordinances,” Baptists agree with this assessment.

Historically, the right preaching of the Word and the right administration of the sacraments have been seen as defining marks of a true church.<sup>3</sup> While baptism is viewed as the entry sign into the church that is commanded by Christ as an external aspect of conversion (Matt 28:19-20), the Lord’s Supper is the continuing ordinance that marks off God’s people from the world (Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor 11:17-34).<sup>4</sup> Having emerged from the Separatistic movements of the Puritan era in England, Baptists have long thought of themselves as heirs of the Reformation. While some Baptist forebears (e.g., J. R. Graves) have leaned into a sectarian identity, in the main, the legacy of the Baptist movement has been that of carrying on the orthodox Christian and Reformation traditions with attention to the New Testament’s authority in all of life and specificity and clarity concerning the doctrine of the church.

Throughout Baptist history a tension exists between the impulse toward obedience to Scripture (Matt 28:19-20) and the desire for unity across denominations in which believers may believe in the same gospel of Christ yet disagree on secondary and tertiary doctrines (Rom 14:1-7; 1 Cor 12:13). The impulse to obey Scripture’s specific commands and examples has led Baptists to affirm that biblical baptism is rightly administered only to those who give some testimony and evidence of conversion to Christ (Acts 2:38, 41). And, the desire for unity has led some Baptists to encourage participation in the Lord’s Supper with believers who have not been biblically baptized (e.g., paedobaptists). The impulse to allow paedobaptists (and even those who have not experienced baptism in any mode) to participate in communion has come in opposition to the church’s historical practice that baptism (however biblically understood) should precede the Lord’s Supper as prerequisite to it.

The result of these impulses toward obedience to explicit commands on the one hand and unity on the other has resulted in four views of who may participate in the Lord’s Supper: (1) ecumenical communion; (2) open communion; (3) close communion; and (4) closed communion. Ecumenical communion normally refers to the view that all Christians should be received at communion in any given local Baptist church on the basis of a common process of initiation that

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, and Mez McConnell, “Church Polity? Really?” (Gospel Coalition National Conference: New Heaven & New Earth, Orlando, FL, 2015), [https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference\\_media/church-polity-really/](https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/conference_media/church-polity-really/). Throughout this dissertation, I will use the Lord’s Supper synonymously with *communion*, *the Table*, and *the Supper*.

<sup>2</sup> Dever, Duncan, and McConnell, “Church Polity? Really?”

<sup>3</sup> See chap. 26 in Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 565ff., Kindle. See also Robert Kolb, “The Church,” in *Reformation Theology: A Systematic Summary*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 577–608, Kindle.

<sup>4</sup> Keith A. Mathison, “The Lord’s Supper,” in Barrett, *Reformation Theology*, 643–74.

includes a profession of faith, baptism (by affusion, sprinkling, or immersion on a subject that may be an infant, a child, or an adult), and sometimes confirmation in some unspecified order. Open communion refers to the view that all believers are authorized to participate in the Lord's Supper in any given Baptist church by virtue of their common profession of faith (and, sometimes, given the credible evidence of a holy life).<sup>5</sup> Close communion refers to the view that only those who have been baptized as professing believers by immersion and are members in good standing of a church of like faith and order may participate in communion. Closed communion refers to the view that local church members only may participate in communion by virtue of their baptism upon a profession of faith in Christ.

In 2012, LifeWay surveyed 1,066 Baptist pastors regarding who may participate in the Lord's Supper.<sup>6</sup> LifeWay found that 4 percent did not specify who could participate, 4 percent allowed only members of the local church to participate, 5 percent allowed anyone who wants to participate, 35 percent allowed anyone baptized as a believer to participate, and 52 percent allowed anyone who has put their faith in Christ to participate. So, 61 percent of Southern Baptist pastors surveyed in 2012 allow unbaptized persons to receive the Lord's Supper, while ostensibly adhering to the close communion position of "The Baptist Faith and Message 2000" (BF&M). When one further considers the impact of the pandemic on the practice of the ordinances, close communion deserves a fresh articulation. This brief essay defends the close communion view. Yet, before providing that defense, historic arguments from each view are presented.

### **Ecumenical Communion**

While the impulse toward ecumenical communion is not new, some of the arguments promoted in favor of ecumenical communion are more recent. The strongest argument for ecumenical communion, and that which appears to have the most traction among Baptists friendly toward ecumenism, is the notion that Christians may claim a common process of initiation. If one's initiation to Christianity contains similar elements (e.g., belief, baptism, confirmation) even while the order of those elements may be different, churches should not quibble over the order. Instead, the churches should affirm each individual's journey of faith by inviting all to participate in the Lord's Supper together.<sup>7</sup> Having an open Table and open membership is the result of recognizing the commonalities in the process of initiation, recognizing that an individual or church's judgment about baptism could be wrong, and receiving those Christ has received.<sup>8</sup> Consistency then requires Baptist churches to decline

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<sup>5</sup> One distinction between ecumenical communion and open communion lies in the willingness of ecumenical communion advocates to affirm the validity of a mode and subject of baptism besides the immersion of a professing believer when that "baptism" is considered part of the larger process of initiation. See Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 379.

<sup>6</sup> Carol Pipes, "Lord's Supper: LifeWay Surveys Churches' Practices, Frequency," *Baptist Press*, September 17, 2012, <http://www.bpnews.net/38730/lords-supper-lifeway-surveys-churches-practices-frequency>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 13 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 155.

<sup>8</sup> Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 183.

baptizing those previously baptized as infants in order to avoid delegitimizing their initiation processes.<sup>9</sup>

Two other arguments for ecumenical communion deserve mention. Several of the authors seek to uphold believer's baptism by immersion and an ecumenically open Table by inviting any who choose to participate in communion to do so.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, they restrict baptism to professing believers whose lives display some level of discipleship. When making this argument, ecumenical communion advocates sometimes claim the Lord's Supper to be a converting ordinance. However, the authors also leverage Pauline texts, sacramental understandings of the ordinances, and the covenant-forming nature of the Lord's Supper to promote this argument.<sup>11</sup> With respect to Paul's injunction to participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, Paul is not arguing for "fixed boundaries" for who participates in communion. Instead, he "leaves open the possibility that individuals can enter the covenant" for the first time through sharing in the Lord's Supper.<sup>12</sup> If baptism can be a boundary marker between the church and the world while the Lord's Supper remains an open meal, the ecumenical view seems to allow for historical faithfulness to Baptist doctrine and an inclusive openness to a world in need of salvation.

Finally, the ecumenical communion advocates appeal to Jesus' meals with sinners and parables of banquets in the Gospels to make their case. Anthony Clarke explains, given the way Jesus receives the woman at Simon's house (Luke 14:1-14), "We see in Jesus someone who, rather than erecting fences, deliberately dismantles those erected by religious tradition."<sup>13</sup> Bringing together Jesus' shared meals with Paul's teaching "suggests that a radical invitation in our own celebration of communion might best proclaim the life and death of Jesus."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, ecumenical communionists have a strong case if, as they claim, Jesus' willingness to eat with sinners and his indiscriminate invitations to the final kingdom feast provide determinative instruction to churches on whom should be allowed to participate in the Lord's Supper. One cannot be swayed by their arguments without admitting that the biblical examples they marshal are intended not only to instruct churches on the availability of Christ's salvific work to all people who will believe, but also to give directives on how Christ's community is to relate to the world.

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<sup>9</sup> Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces*, 219.

<sup>10</sup> This statement and the discussion that follows is found in Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought 21 (Milton Keynes, England: Paternoster Press, 2008), 138–39.

<sup>11</sup> Anthony Clarke, "A Feast for All? Reflecting on Open Communion for the Contemporary Church," in *Baptist Sacramentalism 2*, ed. Anthony R. Cross and Philip E. Thompson, Studies in Baptist History and Thought vol. 25 (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 102. For a strikingly similar analysis of the same biblical texts for the purpose of encouraging a "radically inclusive table," see Robert William Canoy, "Perspectives on Eucharistic Theology: Luke as Paradigm for an Inclusive Invitation to Communion" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), 179–201.

<sup>12</sup> Clarke, "A Feast for All?" 105.

<sup>13</sup> Clarke, "A Feast for All?" 106.

<sup>14</sup> Clarke, "A Feast for All?" 106.

## Open Communion

Open communion enjoys a long heritage in Baptist life. Henry Jessey (1601-1663)—one of the earliest English Baptists and third pastor of the Jacob-Lanthrop-Jessey church—appears to be the earliest Baptist proponent of open communion.<sup>15</sup> His appeal to Romans 14 and 15—to urge fellow Baptists to receive those who were weak in the faith (lacking light in baptism) because Christ did not give a direct command prohibiting the unbaptized believer from communion—is picked up by every subsequent advocate of open communion. For Jessey, Christians are responsible to receive all those he has received “though they be so weak, as that they hold up such things to be God’s ordinances” (Rom 14:1).<sup>16</sup>

John Bunyan (1628-1688) and Robert Hall Jr. (1764-1831) are the ablest defenders of the open position. Bunyan’s arguments that visible sainthood is the ground of communion, that baptism is not a church ordinance or sign of entry into the church, and that the relationship between circumcision and Passover in the Old Testament encourages the practice of open communion each provide an informative background for this book. Bunyan writes, “Baptism [in water] makes thee no member of the church, neither particular or universal: neither doth it make thee a visible saint; it therefore gives thee neither right to nor being of membership at all.”<sup>17</sup> Robert Hall Jr.’s most notable arguments include (1) his claim that the pattern of the apostolic church should not be followed with respect to the ordinances because error was introduced subsequently<sup>18</sup> and (2) his claim that the local church should have no additional constituting properties besides that which constitutes the universal church. Hall writes, “No man or set of men, are entitled to prescribe as an indispensable condition of communion what the New Testament has not enjoined as a condition of salvation.”<sup>19</sup>

Stanley Fowler presents the surprising argument that despite baptism’s sacramental function in the New Testament, local churches may decide to prioritize the unity of the universal church above the doctrine of baptism.<sup>20</sup> While Charles Spurgeon (1834-1892) does not offer any unique theological argumentation for the open position, his practice demonstrates the open position taken to its logical conclusion, as he was willing to meet with small groups of believers in various places on holiday to celebrate the Lord’s Supper.<sup>21</sup> Daniel Turner (1710-1798)

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<sup>15</sup> The J-L-J church was founded in 1613 as an independent congregation of paedobaptists. The group eventually turned Baptist after 1645. Jason G. Duesing, *Henry Jessey: Puritan Chaplain, Independent and Baptist Pastor, Millenarian Politician and Prophet* (Mountain Home, AR: BorderStone Press, 2015), 187.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Jessey, *A Storehouse of Provision* (London: Charles Sumptner, 1650), 96.

<sup>17</sup> Bunyan, “A Reason of My Practice in Worship,” in *Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor (London: Blackie and Son, 1862), 2:605–6. Bunyan writes, “If baptism respect believers, as particular persons only; if it respects their own conscience only; if it make a man no visible believer to me, then it hath nothing to do with church-membership.” Bunyan, “Differences in Judgment about Water Baptism, No Bar to Communion,” 2:629.

<sup>18</sup> Robert Hall Jr., *On Terms of Communion* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1816), 39–41. See John R. Tyler, *Baptism: We’ve Got It Right and Wrong* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2003), 138–39.

<sup>19</sup> Hall Jr., *On Terms of Communion*, iv.

<sup>20</sup> Stanley K. Fowler, *More Than a Symbol: The British Baptist Recovery of the Baptismal Sacramentalism*, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* 2 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), xv.

<sup>21</sup> This sermon, “The Holy Spirit and the One Church,” was preached on December 13, 1857. See C. H. Spurgeon, *The New Park Street Pulpit* (n.p.: Osнова, 2012), sec. 3. para. 2, Kindle. Peter J. Morden, “*Communion with Christ and His People*”: *The Spirituality of C. H. Spurgeon* (Oxford: Regent’s Park College, 2010) 166.

grounded free communion in the fact that Jewish and Gentile Christians did not establish separate churches based upon the Jewish Christians' continued practice of circumcision.<sup>22</sup>

The strongest argument for open communion is the appeal to the lack of an explicit New Testament command that baptism precede communion. As Jessey writes, "We must limit what the Lord limits and not limit what he does not limit."<sup>23</sup> Open communion advocates have uniformly conceded their willingness to adopt close communion if they could be shown that Scripture requires it. Secondly, most of the authors appealed to Romans 14-15 for the arguments that Christians should receive all those Christ has received and to bear with the weak. If Paul intends this command to require local churches to receive Christians from outside their membership to the Lord's Supper despite issues of conscience regarding the ordinances, then this argument has weight. Third, if the Lord's Supper is given primarily to demonstrate unity amongst all Christians, open communion has a strong case. Fourth, the claim that to exclude a professing Christian from the Lord's Supper is to unchristian, or effectively to excommunicate the Christian, is a significant argument for open communion.<sup>24</sup> Open communion advocates have generally seen a direct connection between one's ability to receive the Lord's Supper and the sincerity of profession of faith in Christ, despite various views on baptism.

Two other arguments deserve mention, though most of the advocates of open communion have not espoused them. John Bunyan's claim that baptism is a personal matter rather than an initiating ordinance into the church, if true, should lead churches to practice open communion. If baptism has no connection to the local church and may be dismissed by those who do not feel compelled to be baptized without error or sin, no more debate would be required.

Finally, Robert Hall's argument that the New Testament principles, practices, and patterns are no longer applicable is significant. Hall admits that the New Testament presents new believers being baptized in Acts and assumes baptized believers compose the churches in the epistles. Yet, due to the incursion of error in the Patristic era, he is willing to tolerate paedobaptism, while claiming that the New Testament explicitly teaches believer's baptism by immersion.<sup>25</sup> The irony of Hall's position stems from the fact that his methodology would render moot any explicit New Testament commands for close communion—if one did exist—even while he appeals to the lack of such a command to justify his views. The fact that other open communion advocates have not generally followed either pastor's line of thought reveals that both arguments require caution.

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel Turner [Candidus], *A Modest Plea for Free Communion at the Lord's Table; Particularly between the Baptists and Poedobaptists in a Letter to a Friend* (London: J. Johnson in St. Paul's Church Yard, 1772).

<sup>23</sup> Jessey, *Storehouse of Provision*, 94.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Hall Jr., *A Reply to the Rev. Joseph Kinghorn*, 2nd ed. (London: Button and Son, 1818), 192–93.

<sup>25</sup> Van Neste makes a similar point, when he claims "The passage [Acts 2:41-42] does not speak to the issue where some believers understand baptism differently." Ray Van Neste, "The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Local Church," in *The Lord's Supper*, ed. Schreiner and Crawford, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology, vol. 10 (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 382.

## Closed Communion

Closed communion is closely associated with the nineteenth-century phenomenon among Baptists in America known as Landmarkism.<sup>26</sup> Not all pastor-theologians associated with Landmarkism have held to closed communion.<sup>27</sup> However, three significant arguments presented by the closed communion advocates below—which provide their distinctive emphasis in contrast to close communionists—are (1) the fact that the Lord’s Supper is a local church ordinance; (2) the coextensive relationship between the Lord’s Supper and church discipline; and (3) the relationship of the local church with its two signs of baptism and the Lord’s Supper to the kingdom of Christ.

J. R. Graves (1820-1893) argues that the Lord’s Supper is a local church ordinance because (1) each church possesses “absolute independence” under Christ;<sup>28</sup> (2) each church has sole guardianship of its ordinances (cf. 1 Cor 5:9-11);<sup>29</sup> (3) “all who can be entitled to the Supper must be subject to its discipline;”<sup>30</sup> and (4) the Lord’s Supper “symbolizes church relations” since apostolic times.<sup>31</sup> Opening the table beyond a local church’s membership causes the ordinance to no longer truly symbolize one body partaking of one bread; thus, the open table “vitiates and nullifies” the ordinance.<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, Graves argues that the connection between the Lord’s Supper and responsible church discipline requires closed communion. Those who do not practice closed communion are not able to properly guard the table, which is their divinely appointed charge.<sup>33</sup> He provides three points of explanation for this argument: (1) Christ has not given anyone the right to commune with a church that does not have “watch and care” over them; (2) Christ does not require that other churches open their tables to nonmembers, since participation in the meal itself “declares he is a member” (1 Cor 10:17); and (3) those churches that do invite nonmembers to commune “violate the command of Paul—to allow no disqualified person to participate,” given the moral certainty that such an occasion does arise when the table is opened. Furthermore, churches with more open tables act inconsistently when they exercise church discipline for any reason, because they do not know that someone worse than those they disciplined may be communing with them on any given week.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Three of its proponents have been labeled the “Landmark Triumvirate” for their common adherence to Landmark views—J. R. Graves, James Madison Pendleton (1811-1891), and Amos Cooper Dayton (1813-1865). Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology*, 213–17. J. M. Pendleton only considered two items essential: (1) the rejection of alien immersions and (2) the rejection of pulpit affiliation with paedobaptist ministers on account of their being unbaptized by immersion as believers. See Thomas White, “James Madison Pendleton and His Contributions to Baptist Ecclesiology” (PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 179.

<sup>27</sup> Although he is considered part of the Landmark Triumvirate, J. M. Pendleton held to close communion. Garrett Jr., *Baptist Theology*, 226. While Landmark theology lends itself to the closed communion view, it does not require it.

<sup>28</sup> J. R. Graves, *Intercommunion: Inconsistent, Unscriptural, and Productive of Evil*, 2nd ed., Baptist Distinctives 17 (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2006), 168.

<sup>29</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 174.

<sup>31</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 174.

<sup>32</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 270.

<sup>33</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 308.

<sup>34</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 309.

Thirdly, Graves makes much of the relationship between the church and the kingdom. He defines a local church as “a body of professed believers in Christ, scripturally baptized and organized, united in covenant to hold ‘the faith,’ and preserve the order of the gospel, and to be governed in all things by the laws of Christ.”<sup>35</sup> While the kingdom has no officers (save Christ the King) or ordinances, kingdom implies organization and visibility.<sup>36</sup> Given that all local, visible Baptist churches constitute the kingdom, Graves denies the existence of the kingdom in heaven during this age. Graves is unwilling to speak of all true Christians or all churches as the universal church, because this church never gathers. In this sense, he denies the existence of an invisible, universal church. If the New Testament speaks exclusively of the local church rather than the universal church, the Lord’s Supper “could not have been delivered as a denomination ordinance, but as a local church ordinance only.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Graves’ view of the local church’s relation to the kingdom negates the concept of intercommunion.

### Historical Arguments for Close Communion

This section briefly sketches some of the historical arguments for close communion from its chief proponents. Close communion also enjoys a long heritage in Baptist thought. Several early proponents of close communion include William Kiffin (1616-1701), Abraham Booth (1734-1806), Andrew Fuller (1754-1815), Joseph Kinghorn (1766-1832), and Thomas Baldwin (1753-1825).<sup>38</sup> Kiffin emphasizes that baptism serves as the pledge of covenant entry and initiating sign of identification with Christ, which by nature should precede the Lord’s Supper.<sup>39</sup> Booth emphasizes the regulative role of Scripture over all of the church’s worship practices and seeks to demonstrate hermeneutical and methodological faithfulness requires close communion. He writes, “Unless our opponents can make it appear, that they obtain the grant of a dispersion power to gospel ministers and churches . . . [that] authorizes the ministers of Christ to set aside an ordinance of his, or to invert the order of its administration as they may think it proper; they are far from answering the exigencies of their case” [for open communion].<sup>40</sup> Baldwin emphasizes that distinctions between the old covenant people of God and new covenant people of God lead to the close communion position.<sup>41</sup> Fuller emphasizes that Christ instituted the ordinances to occur together in connection to each other as positive institutions. Fuller does not refuse to partake of the Lord’s Supper with paedobaptists “because I consider them as improper subjects, but as attending to it *in an improper manner*.”<sup>42</sup> The impropriety stems from the fact that baptism and the Lord’s Supper appear to maintain an “instituted connection” in the New

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<sup>35</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 139.

<sup>36</sup> Similar to Graves is B. H. Carroll, *Baptists and Their Doctrines: Sermons on Distinctive Baptist Principles* (New York: Revell, 1913), 41-50.

<sup>37</sup> Graves, *Intercommunion*, 139.

<sup>38</sup> For a seminal survey of communion among the English Baptists, see Peter Naylor, *Calvinism, Communion, and the Baptists: A Study of English Calvinistic Baptists from the Late 1600s to the Early 1800s*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 7 (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> William Kiffin, *A Sober Discourse* (London: George Larkin, 1681), vi. The first pages of text in the section “To the Christian Reader” are not numbered. This statement is found on vi when counting the pages with text.

<sup>40</sup> Abraham Booth, *An Apology for the Baptists* (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1788). 93.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Baldwin, *The Baptism of Believers Only*, 2nd rev. ed. (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1806), 195–196.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Gunton Fuller, *Complete Works*, ed. Joseph Belcher (Harrisburg, PA: Sprinkle, 1988), 3:508

Testament similar to that between faith and baptism.<sup>43</sup> Kinghorn emphasizes that if the ordinances are mishandled, as is the case with a mixed communion of the baptized with the unbaptized, the constitution of the local church changes from that which Christ instituted. Kinghorn writes, “If obedience to a rite be not a term of salvation, (which no one supposes) yet it was ordered by the highest authority, as an evidence of our submission to the author of salvation,” Christian profession must require baptism.<sup>44</sup> Given these distinctions, it follows that “communion which required the profession of faith [during New Testament times] could not dispense with [baptism as that public profession].”<sup>45</sup> To change baptism’s function from the New Testament—visible connection to the church—is to change Christ’s design for the church.<sup>46</sup>

Close communion benefits from several significant arguments. First, several authors appeal to Christ’s authority to command baptism and the Lord’s Supper for his church. If the church practices open communion, it willingly neglects an ordinance of Christ—baptism—and thereby countervails Christ’s authority. What would keep a local church from dispensing with the Lord’s Supper as well if the same methodology continues? Second, baptism is presented theologically as the sign of entry and initiation into the (universal) church that is normally administered by a local church. This sign of entry is followed by the sign of continuation and nutrition—the Lord’s Supper. Thus, the meaning of the ordinances seems to require close communion. Third, believer’s baptism is a safeguard to regenerate church membership, which entails close communion. If a church allows paedobaptists to receive the Lord’s Supper on grounds that although in error the paedobaptist believes he is baptized, this practice allows a greater possibility of those who never profess faith in Christ joining the church and celebrating communion. Fourth, Baptists have historically argued that circumcision corresponds to baptism as a sign of entry into God’s covenant people.<sup>47</sup> Because circumcision was explicitly required for Passover, baptism should be understood as required for participating in the Lord’s Supper. Fifth, Fuller’s contention that Christ instituted baptism and the Lord’s Supper in connection entails that the order and meaning of the ordinances leads to a close communion position. Finally, Kinghorn’s emphasis on the constitutive nature of baptism for all professing Christians supports the close communion case. If baptism is Christ’s means of visible profession whereby the new Christian publicly identifies with the church, and the Lord’s Supper is an ordinance given specifically to local churches, baptism must precede communion.

### **Biblical-theological Argument for Close Communion**

In addition to the preceding arguments, this section argues that Baptist churches should practice close communion due to the close association of faith with baptism, the example of Acts 2:41, and a principle of continuity (analogy) between circumcision and Passover as compared to baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

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<sup>43</sup> Fuller, *FW*, 3:509.

<sup>44</sup> Joseph Kinghorn, *Baptism a Term of Communion at the Lord’s Supper*, 2nd ed. (Norwich, England: Bacon, Kinnebrook, 1816) 18.

<sup>45</sup> Kinghorn, *Baptism a Term of Communion*, 19.

<sup>46</sup> Kinghorn, *Baptism a Term of Communion*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Booth, *Apology*, 49-51.



## Baptism and Faith

Throughout the New Testament, baptism is closely associated with repentance and faith in Christ (i.e., conversion). In Acts 2:38, Peter commands those who would receive forgiveness of sins and the promised Holy Spirit to “repent and be baptized.”<sup>48</sup> Luke presents repentance, faith, and baptism as God’s means of internal and external appropriation of Christ’s saving work (cf. 2:41).<sup>49</sup> While it was the responsibility of those who repented and believed to submit to baptism, it was the responsibility of the disciples to baptize (Matt 28:18-20). The keys of the kingdom had been given to Peter as representative of the apostles (Matt 16:16-20) and were subsequently granted to the church (Matt 18:15-20), entailing the authority to proclaim the gospel and administer the sign of incorporation into the kingdom. Acts 8:12-13 continues the pattern of belief and baptism as the Samaritans and Simon the magician are baptized “when they believe” Philip’s gospel message. Arguments could be made for other examples of baptism occurring with or following belief in Acts, even with household situations (8:36; 9:18; 22:16; 10:47-48; cf. 11:15-18; 15:7-11; 16:14-15, 31-34; 19:1-6).<sup>50</sup> Crispus’ household is a clear case in which not only the head of the household, but also all the individual members of it, are said to have believed before their baptism (Acts 18:8). These examples clearly indicate that baptism was the assumed and expected response of all who would believe in Jesus.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stein argues convincingly that in the statement “repent and be baptized for (*eis*) the forgiveness of your sins,” *eis* is best understood as purposive. His two most helpful comparative examples are (1) “Repent therefore and turn back, that (*eis*) your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19) and (2) “my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for (*eis*) the forgiveness of sins” (Matt 26:28). For those concerned that this interpretation leads to baptismal regeneration, he adds, “The desire to refute a mechanistic understanding of baptism that leads to the error of baptismal regeneration need not cause us to divide and separate in time and intent these two components of the conversion experience that are intimately associated by and the NT.” Robert H. Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts,” in *Believer’s Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ*, ed. Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, vol. 2, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2006), 49–50.

<sup>49</sup> Faith is included in this list because Luke identifies the group who responded positively as “all who believed” in v. 44. Allison writes, “The efficient cause, or the only ground, of salvation, is God’s gracious, redemptive work in Jesus Christ; his death and resurrection accomplished salvation for sinful human beings. The instrumental cause, or the means, of salvation, is (according to this verse) repentance and baptism; turning from sin and expressing this act by submitting to baptism is the way of appropriating the salvation accomplished . . . by Jesus Christ. Accordingly, the immersion of a repentant woman in water does not save her; it is not and cannot be necessary as the grounds of her salvation. Rather, ‘repentance baptism’ is the means by which she embraces the forgiveness of sins that Christ has provided for her.” Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 359.

<sup>50</sup> For example, in Cornelius’ case, (1) Peter explains the need to baptize the household based on the whole household’s receiving of the Holy Spirit (11:15; cf. 10:45-46) and belief in Jesus akin to the disciples’ belief on the day of Pentecost (11:17); (2) the Jerusalem church’s response to Peter’s account that God granted Gentiles (all who received the Spirit and were subsequently baptized) repentance unto life (11:18); and (3) Peter’s subsequent explanation in Acts 15: “God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe” (v. 7). He further explains “God . . . bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit . . . [and] cleansed their hearts by faith” (vv. 8-9). For more on examples in Acts, see Dallas Wayne Vandiver, “An Argument for Close Communion in Baptist Life” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2020), 167-71.

<sup>51</sup> For further refutation of the argument that household baptisms in Acts included infants, see Robert L. Saucy, *The Church in God’s Program* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 200–2. For arguments against infant baptism more generally, see G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 357–78.

Baptism commonly accompanies other Lukan descriptions of responses to the gospel—such as repentance (2:38; 11:17; cf. 10:43-48), faith/belief (8:12-13; 18:8; 15:9; cf. Acts 10:43-48), and calling on the name of Jesus (2:38; 22:16). These combinations suggest that when Luke does not mention baptism occurring with any of these other responses, it is still reasonable to assume the believers were baptized (13:12, 48; 14:1, 21; etc.).<sup>52</sup>

Throughout Paul’s writings, he consistently assumes that all the believers who compose the churches to whom he writes are baptized. Paul grounds his appeal for unity to the Ephesians in their common faith, consisting of “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (4:5). In Galatians 3:26, Paul assumes that “all” the “sons of God through faith” “were baptized into Christ,” and, as a result of that faith-baptism, “have put on Christ” (v. 27). Thus, Paul assumes that if one has not been baptized into Christ, one has not put on Christ. In Galatians 3, baptism is the external means by which the believer enters and demonstrates a derivative union with those who are united to Christ (v. 28).

Paul assumes the Colossians were baptized when he describes their salvation in terms of a circumcision of Christ (2:11), baptism, resurrection through faith (v. 12), new life, and forgiveness (v. 13). Some of the Corinthians experienced physical baptism in water at Paul’s hands and some from the hands of other evangelists as part of their conversion (1 Cor 1:13-17). Although Paul did not baptize all those who composed the church at Corinth, he declares that he and they were “were all baptized into one body . . . and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (12:13).<sup>53</sup> As Schreiner and Moo argue, although water baptism and Spirit baptism are distinct, the New Testament presents them as internal and external aspects of conversion.<sup>54</sup> Thus, being “baptized into one body” should be understood to include water baptism.

Finally, although Paul had not visited Rome or met those who composed the church there, he grounds his argument for their progressive pursuit of righteous living in their common experience of baptism. He explains, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (Rom 6:3). By this statement, he assumes that any who are not baptized have not died with Christ (v. 5). Then, Paul claims that he and the Roman Christians were baptized: “we were buried therefore with him by baptism, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (v. 4). The association of water baptism with initiation into salvation makes clear that only those who personally trusted in Christ were baptized.<sup>55</sup> The evidence also demonstrates that all those to whom Paul wrote were baptized. As such, Paul has no category for an unbaptized Christian.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Stein, “Baptism in Luke-Acts.” Whereas the argument above is an implication from clear examples, the household baptism argument for infant baptism is based on a presumed continuity with the old covenant inclusion of children.

<sup>53</sup> The question of whether water baptism, Spirit baptism, or both are in view is considered below.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 373–74. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 355.

<sup>55</sup> Gal 3:26-27 shows that all who were baptized had exercised faith. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 375.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel L. Akin, “The Meaning of Baptism,” in *Restoring Integrity in Baptist Churches*, ed. Thomas White, Malcolm B. Yarnell III, and Jason G. Duesing (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2008), 70.

**Acts 2:41**

The example of Acts 2:41 is important to consider for the close communion debate. Acts 2:41-42 presents the order as it occurred in history: proclamation of the gospel, receiving/believing/repenting, being baptized, being added to the church, and participating in the breaking of bread (the Lord's Supper) together with the church. This essay contends that this order in history is exemplary of the order in which these elements should normally occur until Christ comes. The connection of baptism and the Lord's Supper together in Acts 2:41-42 is significant for understanding the nature of the church. As Beasley-Murray explains, "It follows logically that the fellowship with the exalted Lord, that includes within itself a cultic act like the Lord's Supper, is also founded through a cult act like baptism." The fellowship of those who renounced their sinful "killing of God's Messiah" is fostered and represented in the new community's regular practice of breaking bread together.<sup>57</sup>

It is hermeneutically valuable to distinguish those aspects of the formation of the church in Acts 2 that are unique in redemptive history and merely descriptive from those aspects that may contain unique elements but remain prescriptive for the church until Christ returns. While Acts describes several unique events in redemption history and the history of the church after Pentecost (e.g., tongues, rushing wind, in Jerusalem, etc.), several aspects of the account are viewed as binding on the church throughout the new covenant age. Given their redemptive historical uniqueness, the descriptive aspects are not binding, though they remain instructive.

At the same time, Luke describes several aspects of the formation of the church in Acts in ways that signal their prescriptive nature for the church until Christ returns. These binding aspects are at least (1) the proclamation of the gospel message is essential to the existence of the church; (2) the required, saving response to the gospel normally includes repentance, receiving the word/belief, and baptism; (3) those who are converted to the church by these means should normally be added to an existing local church;<sup>58</sup> and (4) the practices to which the early church devoted themselves are essential marks of a church: apostles' teaching (now found in Scripture), fellowship, the breaking of bread/Lord's Supper, prayer, and the principle of generosity among the community.<sup>59</sup> If these activities are descriptive and prescriptive, then, it stands to reason that the order—conversion (repentance/belief/baptism), reception into the church fellowship by that baptism, followed by the Lord's Supper—would remain normative as well. The church at Corinth appears to corroborate the normativity of the order of covenant signs: (1) Crispus' entire household with some Gentiles were baptized upon their belief in Paul's gospel message (Acts 18:8; 1 Cor 1:14) and (2) Paul delivered the Lord's teaching, including instruction on and practice of the Lord's Supper for a year and a half to the baptized church at Corinth (Acts 18:9-10; 1 Cor 11:23).

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<sup>57</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament*, 98–99. A "cultic act" in this context is a general reference to an act of worship.

<sup>58</sup> Schnabel summarizes the relationship of these first three aspects to the church by stating that Acts 2:42-47 "shows that part and parcel of this public commitment to faith in Jesus was integration into the community of local believers in Jesus." Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts, Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 187.

<sup>59</sup> Several scholars generally treat these descriptive aspects of the church as normative. See Schnabel, *Acts*, 185. Keener, *Acts*, 1:988–91. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 155n89.

## **Biblical-theological Principle of Continuity**

Finally, the principle of continuity (analogy) from the relation of the signs of entry to the signs of participation, taken with the prior New Testament data, provides sufficient warrant to conclude that baptism should precede the Lord's Supper. Briefly demonstrating this argument requires three steps: (1) consideration of the functions and relation of the covenant signs of circumcision and Passover; (2) consideration of the way the old covenant signs point to Jesus; and (3) and a presentation of the way the continuities of the covenant signs suggest a continuing principle that the sign of covenant entry should precede the sign of participation.

**Circumcision and Passover.** God gave circumcision as a covenant sign to Abraham after the establishment of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1-3; 15). By providing the sign of circumcision, God "sealed the righteousness that Abraham had by faith beforehand" (Rom 4:11). By circumcising his male offspring, Abraham signaled his faithfulness to the covenant to receive God's blessings and walk blamelessly (Gen 17:1, 9-14), signaled the inclusion of the offspring and/or member of the household in the covenant (v. 14), and signaled devotion to the Lord as God's people and representatives of God to the nations (cf. Gen 1:26; 17:3-7, 16; Exod 19:5-6). God's method of applying circumcision to infants structurally institutionalized the mixed nature of Abraham's biological descendants as a community of believers and unbelievers.

At the first Passover-exodus event, in order to establish the Mosaic covenant, the Lord gave specific instructions that only the circumcised (and the families represented by them) could participate in the Passover meal. Exodus 12:43 states, "This is the statute of the Passover: no foreigner shall eat of it, 44 but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. . . . 48 If a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised. Then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native of the land. But no uncircumcised person shall eat of it." This law serves as part of the ground for the biblical-theological a principle that the sign of entry should precede the sign of participation. Although the institution of Passover as a sign of participation in God's people was new at the time of the exodus, circumcision retained its role as a sign of entry. By allowing the inclusion of foreigners in the feast, circumcision was the means of outwardly demonstrating an "inward commitment to [Yahweh] and Israel."<sup>60</sup> Passover demonstrated ongoing participation in the blessings of God's people. The first Passover was instituted as a unique event with instructions for continued participation as a covenant meal for God's people (12:1-30; 13:1-16).

Several points should be noted regarding the significance of circumcision and Passover after the establishment of the Mosaic covenant (Exod 19-24). While continuing as a required physical sign of inclusion and devotion to God and his people, the Pentateuch and the Prophets utilize circumcision typologically in two ways. First, as Wellum explains, the nation that God would bring from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, Judah, and David would not yield a blameless and obedient covenant partner until Christ. As such, "every male offspring of Abraham . . . was a type of Christ and thus anticipated his ultimate coming."<sup>61</sup> As the sign of entry then,

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<sup>60</sup> Garrett, *Exodus*, 366.

<sup>61</sup> Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 701.

circumcision functioned typologically to mark off from the surrounding nations biological, national Israel in expectation of the promised Messiah. Second, circumcision of the heart is a typological reality. Circumcision appears with unexpected referents—lips (Exod 6:12, 30), fruit (Lev 19:23-25), and ears (Jer 6:10).<sup>62</sup> God’s requirement of a circumcised heart (Deut 10:16) and his eschatological promise to provide a circumcised heart in connection with a prophet like Moses (30:6; cf. 18:15; Lev 26:41) suggests that (1) “foreskinned hearts” is a metaphor for hearts that are sinfully unable to produce loving obedience to God and (2) circumcised hearts are those in which the Lord has sovereignly acted to remove the obstacle to loving obedience (Jer 4:1-4; 9:25-26; 31:33; Ezek 16:60; 18:31). Thus, circumcision points to Christ in terms of biological and national descent from Abraham as the ultimate seed (Gal 3:16) and in terms of Christ’s new covenant work on human hearts (Col 2:12).

Five celebrations of Passover are recorded in the Old Testament: (1) in the wilderness (Num 9:1-14); (2) just before entering the Promised Land (Josh 5:1-12); (3) in the kingdom under Hezekiah (2 Chron 30:1-18); (4) under Josiah (35:1-19; 2 Kgs 23:21-23); and (5) post-exile (Ezra 9:9-12).<sup>63</sup> Passover’s role as a sign of participation in the covenant is evidenced by the common occurrence of covenant renewal with the Passover celebrations. All five instances either state explicitly or suggest that the Lord’s command that only the circumcised participate was upheld, without counter evidence. In sum, the command of Exodus 12:42-48—the sign of entry precede the sign of participation—is corroborated by a pattern of obedience to the command throughout the Old Testament. In terms of biblical-theological trajectory, from the first Passover, God established the event as a type of Christ’s ultimate sacrificial death in the place of not only the firstborn, but all who trust in Jesus (Luke 22:16-20; John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).

**Covenant Signs and Christ.** The Old Testament data helps situate the relation of the old covenant signs to Christ. As Wellum explains, Christ came as the last Adam (Luke 3:38), the antitype of Israel (Matt 2:15; cf. Exod 4:22-23), and David’s royal Son (2 Sam 7:12-16). After millennia of waiting for a faithful covenant partner who would walk blamelessly before the Lord (Gen 17:1-2) and fully obey the Mosaic law, Christ came. As a circumcised Jewish male in the line of David, Jesus embodies Israel’s corporate and ethnic national identity and fulfills the typological expectation of a seed of Abraham who would bless the nations.<sup>64</sup> Thus, Paul describes Jesus as the seed/offspring to whom all the promises made to Abraham were intended (Gal 3:16). Christ is the one with whom the new covenant is made. Jesus’ words of institution before the Last Supper indicate that the meal he instituted inaugurated the new covenant,<sup>65</sup> upon

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<sup>62</sup> By describing each of these as uncircumcised, the text refers to a spiritual impurity or lack of ability to produce faithfully. See DeRouchie, “Circumcision in the Hebrew Bible and Targums,” 194–96; Fuller, *The Unity of the Bible*, 366–67.

<sup>63</sup> A significant eschatological mention of Passover is also present in Ezek 44:7-9 and 45:21.

<sup>64</sup> Wellum, “Relationship between the Covenants,” 127–35; Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 133–46; DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets,” 454–55. Contra Malone, *The Baptism of Disciples Alone*, 32. As a covenantal Baptist, Malone argues that the church is the typological fulfillment of Israel.

<sup>65</sup> More precisely, “The actual death and resurrection of Jesus . . . inaugurates the new covenant.” Yet, “it is the reflection upon” the death and resurrection of Christ “in the Lord’s Last Supper that explains and exposit the meaning of those yet to happen events.” Pennington, “Lord’s Supper in the Gospels,” 53.

his covenant ratifying shedding of blood the following day (Matt 26:29; Exod 24:8; Heb 9:18-22). As the typological fulfillment of the nation of Israel and the one through whom all the promises find their *telos* (2 Cor 1:20), Christ himself serves as the human partner and true Israelite and Davidic representative of “the house of Israel and the house of Judah” with whom the new covenant is made (cf. Jer 31:31). As the mediator, head, and sacrificial means of inaugurating the new covenant, Christ is able to extend the spiritual blessings promised to Abraham to all who come to Christ by faith (Gal 3:29). The church’s redemptive-historical newness comes as a result of its covenantal union with Christ.<sup>66</sup>

The methodological order of types that are fulfilled in Christ through his new covenant work and extended to the church via union with Christ is important to a right consideration of the ordinances. The new covenant blessings of heart circumcision and Spirit baptism are integrally related to the new covenant signs, because baptism and the Lord’s Supper function to visibly constitute the new structure and nature of new covenant community. Baptism visibly presents the community’s new nature and constitutes the church as a regenerate community in its new structure (i.e., not a mixed community of believers and unbelievers as in the old covenant; see Acts 2:38-42; cf. Titus 3:5). One function of water baptism is to externally mirror baptism with the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13). The Lord’s Supper is the meal in which all the new covenant blessings are celebrated, encouraged, and deepened.<sup>67</sup> In a similar way to baptism, the Lord’s Supper visibly celebrates the new nature of the new covenant community—the church. But the meal does more.

First Corinthians 10:16 teaches that the Lord’s Supper is a means of participation (*koinonia*) with the body and blood of Christ. Verse 17 says, “We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” According to verse 17 then, the Lord’s Supper visibly constitutes the group of believers who regularly eat the meal together as a local church, one body, and as a local manifestation of the universal body of Christ.<sup>68</sup> The unity manifest in the Lord’s Supper is derivative of the prior union with Christ. The old covenant people of God came to be God’s people by being baptized in their covenant mediator—Moses—and drinking from Christ (typified in the rock; 1 Cor 10:4-5). Similarly, the new covenant people of God come into union with Christ, and derivatively with his people, through the new birth and Spirit baptism that is signified in water baptism (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26). The new covenant community then demonstrates, concretizes, and manifests its covenantal union with Christ and each other by participating in the Lord’s Supper together (1 Cor 11:17-34).

**Principle of Continuity (Analogy).** The one text in the New Testament that explicitly connects circumcision to baptism is Colossians 2:11-12. Paul explains “In [Christ] also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God.” John Meade argues that the “verb plus participle” syntax in “you were circumcised . . . having been buried in baptism” presents baptism

<sup>66</sup> As Christ’s people, this “ideal Israel” receives all the benefits that flow from their covenantal connection to Christ. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 645-46.

<sup>67</sup> Billings, *Remembrance, Communion, and Hope*, 18–19.

<sup>68</sup> Turley, *The Ritualized Revelation of the Messianic Age*, 172.

as having “an elaborative role to the action of the main verb.” In other words, “heart circumcision is the overarching biblical category in which baptism is subsumed.”<sup>69</sup> As such baptism is not the antitype of circumcision of the heart.<sup>70</sup> Instead internal, circumcision of the heart in Christ is the antitype of physical circumcision. Paul does not tie heart circumcision to faith as he does baptism (vv. 11-12). So, “Baptism through faith elaborates or works out the inner circumcision of the heart.”<sup>71</sup>

Not only does the theology of baptism already presented demonstrate its function as the new covenant sign of entry, but Paul also presents baptism as analogous to circumcision in the function of signifying covenantal entry. Both circumcision and baptism function to mark off the people of God from the world. Whereas circumcision typologically pointed to Christ and the new covenant heart-changing work he would accomplish, baptism reflectively elaborates on the realization of heart circumcision in a believer. The way Paul compares the two signs, combined with the biblical-theological necessity that covenant signs be visible and the relation of baptism to faith suggests that baptism and not faith (or heart circumcision) is the sign of entry to the new covenant.

This flow of thought does not require that baptism and circumcision are analogous in every respect. Because baptism is reflective of the reality of heart circumcision rather than a prospective sign of its future realization, circumcision and baptism also share too many discontinuous aspects to be outlined here. For example, while both signs are initiating oath signs, the agent of the oath symbolized by circumcision was God with respect to the promises to Abraham and the father who circumcised his child with respect to the promise toward God to walk before the Lord faithfully (Gen 17:1; except in cases where a foreigner voluntarily joined the covenant community; Exod 12:43-48).

Significant for close communion though, with the inauguration of the new covenant (Luke 22:19), all members of the covenant have their sins forgiven (Jer 31:33-34), their hearts circumcised, and the permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit by virtue of union with Christ (Acts 2:38; John 3:5; Titus 3:5; Eph 1:13). Thus, only these new covenant members—believers—should be baptized (Acts 2:38, 41). This covenantal continuity appears sufficient then to establish that circumcision and baptism are analogous signs in their covenantal functions as signs of entry to their respective covenants.

Notable among the arguments against close communion is the charge that while the Jewish law required circumcision as prerequisite to Passover, the New Testament nowhere enjoins this rule upon the church.<sup>72</sup> This essay argues that no such rule is required to establish the expectation that baptism should precede the Supper. Instead, the biblical-theological function of covenant signs, when combined with the assumption that believers are baptized in order to enter the church, demonstrates sufficient continuity between the signs of initiation and the signs of

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<sup>69</sup> Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart,” 150.

<sup>70</sup> Samuel C. Emadi and Aubrey Sequeira, “Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 24.

<sup>71</sup> Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart,” 151; Schreiner, “Baptism in the Epistles,” 78–79.

<sup>72</sup> Robert Hall Jr., *On Terms of Communion: With a Particular View to the Case of the Baptists and Paedobaptists* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1816), 34–35; Gregg R. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 403.

participation to warrant the conclusion of close communion.<sup>73</sup> Baptism should precede communion as prerequisite to it in order for the covenant functions and signatory significance to be upheld in the new covenant.

### Conclusion

The biblical impulses of obedience to Christ and unity with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ are each important. It is hoped that this essay encourages both: obedience to all that Christ commands and a unity that is grounded in Christ. A spiritual union exists among all who are in Christ, which should be encouraged and deepened in so far as possible. Yet, Christians recognize spatial/geographical impediments to the practical and institutional of all believers are unavoidable: all believers cannot participate in the Lord's Supper together at the same time until the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-10). This essay understands that wherever disagreement exists over secondary theological issues, further institutional disunity will be inevitable. It is hoped that this inevitability will in no way demoralize efforts toward a charitable catholicity of spirit.

This essay argues that Scripture provides sufficient warrant to conclude that close communion is biblical: the sign of entry should precede the sign of participation as prerequisite to it. Absent a New Testament command for close communion, calling open communion sin appears overly strong. Yet, close communion Baptists believe themselves to be unfaithful to Scripture's teaching on the ordinances without close communion. While the Lord's Supper is a sign of unity *for* the universal church—all who are united to Christ should regularly participate in the meal—the Lord's Supper is not given *to* the universal church per se. Rather, the significance of sharing the one bread together entails covenantal responsibilities of encouragement, love, and accountability (1 Cor 5:7-11; 11:17-21; 31-34). The former principle grounds the openness of any given local church to offer the Lord's Supper to baptized believers in their midst (1 Cor 12:13). The latter principle grounds the claim that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance to be administered by the local church, as an embassy of Christ's kingdom (Matt 18:15-20; 1 Cor 5:4, 11; cf. Matt 16:16-20). Thus, closed communion appears biblically unwarranted though close communion is warranted.

Unity in the gospel should be sufficient to grant grace to those with whom we disagree, even while we refuse to compromise conviction. The pastor who graciously fences the Table by inviting "all those who have been baptized as believers and are members of an evangelical church of like faith and practice" to participate is not being unloving. Instead, he seeking to uphold all that Scripture teaches regarding the soteriological association and ecclesial function of the new covenant signs.

Ligon Duncan is correct: "the question of who is admitted to the Lord's Table is the very core of polity." It is hoped that this essay will better equip pastors and church members with a convictional theology and practice of the new covenant signs, will lead to humble and fruitful conversations with believers from other denominations, and will embolden Southern Baptists to practice close communion that is affirmed in our statement of faith: "Christian baptism is the

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<sup>73</sup> Finn presents this point briefly in Nathan Finn, "Baptism as a Prerequisite to the Lord's Supper," White Paper 9, baptisttheology.org. (Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Ft. Worth, TX: The Center for Theological Research, 2006), 6.



immersion of a believer in water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. . . .  
Being a church ordinance, it is prerequisite to the privileges of church membership and to the  
Lord's Supper.”