

Grace and Peace to you at City of Hope Church (PCA) from God our Father and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. We have been separated from one another probably longer than most of us expected. Yet, in God's good and wise providence, He has kept us apart for this season, doubtless for good reasons. We cannot legitimately question His intentions, He alone can do no wrong. We have so much for which we can be thankful in Him!

I wanted to write down some thoughts on Communion and the idea of holding this service virtually. Communion, as you are well aware, is a means of grace gifted to us by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He instituted this meal right before He suffered for our sins as a way of calling us to remember His sacrificial love for us. So, this meal sobers us to the immeasurable depth of God's grace demonstrated in Jesus Christ, the lengths the triune God would go to have us as His own, have fellowship with us and we with Him and also with one another¹!

Many congregations, due to the seclusion orders over COVID-19, are finding "creative" ways to handle The Lord's Supper virtually in their homes, through the means of Facebook, Zoom or some other technology. However popular this has been and is becoming, I would argue against this practice for the following six reasons:

We can't really be "together" –

The longest instruction in the Bible on the observance of the Lord's Supper is found in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. In this passage, the call to "come together" occurs five times to emphasize the *communal* aspect of this meal. It is actually stronger than this. In verse 20, for example, the Greek literally says, "coming together *at the same place*" (*emphasis mine*). This is impossible in an online context.² Given this, it is wise not to go beyond what has been written in Scripture for our instruction. It is always wise to err in the direction of conforming to Scripture as opposed to taking liberties when it's silent, i.e., "The Bible doesn't say we can't, so it's okay." This can easily lead us astray.

We can't "fence the table" –

It is important that the preaching of the Word and the participation in the Sacrament are kept together. As much as we might try, there is no way to truly *fence the table* in a virtual context, nor is it possible to have the Supper without words of instruction. That said, it is a real challenge for leaders to confirm that everyone participating in the Supper have actually heard the preaching of the Word, which is the substance to which the Supper points. Moreover, there is no way to truly tell if everyone participating in the Supper should in fact be participating.

We can't "administer" the elements –

In spite of present trends, *The Pastor* along with the *Elders* have specifically been entrusted with, what Paul calls "the mysteries of God" and thereby designated "stewards"³ of those mysteries. However, *they* can't be physically present in every home nor can *they* give the elements to the people in a virtual setting. Many say, "It's okay, we can all just get some bread, wine or juice and you say what needs to be said." However, this self-administration can lead to a form of privatizing of the meal meant, by definition, to be *communal* and express our *corporate unity*. Try baptizing someone virtually. This approach also promotes individuals or heads of households/parents becoming surrogate pastors or elders, which is clearly counter to God's Word.

We can't elevate a "means" to a "must" –

The Supper is a commanded means of grace, a meal we are to remember often. However, we need to be careful on what level we place this meal. Roman Catholics for example, claim a "real presence" of Christ *in* this Sacrament and thus believe they are receiving more than is actually promised in God's Word. They believe the Holy Communion to

¹ John 17:20-23

² Compare also, Jay Y. Kim, *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places, And Things In The Digital Age*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 178-79. "We must invite them to show up, hungry for the body of Christ as the body of Christ, because as much as modern technology wants to tell you so, you can't eat and drink **together** online." (**bold print mine**)

³ 1 Corinthians 4:1; Titus 1:7

be the “apex of the whole Christian Life”⁴. Even Jay Y. Kim, who is *not* Roman Catholic, deems the Supper the “centerpiece of Christian worship”⁵. We cannot argue with the importance of this meal, but these statements simply go too far. Salvation does not come through the Supper but through the Savior nor is the Supper the Savior.

God Himself is the centerpiece of Christian worship. This meal is a sign and seal of something far greater than itself. From the standpoint of worship elements, God’s Word alone is central to Christian worship. God’s Word informs, instructs, and regulates all that is said and done in a worship service. The Supper signifies and seals what *Scripture* says. It is a *visual* proclamation and a corporate representative *consumption* of the Gospel, which cannot be known apart from the Bible that defines that Gospel. This sacrament can never do more than Scripture, on which we are called to daily feed⁶. The Supper’s *periodic* observance does not compare with the *daily* necessity given to the Scriptures. Some denominations even celebrate the Supper annually! There is nothing in Scripture that contradicts this practice for it aligns directly with the annual celebration of the Passover meal, which was the context in which the Supper was originally established and is its New Testament counterpart⁷. That said, and given our unique situation, a 2 to 4 month hiatus from this meal, is not such a difficult or big request.

Finally, for this point, we have been given every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in Christ*. The Supper certainly confirms to us the covenant of grace through God’s Holy Spirit as we believe in Christ, but these blessings are not tied to the meal but to Christ Himself. We must not elevate the Supper to the same level of sufficiency, essence or necessity given alone to Jesus Christ.

We can’t seek what could separate –

The Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) ruled several years back against virtual communion services and our Confession of Faith speaks directly against this practice in principle.⁸ Holding virtual communion services also sets a precedent for future problems that would lead us further away from togetherness rather than stir us to spend more time in each other’s presence and thereby affirm the corporeal reality of our Christian faith and identity.

We can’t miss God’s providence –

There is a reason for our present circumstances that God alone fully knows. There is a reason why we *can’t* be together. This is clearly a time for self-reflection and examination. It is a time for repentance and prayer, for us to truly seek God’s face and prepare ourselves for His subsequent plans. God does not make mistakes and the meal that is meant to symbolize the greatest healing, can’t become a meal that potentially brings harm to God’s people and their health by coming together too quickly. Our present seclusion will not allow us to meet *together in one place*. We must take this reality and make the best use of our time apart, searching our hearts, searching God’s Word and will through prayer and fasting. Why would God keep us from *a meal*, if not for *fasting* and seeking Him?

God’s plans for His people are good, this can’t be denied. God’s ultimate purpose for His people is a glorious Christ like conformity and He works every single thing in this life to that end⁹. We should be full of hope for God *will* see His people through this trial one way or another and He deserves our patient, steadfast trust!

In the love of Christ Jesus our Savior,



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⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Lumen Gentium*, 1964

⁵ *Analog Church*, 179

⁶ Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 8:3; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Proverbs 8:32-36; Luke 10:42.

⁷ [Why do the minister and elders interview intending communicants?](#)

⁸ [Why We Do Not Hold Virtual Communion Services: A Biblical Perspective](#) *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Chap. 27, Sec. 4.

⁹ Romans 8:28-30