

Preaching Communion Remembrances: Going Back to the Biblical Worldview, not Beyond it, in Covenant Remembering¹

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Good morning. I am Richard Ostella pastor of Westminster Reformed Church, which meets on the campus of MTS in Plymouth, Michigan. My topic is “Preaching communion remembrances: going back to the biblical worldview, not beyond it, in covenant remembering.” Let me begin with an introduction.

Introduction

The “going beyond the Bible” discussion is about application, the application of Scripture to our lives in our contemporary setting. Preaching is on the cutting edge of application, and preaching the remembrances of Christ is the point of the gospel sword wielded in preaching. The task of the pastor-teacher today, based on sola scriptura, is to proclaim the apostolic message seeking to contextualize the *listeners*; the task is to immerse them in the context of apostolic doctrine. This paper argues for a method in which the historical-redemptive movement from OT to NT has priority in order to give preeminence to Christ in preaching.

Specifically, I want to orient this discussion to the fragmentation problem of focus on Christ that occurs when the communion service comes after regular worship limiting the precious time to a few minutes. Then the task at communion, for both preachers and listeners, becomes refocusing with split focus.² It is a structural problem to have the regular sermon *then* communion. The solution to this problem is preaching communion remembrances *within* communion.³

This discussion will unpack the suitcase of preaching communion remembrances (PCR) by argumentation, explanation, and application. Then we can make some concluding remarks.

1A. Argumentation

Here is the argument in a nutshell. The words of institution call for covenant remembering with special focus on Christ at the Table. Covenant remembering includes reflection on the history of redemption centered on the Passover, and explanation of that history by heads of the households of faith who bring treasures new and old out of the storehouse of kingdom truth. *Therefore, pastors should preach sermons that focus on Christ in a distinct way whenever the church gathers for communion.*⁴ A number of steps unpack this argument.⁵

Support step 1: remembering at the Table is covenant remembering

For example, the “remembrance Psalms” (i.e. 78, 105, and 106) exemplify covenant remembering and they do so in a way that applies directly to communion.⁶ These Psalms center on the redemptive action of God, the death of the firstborn of Egypt (Ps. 78.51; 105.36), and the call to the people of God to remember His works, to not forget them as they have done so often (cf. Ps. 78.35-38).⁷ The remembrance Psalms support the case for PCR by showing that when Jesus says, “This cup is the new *covenant* in my blood, do this in *remembrance* of me,” He tells us to *engage covenant remembering* at communion, which must involve something much more extensive than the remembering that takes place *after* the sermon. We have to spend time on the history of God’s work through Israel as it has now come to fruition in His work through the *new* Israel, the Lord Jesus.⁸ Furthermore, due to our proneness to wander in thought and due to our forgetfulness,⁹ the minister ought to guide communion reflection.¹⁰ This leads to support step 2.

Support step 2: remembering at the Table includes Passover explanation

Spending time remembering (guided by the head of the household) was part of the Passover, the old covenant anticipation of new covenant communion (cf. Ex. 12.14, 26).¹¹ During Passover, the leader of worship was responsible to explain the meaning of the symbolic partaking of the sacrificed lamb. Now we have the reality of the new wine and the new wineskin of the Christian Passover.¹² In the new covenant administration of the Passover, the head of the household of faith is to proclaim the death of the Passover Lamb in the freshness of a post-resurrection perspective (cf. Mat 13.52).¹³

Support step 3: remembering at the Table involves proclamation

Paul tells us that in communion we “proclaim” the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11.26). This fact suggests the reasonable inference that preaching is to guide remembering.¹⁴

Support step 4: remembering at the Table follows the example of Christ

A number of things work together in the support for preaching during communion from the example of Christ. 1) The reference to “this Passover” (Lk 22.15) helps us see that at the table of institution, Jesus was in the process of transforming Passover into the new covenant meal. 2) “Doing” Passover includes covenant explanation (Ex 12.26; Ex. 24.1-11).¹⁵ 3) The Gospel of John indicates that the covenant explanation that Jesus gave at the Passover of transition focused on His coming humiliation.¹⁶ Together these threads give us the fabric of preaching the remembrances as part of new covenant Passover for which Jesus paved the way by His example.¹⁷

In summary of this argument, to do justice to covenant remembering, by Passover explanation, in the form of sermon proclamation, following the example of Christ, *we must spend time in covenant remembering in each communion service*¹⁸ by preaching communion remembrances.¹⁹

Some initial implications emerge from this argument.

1) First, preaching at the Table is a window into how we are to apply the word of God in the time between the comings of Christ. Everything centers on Christ as the new wine of fulfillment. The trajectory of the historical-redemptive movement from promise to fulfillment culminates in Him and thus in the gospel that He gave through His apostles as the foundation of the church (Mat 16.18; Eph 2.20; cf. Ridderbos, *History of Redemption and NT Scriptures*).

2) In turn, second, all application derives from understanding the apostolic foundation. By refuting those who contradict the outline of sound words, ministers are to engage in covenant explanation to bring the church into the context of the movement from promise to fulfillment. In contrast to a “synergistic-developmental model,”²⁰ this is a “historical-redemptive-logical model.” Emphasis is on movement in the history of redemption as critical to understanding the coming of the kingdom in which we now live until the harvest (Mat 13.36-43).

3) Here, third, we must handle the questions of the transcultural versus the cultural as questions of historical-redemptive movement of OT promise to NT fulfillment, and within the NT, of movement from apostolic foundation laying to the post-apostolic church that rests on *that* foundation.

4) Preaching communion remembrances itself is not a theological development that arises from a trajectory that extends beyond the NT to have “a more significant Christian theology and a truer Christian ethic than even the earliest believers in Jesus.”²¹ Instead, it arises from working out the logical implications of a historical-redemptive trajectory that culminates in the NT as the apostolic foundation that Christ gave to the church for the time between His comings.²²

2A. Explanation

Three things guide explanation of PCR in relation to the sacrament. Communion is a preaching rite, it is a means of grace, and it involves a philosophy of preaching.

1) Communion is a preaching rite

If we preach communion remembrances, then at communion, we will not speak of word *and* sacrament suggesting in a subtle way that they are separate things simply conjoined however closely.²³ Better: we will speak of word *within* the sacrament. That is, observing communion includes preaching. Preached word and enacted symbol constitute the sacrament. When the worship service begins with PCR, the minister can announce that the church is now at the Table. Thus, *in a sacrament, the gospel is preached in word and deed*. We do not have preaching on one hand and the sacrament on the other.²⁴ Within the sacrament, we have the conjunction of preached word and symbolic action; we do not restrict the sacrament to the ritual partaking of the elements.²⁵ *PCR is one component of communion and the symbolic action is another.*²⁶

2) Communion is a means of grace

It is such by the intertwining of word and symbol. We taste the gospel that we hear when the physical elements of bread and wine pointedly direct our focus to the body and blood of Christ as life-giving nourishment. We also hear what we taste when preaching proclaims the person of Christ in terms of His work in humiliation and exaltation.²⁷

Thus, God uses preaching in conjunction with symbolic action to bless His people *by faith and for the strengthening of faith*²⁸ with nothing *ex opere operato*.²⁹ Therefore, preaching at communion counters a subtle mysticism that may be present in the two or three minutes of remembering in the commonly practiced fragmented pattern. Furthermore, preaching the remembrances does an end run around the real presence debate by focusing not on how Christ is present *in the elements*, but on how He is present *in the sacrament as a whole*: by the Spirit working with word and deed proclamation.³⁰

3) Communion implies a philosophy of preaching

If we preach communion remembrances, then the preaching will have a distinct focus, namely, *preaching Christ in a distinct way not done in regular preaching*. Preaching during communion is a distinct kind of preaching, or better, it involves preaching Christ in a distinct, special, and focused way. Some examples may help clarify the philosophy of preaching presupposed by communion preaching.

a) First, preaching that stirs up the mind about the Law, how to avoid worry, the duty of forgiving, and so forth, is different from preaching that stirs up the mind in remembrance of Jesus Himself.³¹ Therefore, we can state that there is a proper distinction between regular preaching that goes in thought in one direction to which Jesus points us (to the Law, how to avoid worry, the duty of forgiveness, etc.) and communion preaching that goes in thought in another direction to which Jesus points us (to Himself)³² Of course, we must preach Christ in every sermon, but every sermon does not preach Christ in the same way.

b) Regular weekly preaching through the book of Romans, for a second example, is comparable to viewing and constructing a superstructure of a building that has *Christ as the foundation of every structural member, and all is ultimately viewed in relation to Him as the foundation*.³³ Thus, in communion we must concentrate on the historical Jesus of the Gospels, the Lord Jesus of redemptive history, the risen Lord Jesus, Sabbath king, and universal sovereign.³⁴

c) Third, in connection with the notion of focusing on a subject, on *the* subject, of a given text (as clarity demands), it seems totally appropriate to outline Matthew 11.7-15, for example, in regular preaching by answering the three questions of Jesus about John. Ultimately, these verses about John lead in thought to the coming kingdom and thus to the coming king. Still, *the focus is properly on John in order to get to what is ultimate*. The sermon must engage the minds of God's people on details about John; he is the *subject*, and he is the subject to which Jesus directs our thoughts.³⁵ Therefore, it is proper to focus on John in order to lead the people of God to the gospel of the king.

Simply put then, this text (Mat 11.7-15) is not an appropriate text for preaching communion remembrances since the subject is John and the flow of thought centers on him and his greatness in order, of course, to reveal the coming king. We might say that the emphasis in preaching this text is on remembering *John*, whereas, the emphasis in preaching communion is on remembering *the Lord Jesus*. Accordingly, this shows how preaching the remembrances involves appropriate text selection.³⁶

Finally, this passage gives an excellent illustration of how PCR flows from a *peculiar hermeneutical approach* to the text: *a person of Christ memories hermeneutic*.³⁷ To be specific, consider how we might preach communion remembrances from Matthew 11.28-30. The focus of the text on the duty of disciples implies the offices of Christ as priest (come to me for soul rest), prophet (learn from me) and king (take my law-yoke upon you). Thus, if the preacher selected

this text for communion remembering, he would approach it *looking for details about the Lord Jesus Himself* in the roles that He performs as prophet, priest and king.

3A. Application

One primary thing needs rethinking in light of preaching the remembrances that enhances its applicability in communion worship.³⁸ It is the fact that we tend to excogitate memories.³⁹ Excogitating memories refers to any attempt to let the imagination run freely, creatively, and beyond the boundaries of Scripture.⁴⁰ In contrast to concentrating on the Lord's personal experience of suffering, the crucifixion narratives spend most of the time dealing with the activity of *others* along with the words of Christ spoken on behalf of *others*.⁴¹

Therefore, remembering is not excogitation. We should not try to relive the cross, to re-enact or dramatize the experience of suffering. Accordingly, Easter dramatizations of the crucifixion collide with the gospel record.⁴² How should we remember?⁴³ We are to remember the way God reminds us, along the lines of His reminding, along the lines spelled out in the Gospels as our *primary* sources.⁴⁴ Concentration on the Lord Jesus in a distinct way governs communion preaching so that we subordinate every other consideration to one goal: focusing on the risen Savior with single-minded diligence and discipline.⁴⁵

Here we must emphasize the duty of pastors who have *the God-appointed privilege and duty to exercise single-minded diligence and great self-discipline to direct their listeners to where the elements point them*. Pastors have the sacred obligation to focus attention in communion on the Lord Jesus Christ in a distinct and special way by preaching from the resource of the Spirit's reminders in the Gospels.⁴⁶

Implications and Comments

A number of implications and comments related to preaching, the Table, application, and the beyond the Bible discussion make up this summary section.

1) Preaching communion remembrances is one central way that Christian teachers are able to bring modern audiences into the biblical narrative. To use, but creatively adapt Longenecker's "synergistic developmental model,"⁴⁷ this means that we bridge the culture gap between speaker and receptor by pastoral teaching that takes the listener back to the apostolic worldview believing that it is the good news God gave, once for all, to His covenant people for the time between the comings of Christ. Thus, we proclaim the death of the risen Lord Jesus who is now universal sovereign and Sabbath king at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

2) The view of preaching at the Table presented here, along with the expository preaching that it presupposes, is a case in point of theological development regarding the means that God has appointed for saving sinners. The claim is that preaching communion remembrances is implicit in the Scriptures and we draw it out by logical deduction with careful attention to the trajectories of the history of redemption recorded in Scripture.

3) Regular preaching, and its unique subset of preaching the remembrances of Christ, is on the cutting edge of application as a divinely appointed means saving and sanctifying God's people. This underscores the primacy of preaching in biblically rooted worship where the people of God hear God's voice through frail and weak preachers. This is the divinely appointed way for the church to tap into the means of grace. Thus, in the presence of God, those with ears for hearing are the audience listening intently to the word of God.

4) Preaching the remembrances of Christ during communion exemplifies the direction that Christian teachers ought to go in application. The task is one of looking back to remember the Lord Jesus within the history of redemption. Just as we are not to excogitate remembrances, likewise, we are not to excogitate applications. In communion preaching as in regular preaching, we are not to go beyond the boundaries of Scripture. Our task is to remember along the lines of God's reminding in Scripture.

5) We should all be struggling to find a model that is in touch with contemporary settings, but that is not governed by the contemporary in a way that forces Scripture to fit its mold in the way of Procrustes (chopping and stretching his victims to make them fit his bed). The cross as a stumbling-block is counter cultural in a fundamental way. We need to think about relevant application of the apostolic gospel by taking the listeners of our modern cultures back to the apostolic foundation despite negative reactions. Modern listeners need to go back to the gospel story. They need *enculturation* into the biblical worldview to understand the gospel story. They need to hear the gospel story in its development from the OT to the NT. In that context, they need to focus supremely on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

Of course, our work taking people back to the biblical worldview is fallible because it is skewed by the fact that those who interpret it are sinners.⁴⁸ However, the challenge to be taken up humbly is to attain a growing understanding of the ultimate standard in the sixty-six books. To do this, we must exercise open-minded humility before God and others as we pursue the truth of the apostolic foundation (cf. Ridderbos, *Redemptive History and the Authority of the New Testament Scriptures*). We do not seek something truer than that foundation,⁴⁹ but we should seek something better in our understanding of that foundation. Interaction with changing cultures presents new questions that help in this work of making the implicit explicit. A feature of this pursuit is the humble acknowledgment that we cannot, we must not, go beyond the truth of every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. Then, all theological development that takes place for practical application is simply a matter of coming to know God better through the means that He gave once for all in the Scriptures. Growth in understanding comes gradually to those with open minds. Central in open-mindedness is the use of the mind in critical thinking and logical inference making. By “good and necessary consequence” we must seek to make explicit what is present in Scripture implicitly.

6) Therefore, the implication here is that modern audiences need to learn to think biblically in terms of the scriptural worldview. We must teach them to think critically and biblically. Christian teachers are to pave the way for this by understanding the biblical worldview better and better in order to inculcate a distinctively Christian mindset in their hearers. Looking back by preaching covenant remembrances is at the core of how we do this. It is a divinely appointed way of instilling heavenly mindedness, of developing minds set on things above, and of fixing modern eyes on the risen Lord Jesus. Going back to the text, to the history of redemption, to things new and old, and to God’s saving acts and saving words recorded in Scripture alone is the way to stir up critical Christian thinking for wise living in the contemporary world.⁵⁰

Preaching Communion Remembrances: Going Back to the Biblical Worldview, not Beyond it, in Covenant Remembering-Summary

Explanation

1) Jesus called for something distinct in remembering Him at the Table; finding it leads to PCR, and away from sermon *then* sacrament.

2) Remembering involves meditation on the history of redemption.

3) The sacrament has two basic components: preached word and symbolic action.

4) PCR does an end run around the real presence debate in focusing not on how Christ is present *in the elements*, but on how He is present *in the sacrament as a whole*: by the Spirit working with word and deed proclamation.

5) The primary sources for PCR are the Gospels, God's reminders, which we need more than excogitation and self-examination.

Basis

PCR arises from the need to do justice to covenant remembering by Passover explanation in sermon proclamation following the example of Christ by *doing* what He *did* in the meal of historical-redemptive transition.

Hermeneutics

The call to remember *Him* governs our approach to a text for communion preaching. Approaching Matthew 11.28-30, for example, preaching communion remembrances means that all eyes are fixed on what the text reveals about *Christ* as our prophet, priest, and king, even though the text itself moves in a different orbit of thought, namely, the duty of disciples to the law.

Philosophy of Preaching

1) PCR involves the important distinction between regular expository preaching and communion preaching.

2) PCR builds on the fact that all sermons preach Christ but communion sermons preach Christ in a distinct way because foundation and building are inseparable, but how we see their interrelation is different; it depends on whether we are concentrating on the foundation and looking up or concentrating on various structures and looking down.

3) The subject, introduction, outline, and conclusion of a communion sermon (of PCR) will focus on the Lord Jesus in a disciplined way. Instead of "John is this, that, and the other thing" (Mat 11.7-15), the communion sermon will tell us who Jesus is (from Mat. 11.28-30, He is our prophet, priest, and king).

A Challenge to Pastors

Pastors should have more communion sermons, sermons on remembering Christ in a distinct way, than they have on any other topic.

Going back, not beyond, to make the implicit explicit

The task of Christian teachers is that of bringing new and old things out of the storehouse of biblical truth by good inference making with historical-redemptive awareness. This is for application by preaching that brings listeners into the Christian worldview. A major part of this task is preaching communion remembrances so that all structural members of the building of biblical truth clearly rest on the risen Lord Jesus. In this way, He is our wisdom for modern application.

¹ Many thanks are due to my son Adam, pastor of Knox Presbyterian Church, Oklahoma City, whose careful reflections, critical remarks, and special focus on Christ shaped the ideas of this paper throughout. He has helped me with the good that is here; the failures, of course, are mine.

² Leonard J. Vander Zee suggests the idea of refocusing when he makes the point that preaching may be on the Ten Commandments and then the Table “*brings us back to the central drama,*” *Christ, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 233 (italics mine).

³ There is a tendency to seek an emotional re-living of the cross by excogitating remembrances of what it must have been like to die on a Roman cross.

⁴ A way to make this point clear in a pastoral context is to state that every pastor’s catalogue of sermons should have a large percent that are particularly communion sermons, sermons that preach the remembrances of Christ in a distinct way. Another way to make this point is to note that even those who are schooled in the faith, academics, seminary professors, and pastors cannot engage communion remembering by simply “resting on their laurels.” They cannot simply rest on past studies, sermons, or readings. Instead, they need a “fresh imprint” in remembrance of the Lord Jesus every communion service. Furthermore, as suggested by Danian Heron, a member of Westminster Reformed Church, if this is true for the schooled, how much more must it be true for the unschooled, for the “average” everyday struggling Christian. Pastoral ministry should work hard at meeting this need for schooled and unschooled believers alike. Heron helps focus the matter of distinctiveness by saying, “Certainly, Christ is aware that all of Scripture is about Him, yet in spite of that fact, Christ calls us to focus on Him in a unique way in communion” (Conversation, August 11, 2005).

⁵ I cover more matters of support and some counter-arguments in the small book *Preaching Communion Remembrances* (Dearborn Heights, MI: SohBiblicalPublications.org, 2004). The addendum treats the question of frequency in response to Keith A. Mathison’s argument for weekly communion, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2002), pp. 291-297.

⁶ On the genre of remembrance see Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 32.

⁷ The Psalm states that they remembered, they were not faithful, He atoned for their iniquity, and *He* remembered their frailty. Of course, to remember is to hear and obey, but the big picture of the Psalms roots that obedience in the details of the Lord’s covenant faithfulness. Similarly, Moses’ Deuteronomy sermon looks back to remember God’s redemptive action in order to go forward in obedience. There is a reflective and meditative side to remembering that grounds diligent action.

⁸ By tracing the reference to the new covenant in my blood (1 Co 11.25) back to the blood of the covenant mentioned in Exodus 24 (v. 8), we can see the parallel between the preaching of the OT servant of the Lord and the preaching of NT servant of the Lord. Moses told the people “all the words of the Lord” (v. 3), wrote them down (v. 4), and read them; he read the Book of the covenant in the hearing of the people (v. 7). Then Moses sprinkled “the blood of the covenant” on the people saying, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words” (v. 8). After this, Moses and the elders “ate and drank” (v. 11). Thus, though there are differences, the old covenant meal *on which our Lord builds the new covenant meal* included reading, explaining, and proclaiming the word of God with a focus on the blood of the covenant (“Behold the blood of the covenant, v. 8). Now remembering during the new covenant meal does the same thing, but in a new way, that places distinct focus on Christ whose blood *is* the blood of the new covenant (1 Co 11.25). In its new covenant form, this preaching on the blood of the covenant must translate into preaching the remembrances of Christ.

⁹ Again, consider the repeated refrain of our forgetfulness in the remembrance Psalms.

¹⁰Cf. Ostella, *Preaching Communion Remembrances*, 35-36, for some problems with a non-preaching communion rite. As a whole, these problems furnish another argument in defense of PCR. Furthermore, the practical distinction between preaching about communion remembering and actually remembering argues for PCR, otherwise, we will be guilty of “dwelling at a feast on the proper mode of eating rather than concentrating on the feast” (C. Hodge, *Princeton Sermons*, 338).

¹¹ Passover was a memorial, Ex. 12.14 that included explanation, Ex. 12.26.

¹² This application of new wine and new wineskins rests on the fact that Jesus came to fulfill and not abolish the old order of things (Mat 5.17). The old is transformed by His coming, the coming of the new wine of fulfillment. Wineskins, structure, and law remain but they must have a new covenant form because of the new wine they contain.

¹³ That communion is the Christian Passover (contrary to Robert Letham, *The Lord's Supper: Eternal Word in Broken Bread*, pp. 4-5) see Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield* (ed., John E. Meeter, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), Volume I, pp. 332-38. I profit much from Letham in this connection when I see him emphasizing discontinuity between Passover and communion, but I want to stress continuity as well. With Letham, we must heartily agree that the early church did not do communion as a replica of Passover.

¹⁴ Per Acts 17.3, proclaiming Christ has the death and resurrection of Christ as its content (And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus, whom I proclaim to you, is the Christ."). Paul tells us what it means to “proclaim” Jesus. It means to show that He is the Messiah; it includes explanation and proof regarding His suffering, death, and resurrection. Thus, when Paul says, “we proclaim his death” (1 Cor 11.26), we can identify the following facts: a) proclaiming His death includes His resurrection; it is the risen Lord's death that we proclaim, and b) proclaiming His death involves reasoning from the Scriptures, explaining, and proving. When we combine these facts with the fact that proclaiming His death in communion has the larger context of new covenant Passover explanation (that communion is the Christian Passover), then it is reasonable to conclude that the heads of the households of faith, pastors (like the heads of households during Passover) should guide covenant remembering by preaching.

¹⁵ If we emphasize the important point of symbolic action as is done by Peter J. Leithart, *CTJ* 40 (2005), then we know what Jesus was *doing* when He transformed Passover into Christian Passover. He was giving the Upper Room Discourse. Knowing what Jesus did presents us with His example to follow.

¹⁶ I am operating on the view that John 13-17 are words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper. I take “rise and let us go from here” (14.31) to be anticipatory of the departure from the upper room that 18.1 records (“When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley, where there was a garden, which he and his disciple entered”); cf. Carson, John, 476-482 for alternative interpretations and the point that nothing forbids the possibility that Jesus and His disciples did not leave the upper room until after John 17. Ridderbos argues from the unity of 14-17 (*John*, 486-87). The argument for PCR from this section of the Gospel of John remains essentially unchanged, though less detailed, if chapters 15-17 record words uttered after the Last Supper at some location on the way to the garden.

¹⁷ In both the concentration on Him in a distinct way, and by doing so through covenant explanation, (preaching and teaching), we are following His example in the full dimensions of what He did in giving us the new covenant communion meal. Consequently, “this do in remembrance of me” must be understood in its larger context as more than a reference to the action of eating and drinking. It refers to eating and drinking by faith of the benefits of His body and blood by a new covenant focus on the Lord Jesus by explanatory preaching. Another contextual argument based on the example of Christ traces the communion meal back to all the

meals recorded in the Gospels that Jesus attended and used for teaching. All of these meals, as historical precedents of the new covenant meal, involved teaching and preaching on the coming of the kingdom. It is reasonable to collect the various strands together into the single conclusion that we should follow the Lord's example of what to do at His Table in remembrance of what He did with respect to these meals, namely, He preached the gospel of the kingdom. Therefore, at the Table we preach the gospel of the king; we preach the king who gave us the gospel. Cf. N.T. Wright, *Prayer*, 63: "The Eucharist is the direct historical descendant, not just of the Last Supper, but of those happy and shocking parties which Jesus shared... This meal... is linked directly to the meals which Jesus explained..." Wright, however, is ambivalent with respect to PCR, cf. the need for explanation on one hand, "Scripture is expounded so the heart is warmed," 66, and the note that communion is not a time for preaching on the other, specifically, he makes the comment that 1 Co 11.26 does not mean this is an opportunity for preaching, 77.

¹⁸Too often, we forget the importance of remembering in anti-Zwinglian polemics, cf. Mathison, who reacts to "symbolic memorialism" by saying that the sacraments are not "mere empty signs that produce a subjective state of mental recollection." Instead, he says, "Jesus connects the bread and wine with body and blood." He seems to lose sight of remembering because of His attention on the real presence doctrine. Wright, however, makes the point that the Eucharist takes us back "in heart and mind, in sacramental time to the very life of Jesus himself," *The Lord and His Prayer*, p. 47. It should be obvious that preaching communion remembrances along the lines of God's reminding in the Gospels is hardly a bare memorial. To the contrary, we should think that whatever view we hold if we subtract PCR from it, then we *are* in danger of bare memorialism.

¹⁹ It seems reasonable to conclude that remembering is more than avoiding a state of total forgetfulness. Remembering is more than simply taking some notice to mind. It means to recall to the mind, to retain in the mind, to keep someone in one's thoughts and affections. It includes a process of recollection. For example, when God remembers our sins it means that He considers them in detailed and fitting coordination with the just punishments they deserve. Furthermore, when the OT saint performed a sacrifice, it served as a remembrance (Lev. 24.7; Ps. 37.1; 69.1). However, the reminding of sin associated with the sacrifices of the OT provides a wonderful contrast to communion. Those sacrifices drove home the fact of our sin and need, but communion arises from the accomplished sacrifice so it does not focus on our sins. On the contrary, communion focuses on our Savior who did all that was necessary to deliver us from our sins. Thus, a communion service should have a sermon that *brings Christ to mind* in a distinct, focused, and concentrated way. In the OT sacrifices, there was a reminder of sin (cf. Heb. 10.3). There was a continuous reminding of sin and of the fact that God remembers sin, but per the atonement in Christ, we know that He remembers our sin no more (Heb. 10.17; 8.12). Also, important here is the analogy that exists between tracing the history of the Israelites in detail and remembering the history of the true Israelite, the Lord Jesus, presented to us in the remembrance Gospels.

²⁰ *New Wine*, Longenecker, 147-153.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 176.

²² Like baptizing to the end of the age (Mat 28.20), communion remembering continues to the return of Christ (1 Cor 11.26). We are not to look for a shift from many rituals in the OT to, say four, in NT beginnings (feet washing and a Passover form of communion along with the Lord's Table and baptism), to two by the end of the apostolic era, and finally to none in the post-apostolic church as in ultra-dispensationalism and the Salvation Army.

²³ For example, Laura Smit lists the key points about Calvin's view of the sacrament. Her fourth point is "The celebration of the sacrament must always be initiated by the proclamation of the word" and there is "a speaking in conjunction with an acting" but "the sermon... must precede the sacrament," *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and*

Participation, James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis, eds, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 206, 214 (italics mine).

²⁴ The distinction too often made between preaching and observing the sacrament separates, incorrectly, that which is inseparable. Thus, we should not be speaking about preaching as doing this and the sacrament as doing that, for example, the one declaring the promise and the other giving assurance of that promise. This separation comes out clearly in Zee's quote of Wolterstorff, "In the sermon God tells us, by way of the words of the preacher, of the promise already made in Jesus Christ. In the sacrament God doesn't so much *tell* us of that promise as *here and now assure us* that it remains in effect," *Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 191. Thus, Zee speaks of preaching doing this and the sacrament doing that: "Preaching declares God's promises; the Supper offers the concrete and physical here-and-now assurance of that promise" and "In modern communication theory, the sermon is locutionary, making of a promise, and the sacrament is illocutionary, conveying the promise in an assuring way, and the work of the Spirit is perlocutionary, that is, the sacrament effectively grants assurance by the agency of the Spirit, *Ibid.*, 190-192. What Zee and Wolterstorff say in this regard is excellent and helpful when transposed into the distinction between PCR and symbolic action: in the former, God tells us His promises and in the latter He assures us of them. However, it seems just a bit better, with PCR in mind, to say that in both aspects of the sacrament God does both: the preaching tells and assures, and symbolic action tells and assures.

²⁵ In the sacrament, the gospel is proclaimed by means of the intertwining of sermon and ritual. PCR is compatible with the emphasis on symbolic action in the sacraments and thus with the use of the term ritual to designate that action. Leithart thinks that the best way to refer to the sacraments is to call them rituals. Thus, for Leithart, the term ritual emphasizes the point that we use water, bread, and wine "in a particular way" and this emphasis on action in the sacraments is a way to seek revision and a fresh start in our perspective on the sacraments, *CTJ* 40 (2005), 7, 18, 20. From the perspective of PCR, the action of preaching the remembrances along with the action of eating and drinking, is critical in sacramental renewal. What we *do* in the meal of fulfillment follows the example of what Christ *did* in the meal of anticipation.

²⁶ On one hand, the sign (the physical elements; the gospel word in symbolic action or ritual), as the arrowhead, precisely directs our focus to, and clarifies our focus on, the nourishing benefits of the very body and blood of Christ (His literal, physical body and blood secured life giving nourishment for His people). On the other hand, the sermon (the preaching aspect of communion; the gospel in word), as the shaft of the same arrow, directs our focus to, and clarifies our focus on, the Lord Jesus in His person and work by which He secured the nourishing benefits epitomized in the bread and wine (picturing the benefits we receive from His very body and blood). The sacrament is this arrow flying to its target.

²⁷ Four comments pertain here. 1) This explanation orients itself in a distinct way along the lines of the Gospel narratives that fix the memory of the church on Christ according to the Holy Spirit's reminders. 2) We should have no aversion to the use of physical things in the context of worship, but Zee appears to overstate this focus when he quotes pastor Diephouse approvingly: "liturgical renewal, with its fragrant loaves of homemade bread, broken and passed in a circle, and large chalices of aromatic wine, has helped focus more on the elements" (*Ibid.*, 58). It goes without saying, from the perspective of PCR, that we do not look at the physical elements as the key to liturgical renewal. 3) We should have no aversion to the use of physical things in the context of worship, but Zee appears to overstate this focus when he quotes pastor Diephouse approvingly: "liturgical renewal, with its fragrant loaves of homemade bread, broken and passed in a circle, and large chalices of aromatic wine, has helped focus more on the elements" (*Ibid.*, 58). It goes without saying, from the perspective of PCR, that we do not look at the physical elements as the key to liturgical renewal. 4) In monthly or bimonthly communion, there is repeated refocusing on the center of the center of the gospel, on the Lord Jesus, and this

refocusing that underpins regular preaching is itself rich and diverse. The kind of refocusing intended here is similar to a shift of perspective from concentration on a building to its foundation. Christ is the foundation of every structural member of the building, and in regular preaching each part must be understood as a subject all its own in relation to Him, but He is not the subject when we focus on the building or some aspect of it. However, in communion, all attention is on the foundation, Jesus is the subject, and the structural members of the building are in our peripheral vision.

²⁸ Berkouwer summarizes the meaning of the sacrament as a seal as well as sign by pointing out God's use of the sacrament to strengthen our faith, *The Sacraments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), pp. 156-57, "...the Holy Spirit... makes use of the sign in order to overcome the resistance of man's heart. Believers are thus truly sealed in the sacrament. The one work of the Holy Spirit which leads to the conquest of all uncertainty stands in an unbreakable and profound relation. ... The purpose of the sacrament is the assurance of salvation, stability rather than instability, proof against doubt, a song of praise about the trustworthiness of God in contrast with the mendacity of man's heart, and a guarded inheritance in the midst of the dangers of this unstable life. Those who do not understand the ways of God because they gaze at the outward sign, live only in their own wisdom. But those who follow his way will learn increasingly that God uses these pledges of his mercy in the weakness of our faith." The Holy Spirit gives the faith that believers have when they come with a sense of need to the sacrament, and the Holy Spirit uses the sacrament to strengthen the faith of those who come in faith. Thus, the communion sacrament, inclusive of preaching that focuses in a distinct way on the historical Jesus of the Gospels, is a vital means by which God assures His people of His promises, and He does this to strengthen their faith and increase their love. The promises of the gospel are put in focus by the use of physical elements and preaching fills out the focus of the elements by expounding on the work of Christ in His sacrifice to cleanse sinners and nourish them all the way to resurrection glory (these things apply to baptism *mutatis mutandis*).

²⁹ Cf. Calvin on the frail but real instrumentality of ministers in giving a word from God to His people, *ICR*, 4.3.1.

³⁰ Accordingly, PCR does an "end run" around the polemics of the real presence debate because concentration is not on how Christ is present in the physical elements but on how He is present in the sacrament as a whole, and the answer is that He is present by the Spirit working with the preached word, with the word preached "in word and deed." Thus, "in word" refers to PCR and "in deed" refers to the symbolic action of eating and drinking; through both we hear, see, sense, and taste a word from God.

³¹ Cf. how Zee acknowledges the change of focus from preaching the Ten Commandments to observing communion, *Ibid.*, 233. The problem I see here is the need to refocus during every communion service from one thing to something else. The refocusing envisioned in PCR is from regular preaching, say, three Sundays a month to communion preaching every fourth Sunday.

³² The point, then, is that we seek in communion to preach on the Lord Jesus Christ in a distinct way. This is the place of refocusing the preaching: whatever may be our focus in regular preaching, a focus on some part of Scripture rooted in Christ, we need to keep returning to the central focus on Christ by remembering Him through sacramental preaching in sermon proclamation and symbolic action. Thus, the model here is not weekly communion, but a monthly or bimonthly pattern that gives attention to a series of sermons through the book of Romans, for example. Then intermittently and profitably an entire worship service is devoted in a concentrated way to remembering Christ. Of course, this does not mean that Christ is not preached in the regular series on Romans. He is preached in a series on Romans, but in a different way, with a different accent, than how He is preached during communion.

³³ Structural members of a building relate to the foundation in different ways. Some have a clear and direct relation and some relate indirectly and ambiguously. Explaining this relationship is analogous to the work of regular exposition of Scripture (like saying: "this is a floor joist; it

connects to a wall that rests on the foundation”). Placing all attention on the foundation bears analogy to PCR (like saying: “behold the foundation; it has the following length, thickness, and strength”). Foundation and building are inseparable, but how we see their interrelation is different; it depends on whether we are concentrating on the foundation and looking up or concentrating on various structures and looking down. For either emphasis, it is a matter of time spent on details.

³⁴ Furthermore, having the primary source in the Gospels keeps PCR from separating the person of Christ from His work. In PCR, emphasis is on the person who does the work of redemption while at the same time we can only understand Him in terms of His work because in the Gospels, we see *Him* at work. The history keeps us from flights of topical fancy; biblical theology guides, and restrains, systematic theology. When we come to the textual unit of 14.6-19, for another example text, the sermon outline will follow Paul to focus preaching and listening on how important interpretation of tongues is for understanding and edification (6-12), on prayer for interpretation of tongues (13-17), and on what Paul would rather do with his gift of tongue-speech (18-19). Focus must be on these things, and notably there is no mention of the Lord Jesus in these verses (He is not mentioned in chapter 13 or 14 of 1 Corinthians). Nevertheless, Jesus is the foundation of the applications made by the Holy Spirit through Paul in these portions of Scripture. Therefore, when the preacher draws out the significance of this Corinthian text for believers today, he should address the need for love unto edification and the need for self-evaluation in the use of gifts. The preacher presses home this significance because that is what the Holy Spirit does through Paul to the church at Corinth (and to us as one with the Corinthians as the church in the time between the comings of Christ). Then the preacher can make the point clear that this entire passage speaks of God’s desire to communicate with His people and how that desire reaches its apex in the sending of Christ as the Word who is the revelation, the speech, of the Father *par excellence*. Accordingly, by His death and resurrection, Jesus makes the Father savingly known to sinners in need. Thus, a sermon that preaches Christ from 1 Corinthians 14.6-19 is a sermon *that properly spends most of the preaching time and concentration of mind focusing on the details of tongue-speech in relation to love and the edification of the saints*. The time spent and the focus attained have Christ as their foundation and ultimate goal, but the details in focus most of the time in the sermon are tongue-speech, love, and edification. By contrast, the claim of PCR is that the command of Christ to remember Him at the Table calls us to focus on Him in a special and distinct way that can only be done substantively by spending most of the preaching time thinking about Him along the lines of the Holy Spirit’s reminding of Him. Accordingly, the Gospel remembrances will be our primary resource (cf. Jn. 14.26). The basics of this treatment of 14.6-19 come from a sermon preached by Pastor Craig Troxel at Calvary Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Glenside, Pa., September 25, 2005.

³⁵ As Greidanus puts it, the sermon theme should reflect the theme of the text and the outline should usually follow the emphases or outline of the text and both theme and outline lead to application (*The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 136-140, 154-156).

³⁶ PCR is not to be identified with didactic instruction *about* communion remembering; it engages *actual* communion remembering. This “about-actual” distinction constitutes a practical argument for PCR in distinction from regular preaching because otherwise we either preach on polemical issues at communion (if communion is observed weekly) or we never preach on these issues about communion in the first place. By analogy, we either dwell on the mode of eating instead of eating or we never dwell on the mode of eating. Either way is surely wrong. The better way is to teach about communion in regular preaching and to engage actual remembering by PCR in communion worship.

³⁷ Distinctly focusing on Christ-memories has hermeneutical implications. In studying for communion preaching, the minister not only follows the flow of argument of a Gospel writer, but he also opens another window into the text to look for what it reveals about the *person* of Christ. This is not to find something contrary to the author’s line of thought (nor is it to separate His

person from His work). Instead, the goal is simply to see the Lord and accent in communion preaching what we see. For example, in the account of the healing of the woman with a blood disease (Mat 9), the Gospel writer records the words of Jesus to this woman about her faith, and this line of thought leads us to ponder the truth of salvation by faith versus magic and superstition. Approaching this text with a Christ-memory hermeneutic means that we will not put our attention on the faith of the healed woman nor on salvation by faith (any attention there will be subordinate). We will focus instead on the gentleness, patience, and kindness of our Lord in correcting her faith in His role as teacher. In the end, it is a matter of what is primary and what is secondary for the preaching occasion; following the writer's line of thought is primary in preparing for regular preaching and remembering the person of Christ is primary in preparing for communion preaching. Perhaps we might call this a Christian-memory hermeneutic (or we might call it a Christian-remembrances hermeneutic) because we have our focus on God's reminding that ought to fill the memories of Christians about the Lord Jesus that is revealed at the same time that He reveals the gospel (cf. the different emphasis in preaching "*The Gospel of Jesus in His Miracles*" and *The Gospel of Jesus in His Miracles*). In the context of the relationship between systematic theology and biblical theology, we can say provisionally that regular sermons ought to be oriented in a historical-redemptive way to follow the writer's line of thought. Communion sermons presuppose this historical-redemptive foundation and often may approach the same passages from a topical (systematic-theological) line of thought. It goes without saying that the Gospel writer's line of thought is ultimately a remembrance of Christ as a testimony to His saving work. Still, in communion remembering, the accent is on the Savior (on Him who said, "remember me") who does the marvelous saving work recorded in the Gospels.

³⁸Another matter for rethinking, though not addressed in this paper, is the question of frequency from the perspective of preaching Christ in a distinct way at every communion service. PCR is contrary to weekly observance only in the case where PCR is set aside; that is, if communion were held weekly on a Sunday evening with PCR as part of every communion service, then PCR is compatible with weekly communion. What PCR is not compatible with is any communion observance that does not include preaching Christ in a distinct way, that has a word and sacrament split, and that in effect makes communion a virtual "tack on" to a worship service. In other words, PCR is incompatible with any view of communion that fails to recognize preaching as a vital part of the sacrament (there is no move from preaching to the sacrament; there is no preparing for the sacrament in preaching; PCR is an integral part of the sacrament). Furthermore, among other things that might be included in contrast to God's reminding is the notion of a bare ritual. It is important to strike a balance between a bare memorial and a bare ritual. The bare memorial occurs when we fail to emphasize the fact that God is present and active by means of the sacrament confirming the faith of His people. We have a bare ritual when we fail to emphasize PCR. Although God's presence and action is in view, a subtle separation of word and sacrament strips the ritual of its depth failing to follow through on the reformed emphasis on the Spirit's working by the word. Underneath the bond of word and sacrament is the important claim that the Spirit works by the word through ministers of the word (cf. Calvin on ministry of the word). Thankfully, it seems impossible to have either a bare memorial or a bare ritual. We should think here of tendencies and areas needing improvement. Improvement comes and balance is attained if PCR is part of celebrating the Lord's Table. Signs of these tendencies toward extremes include a mystical view of the sacrament, emphasis on the elements as if accented tastes and smells will give sacramental renewal, undue preoccupation with self-examination to the point of dreading communion or not coming at all, excogitation of remembrances that emphasizes the gruesome aspects of crucifixion in a way that runs counter to the emphases of the Gospel accounts themselves, and polemics over the way in which Christ is present forgetting His gift of the Spirit to apply the word.

³⁹The distinction between regular and communion preaching and especially their interrelationship, as discussed earlier, is also important in rethinking corporate communion

worship. In PCR as part of the sacrament, the church continually sharpens its focus intermittently across the regular diet of preaching; thus whatever the concentration may be, as in a series on the book of Joshua, and though preaching on Joshua will inevitably direct us to Jesus our deliverer, the church is brought to a deepened refocus on her Lord in communion. This is necessary because we may get lost in the details of Joshua, lost in a beneficial feeding on the gospel of the old covenant, even though we must ultimately see Christ as our Joshua. We come in communion to a sharpened focus on Christ, as our Joshua and the greater Moses, the greater than Solomon, and the sacrificed Isaac. This sharpening is not just at the end of a sermon on a section in Joshua; it is the sacrament with an entire sermon (PCR) conjoined with symbols that sharpens our focus on Christ. This sharpening takes place intermittently across the preaching diet.

⁴⁰ This is the case in Mel Gibson's movie, *The Passion of Christ*. No doubt there are pastors who have used clips of this movie to go down this wrong path of excogitation that flows in crosswinds to the Gospels unto inevitable fragmentation.

⁴¹ Rather than trying to relive what it probably was like to die on a Roman cross, consider how the gospel accounts present the death of Christ. Matthew 27 records the crucifixion in verses 35-50, in only sixteen verses and notably *most of these verses deal with the activity of others*: the guards (35-38), people passing by (39-40), the chief priests, teachers and elders (41-43), the robbers crucified with him (44) and the attempt to give Jesus the wine vinegar (48). On the actual crucifixion of Jesus and all of its agony, Matthew only cites the words of Jesus to the Father in verse 46 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"). It is interesting to think about the lack of emphasis on His personal experience of suffering such a violent and painful death. The other Gospels have the same emphasis as Matthew's Gospel. Mark's account is very similar with fourteen verses (15.24-37). Attention is on the activity of others in relation to Christ. There are comments regarding the soldiers (24), the time of the crucifixion (25), the inscription put above Him (26), the location of the robbers, "one on his right and one on his left" (27), mockery (28-32), darkness (33), the same word of Christ to the Father that we read in Matthew (34), the comment about Elijah (35-36) and the record of the Lord's last breath (37). The account is pointedly objective. Luke has fourteen verses (23.33-46) and the words of Jesus that are recorded do not concern Himself, or His suffering, but they concern forgiveness for the soldiers and for one of the criminals crucified with Him. We may think that John will have a longer and more detailed account as the youngest and the beloved disciple. However, his account of the death of Christ is only thirteen verses long (19.18-30). Instead of words of a sufferer, we hear Jesus assign to John the task of caring for his mother. Instead of weakness and loss of perspective in suffering, we learn that Jesus knew that all was completed and that is why He said, "I thirst" and "It is finished." His saying about thirst was not a weak and frail request; it was an expression of determined resolve to return from the wasteland of sacrifice to the refreshing waters of fellowship with the Father. He panted after God like the deer after the water brooks because He accomplished His mission on earth.

⁴² What the gospel writers include and omit gives us dramatic theology not drama; they give us the gospel that has content for our meditations. We thus feed upon the word that proceeds from the mouth of God. This of course affects us in the wholeness of our beings; it affects us intellectually, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and aesthetically.

⁴³ OT Psalms of remembrance keep us from overstating the point that in communion "the doing is the saying," (cf. Wright and Leithart). Some Psalms are called historical-redemptive Psalms because they focus the people of God in their worship on God's redeeming acts in the past. They teach us about covenant remembering and covenant forgetting. Thus, they contribute to our understanding of new covenant remembering. Psalm 78 directs the Lord's people back to the "glorious deeds of the Lord" (v. 4) that include the striking down of the first born in Egypt (v. 51), dividing the sea (v. 13), and building the sanctuary (v. 69). All of these acts are acts of covenant fulfillment (v. 37) to a sinful people who forget His power and redemption (v. 42), but who by grace remember that God is their rock and redeemer (vs. 32-35). They remember

because God remembers their frailty and His covenant (vs. 39, 37). Granted, doing is saying, it is the voice of God. Doing does involve saying, but the doing is not the whole of the saying; doing does not exhaust the saying. Psalms like this help make the point that in the history of the covenant and in reflection on that history within it by “covenant remembering” much more is going on than abbreviated reminders associated with simply doing a ritual. In Psalm 105, covenant remembering includes the Lord’s remembrance of His covenant and His people’s remembrance of His wondrous works (vs. 8, 5). Per Psalm 106, His people are to remember His redemption, but they in fact “soon forgot His works” (v. 13; cf. v. 7). Still, He remembered His covenant and delivered them (v. 45). The new covenant church is not to follow Israel in her forgetfulness (cf. 1 Co. 10.6). Communion is a means of covenant remembering of paramount importance. The blood of Christ represented by the wine is “the blood of the new covenant.” By means of the sacrament that conjoins PCR and symbolic action, the church remembers Christ, and by the Spirit, the church receives assurance that God remembers His covenant.

⁴⁴ There is objectivity to the signs: they embody His word to us. This is primary; this has priority. The gospel that centers in Him is being reiterated. When a worker puts a traffic sign up, who is speaking? Is the worker saying, “Stop,” “Go,” or “Yield”? No, it is the state and the governor that are regulating the flow of traffic. Likewise, the Governor of the heavens and the earth is speaking through the communion elements. In effect, He says, the body and blood of Christ secured life giving nourishment for you, eternal life giving nourishment. How that is the case is unpacked by PCR. In this connection it is important to note that *the elements do not visualize the offering of Christ in sacrifice or the breaking of His body on the cross; instead, they picture the distribution of the saving benefits procured by His body and blood through death and resurrection; they picture these benefits distributed to His people for their life giving nourishment* (cf. Ridderbos, *Coming of the Kingdom*, 429-30). The idea that His body and blood are distributed for our nourishment, not broken or sacrificed, is part of what we explain *about* the elements in regular preaching, but during communion PCR counters undue subjectivity and mysticism *in practice*. Interestingly, the distinction between talking about communion remembering and actually remembering gives us another argument for PCR. When preaching addresses the polemics of the real presence it does so in part to engage refutation of that which contradicts sound doctrine (cf. Titus 1.9). *Then we direct the church to reflect on the mode of eating rather than on actually partaking of the feast*. The idea of refuting those that contradict surely must condition regular preaching, but this seems intuitively out of sync with remembering Christ in a special way with special focus. Citing Titus 1.9 in this connection points out the need for a philosophy of regular preaching in relationship to communion remembering.

⁴⁵ Thus, we come to the meal of covenant mercy to hear the voice of God and to receive strengthening from His oath that we may know the unchangeable character of God’s good purpose for us (Heb. 6.13-18). We have access to the Communion Table by means of a fundamental acknowledgment of our unworthiness. Marvelously, the Table is for sinner-saints, for those who admit their unworthiness and unrighteousness (cf. Lk. 18.13-14) and who cling to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, forgiveness and eternal life. A summary will help us drive the point of self-examination home and expand our perspective on it. Not all sinners have an invitation to the Lord’s Table. The Table is for sinners who acknowledge their need of the body and blood of Christ, of His work as the ultimate mediation between God and man. Self-examination is not primary. It is a by-product but it is not the focus of communion. Communion is not specifically or primarily a time to concentrate on ourselves even as sinners. Of course, there is no forbidding of self-examination. Indeed, it will naturally surface when we spend time with the Lord. His glory, honor, majesty and holiness will tower over us and put us to shame. However, shame is not the constant of communion. The constant is joy and rejoicing at the table feast of forgiveness that is before us in the person and work of Christ. A self-examination emphasis misdirects attention to our sins and us. It misdirects to the sins of the church. Whether our thoughts are on the small picture (individually) or the big picture (corporately), either way

our eyes are on the wrong picture when we concentrate on our sins and the sins of others. This kind of contemplation can discourage people from coming to the Table. The Table is for sinners but the concentration is not on our sinfulness; instead, the concentration is on Christ, who He is and what He did to save sinners. The concentration is on the fact that He gave His body and blood for our nourishment and life.

⁴⁶The following question, raised by my son Jonathan, might help add some perspective on the distinctiveness of communion preaching within the normal diet of preaching. Is there anything that the minister would (or should) avoid in regular preaching in order to reserve it for communion? Another way to get at this question is to wonder if we might avoid the Gospels or sections of the Gospels in regular preaching because they contain pointed remembrances of the Lord Jesus. It is possible to think that avoiding some things is the only way to maintain a difference between regular preaching and communion preaching. In replying to these inquiries, it is important to state that the distinctiveness of communion preaching does not necessitate the conclusion that the minister is to avoid some texts of Scripture in the regular preaching diet. To confirm this point, let us consider the example of an expository series on the Gospel of Matthew in relation to PCR. First, this Gospel and any Gospel account are included in regular expository preaching; there is no exclusion of the Gospels. Second, ministers will exposit all the paragraphs of the Gospel under review from beginning to end. There is no excluding of any section to leave it for a communion message. Third, some of the preaching in such a series may take exactly the same form as a communion sermon. During such a series many topics will not lend themselves to “remembering Christ” as directly as other topics; *time and reflection spent on the Christian’s duty to not worry (Mat. 6.25-34) is different from time and reflection spent on the loud cry of Jesus from the cross (Mat. 27.46)*. Accordingly, it is difficult to suggest any difference between a regular exposition of the words of Jesus from the cross and a communion exposition of those words. Therefore, there may be times when there is no substantive difference between regular preaching and communion preaching. Fourth, *PCR will “avoid” some texts or certain emphases within a text in order to concentrate distinctively on the Lord Jesus* (because He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.”). In communion, speaking will not be about Christians or Christian duty (such as “do not worry” and why); speaking will be about Christ and how He fulfilled His duty in the covenant of redemption.

The perspective we are seeking to emphasize is this: regular preaching points to Christ, even preaching about Christian duties to which Christ Himself directs us, and it may at times overlap in essence with communion preaching, but preaching the remembrances during communion worship has a distinct focus on the Lord Jesus that involves the subordination of matters like Christian duties. The point, then, is that we seek in communion to preach about the Lord Jesus Christ in a distinct way. This is the place of refocusing the weekly preaching diet: whatever may be our focus in regular preaching on some part of Scripture rooted in Christ, we need to keep returning to the central focus on Christ by remembering Him through sacramental preaching in sermon proclamation (PCR) and symbolic action (partaking together of bread and wine). Finally, it is important that we clearly emphasize the point that this refocusing takes place within the diet of preaching: there is no coming back to what is central during communion (cf. the problem of split focus). This is a coming back from regular preaching (focusing on the building in its relation to Christ as the foundation) to communion preaching (focusing on the foundation, Christ, with the building in our peripheral vision).

⁴⁷ *New Wine*, 147-153.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁵⁰ In this connection, we should emphasize the need to preserve the apostolic post-apostolic distinction with apostles as foundation: the apostles labored and we enter into their labors. We should also emphasize the central elements of the storehouse of things new and old based on the parables of Matthew 13. A key element is that the promises of the OT (from the beginning and to

Abraham and Israel) come to realization in ways unexpected with Israel as “not my people” blended with the Gentiles in exile. However, the kingdom promised to Israel includes all people within its scope (parable of the wheat and weeds) with Christ as king (Mat 13.41). Saving Israel includes saving Gentiles with them in the call of those who are not a people to be the people of the living God (fish net). Jesus secured this salvation by selling all that He had to buy the church of Jew and Gentile as a pearl of great cost (pearl merchant). He applies the gospel message to His covenant people by the spreading gospel seed (Sower) to all without discrimination (fish net) causing the word to work effectively like working of leaven throughout an entire batch of dough. The gospel itself grew from a small seed in the ministry of Christ to a mature form in the witness of the apostles (mustard plant) so that all who see the value of the kingdom (treasure) may appropriate it as their own by total self-surrender to Christ.