

The Communion: A Measure of Righteousness or a Memorial Code

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ABSTRACT: This article examines Christian Communion's theological and practical significance, questioning whether it should be primarily viewed as a measure of righteousness or as a memorial code. Drawing from biblical texts, church tradition, and contemporary theological perspectives, the study evaluates Communion's varying interpretations and practices throughout Christian history. It argues that while some traditions emphasise Communion as a test of spiritual worthiness and moral standing, others focus on its role as a remembrance of Christ's sacrificial death. This article highlights the tension between these perspectives and proposes a balanced understanding that recognises Communion as a memorial of Christ's redemptive work and a transformative means of grace that calls believers to holiness. By addressing doctrinal, ethical, and pastoral dimensions, this paper contributes to a deeper appreciation of the sacrament and its influence on shaping Christian identity and practice.

Keywords: *Communion, Measure, Righteousness, Memorial Code.*

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Communion, severally known as the Lord's Supper, the Last Supper, the Lord's Table or the Eucharist, is one of the global Church's most significant and widely

observed practices. Rooted in the words of Jesus during the Last Supper (Luke 22:19–20; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26), Communion has been interpreted and practised in various ways across different Christian traditions. At its essence, it represents Christ’s body and blood, which were given for the salvation of humanity. However, its meaning and application have often sparked theological debate. A key question revolves around whether Communion is a measure of righteousness or a memorial act. For some traditions, participation in Communion necessitates self-examination and a demonstration of spiritual worthiness, thereby rendering it a test of righteousness and faithfulness to God (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:27-29). This view reflects the believer’s moral standing before the Lord and the community. Conversely, others interpret Communion primarily as a memorial act, a symbolic remembrance of Christ’s sacrificial death and a reaffirmation of faith independent of personal merit. This memorial perspective emphasises grace, gratitude, and unity rather than human achievement. This article explores these two perspectives by drawing on biblical teachings, theological reflection, and historical practices. It will examine how the dual understanding of Communion as a memorial and a moral measure has influenced Christian worship and discipleship. In doing so, it advocates for a balanced view that honours communion as both a sacred remembrance and a transformative act, calling believers into deeper righteousness through Christ’s grace.

Biblical Foundation of Communion

The term “communion” is derived from the Latin word *communio*, meaning “sharing” or “fellowship,” which itself comes from *communis*, meaning “common” or “shared” (Knight, 2006,59). In the New Testament, the Greek word κοινωνία (*koinonia*) is used to describe Communion, meaning “participation,” “fellowship,” or “partnership” (1 Corinthians 10:16). According to Estep and Kim (2010,103), *koinonia* conveys the idea of believers sharing in the body and blood of Christ and in fellowship with one another. Thus, the root word emphasises remembrance, participation, and unity within the Christian community. Some churches call it a sacrament, while the Baptist denominations consider it an ordinance. The Christian practice of Communion, also known as the Lord’s Supper or the Eucharist, finds its roots in the Bible and has remained central to Christian worship for centuries. Its

biblical foundation is essential for understanding its meaning, purpose, and practice. Communion is not merely a church ritual; it is deeply grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ, the apostolic witness, and the Old Testament foreshadowing God's redemptive plan.

1. **Old Testament Background and Foreshadowing:** The foundation of Communion can be traced to the Old Testament, particularly the Passover meal commemorating Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt (Exodus 12:1–14). The lamb sacrificed during the Passover symbolised protection and salvation for God's people. According to Knight (2006,60), the "Passover served as a typological foreshadowing of Christ, the ultimate Passover Lamb, whose sacrifice brought eternal redemption" (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:7). The practice of sharing the Passover meal thus laid the groundwork for the New Testament institution of Communion. The prophets also anticipated a future covenant meal to signify reconciliation between God and His people. Isaiah 25:6-9 speaks of a divine banquet prepared for all nations, pointing to God's ultimate plan of salvation. Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008,41) argue that these Old Testament themes reveal God's intent to use meals as a symbol of covenant fellowship, culminating in the Lord's Supper instituted by Christ.
2. **Institution of Communion by Jesus:** The direct biblical foundation of Communion is found in the Last Supper accounts. The night before His crucifixion, Jesus gathered with His disciples to celebrate the Passover (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20). During this meal, He broke bread and shared the cup, declaring that these elements represented His body and blood given for the forgiveness of sins. Luke's account is particularly significant: "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me'" (Luke 22:19, NIV). This command to "do this in remembrance of me" establishes Communion as an ongoing memorial act for the Church. According to Estep and Kim (2010,103), the Last Supper signifies remembrance and participation in the new covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ. While not recording the institution in the same way, the Gospel of John provides a theological backdrop in Jesus' "Bread of Life" discourse (John 6:48–58). Here, Jesus declares that those who eat His flesh

and drink His blood will have eternal life. While scholars debate the literal and symbolic meanings, Knight (2006,62) notes that this passage emphasises the intimate Communion between Christ and His followers, which the Lord's Supper embodies.

3. **Pauline Teaching on Communion:** The Apostle Paul provides the most extensive theological reflection on Communion, particularly in 1 Corinthians 10–11. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Paul describes the cup and bread as a “participation” (Greek: *koinonia*) in the blood and body of Christ. This underscores Communion as more than remembrance; it is a sharing in Christ's redemptive work and a unifying act for the Church. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, Paul recounts the institution of the Lord's Supper, emphasising its significance as a proclamation of Christ's death “until he comes.” Anthony (2001,82) observes that this eschatological dimension reminds believers that Communion points backwards to the cross and forward to the hope of Christ's return. Paul also addresses the manner of participation, warning against unworthy reception (1 Corinthians 11:27–29). This suggests that Communion carries ethical implications, calling believers to self-examination, repentance, and reconciliation with one another. Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008,45) note that Paul's teaching balances Communion's memorial and moral aspects. It is both a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and a call to live righteously within the covenant community.
4. **Communion as Covenant Renewal:** Another biblical foundation of Communion is its connection to covenant renewal. Just as the Old Testament covenants were sealed with blood sacrifices (Exodus 24:8), Jesus' words at the Last Supper, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20), indicate that Communion symbolises the ratification of the new covenant. Estep and Kim (2010,105) argue that Communion is thus not only remembrance but also participation in the ongoing covenant relationship between God and His people. Knight (2006,65) further explains that in covenant terms, Communion functions as both a memorial of God's saving act and a commitment by the believer to live faithfully. This dual function underscores its central role in Christian discipleship.

5. Eschatological Hope in Communion: Communion also has an eschatological foundation in Scripture. Jesus Himself linked the practice to the future banquet in the kingdom of God, saying, “I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29, NIV). This anticipates the “marriage supper of the Lamb” described in Revelation 19:9. According to Anthony (2001,88), this forward-looking aspect of Communion provides believers with hope, reminding them that the Lord’s Supper is a foretaste of the eternal fellowship they will enjoy with Christ. Thus, Communion is not only retrospective (looking back to the cross) and introspective (calling for self-examination), but also prospective (anticipating the fulfilment of God’s kingdom).

Communion as a Measure of Righteousness

Communion, or the Lord’s Supper, has long been regarded as one of the central practices of the Christian faith. While some theological traditions have interpreted it as a test of moral worthiness or personal holiness, it is more accurate to understand Communion not as righteousness based on human effort, but as an expression of one’s relationship with God through Christ. Communion serves as a covenantal reminder of God’s grace and a communal affirmation of reconciliation with Him. It is therefore less about achieving righteousness through human actions and more about restoring fellowship with God through Christ’s atoning work.

Biblical Understanding of Communion: The Apostle Paul clarifies that Communion requires self-examination and reverence (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). However, this examination is not about proving personal perfection but about discerning the body of Christ and maintaining a right relationship with God, by rightly accommodating and empathizing with other believers who make up the “body of Christ.” According to Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008,47), Paul’s warning is not intended to discourage believers but to call them to authentic Communion with God through repentance and faith. Jesus established Communion as a covenant meal during the Last Supper (Luke 22:19-20). His instruction, “Do this in remembrance of me,” highlights that the act is about remembering

His sacrifice and reaffirming a relationship with Him, not displaying human righteousness. Knight (2006,72) points out that righteousness in the New Testament is primarily relational, describing one's standing with God through faith rather than moral achievement.

Communion and the Covenant Relationship: Communion is a covenantal act. Covenant meals symbolised reconciliation, unity, and ongoing fellowship in biblical times. When Christ instituted the Lord's Supper, He described the cup as "the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20). This indicates that participation is a reaffirmation of the covenant relationship with God.

Anthony (2001,91) stresses that Communion is therefore relational, not transactional. It does not measure whether one has attained flawless moral conduct but is rightly aligned with God through the covenant of grace. To partake of communion "worthily" is to do so in faith, humility, and repentance, acknowledging dependence on God's grace, as well as eschewing selfish greed but considering the wellbeing of other believers who constitute the body of Christ.

The Danger of Misunderstanding Righteousness: Throughout church history, there has been a tendency to interpret Communion legalistically as if one's moral purity qualifies or disqualifies one from the table. This misunderstanding risks turning the ordinance into a ritual of fear rather than a celebration of grace. Estep and Kim (2010,109) caution that believers often confuse righteousness as proper conduct with righteousness as right relationship. Communion should not be seen as a merit-based achievement but as an invitation to renewed fellowship with God. While ethical living is essential, it flows out of a relationship with God rather than serving as a precondition for Communion. Calvin also emphasised this relational view, teaching that worthiness for Communion does not lie in being free from sin but approaching the table with repentance and faith (cited in Knight, 2006,74). In other words, the measure of righteousness is not human perfection but humble dependence on Christ.

Communion as Relational Examination: Paul's call for self-examination (1 Corinthians 11:28) should be understood as relational rather than legalistic. Believers are asked to evaluate whether they live faithfully in relationship with God and in unity with the body of Christ. This involves confessing sins, reconciling with others, sharing with others, and

approaching the table with sincerity. Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008,50) note that the Corinthians' failure was not simply individual sin but broken relationships within the church, divisions, favouritism, and disregard for the poor. Thus, the communion table became a measure not of personal moral record but of relational righteousness with God and fellow believers.

The Ethical Flow of Relationship: Although Communion is not based on human righteousness, it naturally produces ethical implications. A restored relationship with God should lead to righteous living. Anthony (2001,95) argues that Communion is a spiritual checkpoint where believers renew their covenant with God, calling them to live out holiness in daily life. This shows that righteousness in Communion is relational in origin but ethical in expression. Participation in Communion should inspire reconciliation, justice, and love within the Christian community. As Estep and Kim (2010,112) affirm, "true righteousness is relational fidelity to God that manifests in ethical conduct, not a human achievement tested at the table."

Balancing Grace and Responsibility: While Communion emphasises relationship over human righteousness, this does not mean it is casual. It is still a solemn act that requires reverence, repentance, and humility. The key difference is that these requirements are relational, grounded in faith and covenant, not legalistic measures of perfection. As Estep, Anthony, and Allison (2008,53) conclude, "communion is both a memorial and a covenant renewal." It measures righteousness not in flawless conduct but in genuine relationship with God, expressed in faith, repentance, and obedience.**Communion as a Memorial Code**

Traditions view of Communion as ordinance or even a measure of righteousness; many Protestant traditions, particularly Baptist and Reformed, understand it as a memorial code. This perspective sees the act not as a means of conferring grace or testing holiness but as a symbolic remembrance of Christ's redemptive work. In this view, Communion functions as a covenantal sign pointing to the past (Christ's death), the present (the believer's faith), and the future (the hope of His return).

Biblical Foundations: The clearest biblical foundation for understanding Communion as a memorial comes from Jesus' own words at the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of

me” (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). The Greek term *anamnesis* (“remembrance”) indicates a deliberate act of recalling Christ’s sacrifice. Paul reinforces this by declaring, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV). Thus, the biblical witness establishes Communion not as a mystical transformation of the elements, but as a symbolic proclamation that memorialises the central truth of the gospel (Fee, 2014,306).

Theological Understanding: Communion as a memorial code emphasises the sufficiency of Christ’s once-for-all sacrifice. It rejects notions that the bread and wine (or juice) become Christ’s literal body and blood, affirming instead that they are symbolic tokens pointing believers to Calvary. Erickson (2013,1124) stresses that Communion is not a repetition of Christ’s sacrifice but a reminder of its enduring significance. For Baptists, it is an ordinance, an outward sign of obedience that testifies to inner faith, rather than a sacrament imparting grace (Hammett, 2005,165). This perspective also protects against legalism. If Communion were seen as a measure of righteousness, participation might lead to ritualistic pride or exclusion. As a memorial, however, the focus shifts from human achievement to God’s saving work in Christ. Stott (2007,130) notes that the cross, commemorated in Communion, is the ultimate revelation of divine grace and humility, not human merit.

Historical Perspectives: Historically, the memorial view of Communion gained prominence during the Protestant Reformation. Reformers such as Ulrich Zwingli rejected the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, insisting that the Lord’s Supper was symbolic rather than sacramental. Zwingli emphasised remembrance and proclamation over mystical transformation, framing Communion as a covenantal memorial (McGrath 2017,345). Baptists later embraced this understanding, who consistently maintained that the ordinance is a testimony of Christ’s completed work and the believer’s ongoing faith (Garrett 2009,302). The Baptist heritage regards Communion as a community act of remembrance, rooted in obedience to Christ’s command and devoid of sacramental grace.

Practical Implications: Viewing Communion as a memorial code carries several implications for church life and personal faith:

- i. Remembrance of Christ’s Sacrifice – Communion regularly reminds believers of the cross as the foundation of their faith (Stott 2007,128).

- ii. Unity of Believers – As a shared act, Communion reinforces fellowship and collective identity in Christ (Hammett 2005,167).
- iii. Evangelistic: proclamation of the Gospel – Each observance serves as a visible sermon, proclaiming Christ’s death to the world (Fee 2014,309).
- iv. Safeguard Against Ritualism – By focusing on remembrance, the memorial view avoids treating the ordinance as a magical or merit-based act (Erickson 2013,1126).
- v. Therapeutic: the broken body of Christ serves as the healing reference to the body of believers. (Isa. 53:5).
- vi. Reconciliatory: the shed blood secured pardon for sin and sealed the eternal covenant (1 Peter 2:24, Matt. 26:27-28).
- vii. Eschatological: hope of Christ’s Return – The ordinance points to the anticipated banquet in God’s kingdom (Matt. 26:29).

Comparative analysis of Communion: A Measure of Righteousness or a Memorial Code

1. Biblical Basis – Both interpretations draw from Scripture, especially 1 Corinthians 11. The measure-of-righteousness view stresses verses 27–29, which warn against unworthy participation. The memorial view emphasizes verses 23–26, focusing on remembrance and proclamation. Together, they highlight the tension between ethical preparation and symbolic remembrance.
2. Theological Emphasis – The righteousness perspective elevates human responsibility and holiness, while the memorial code stresses divine grace and Christ’s finished work. Grenz (2000, 622) notes that Christian theology must hold together God’s grace and human response without confusing them.
3. Historical Development – The righteousness interpretation aligns with sacramental traditions that link Communion to sanctification, while the memorial code reflects Reformation and Baptist thought, emphasizing symbolism and proclamation (McBeth, 1987,357).

4. Practical Implications – The righteousness view fosters self-examination and church discipline but risks exclusion and legalism. The memorial view fosters gratitude, unity, and gospel proclamation but may risk trivialization if treated casually.

Ultimately, both views highlight necessary dimensions of Communion. The danger lies in embracing one to the exclusion of the other. When balanced, the seriousness of self-examination complements the joy of remembrance, producing a holistic understanding of the ordinance.

African Theologians' Views on Communion

African theologians approach the doctrine and practice of Communion with unique emphases shaped by culture, community, and the challenges of postcolonial life. Several recurrent themes emerge: inculturation, communal identity, socio-economic relevance, ecclesiology (Church as family or communion), ubuntu or relationality, criticism of individualism, and an insistence on ethical response.

1. Inculturation and Cultural Resonance: One of the strong strands in African theological writing is inculturation, making Christian rituals and sacraments meaningful within African cultural contexts. In the case of Communion, theologians argue that the Eucharist or Holy Communion must not be just an imported ritual but one that resonates with African metaphors, symbols, communal meals, and relational life. Boaheng (2025) argues in his article *An African Christian Appropriation of the Eucharist* that the shedding of Christ's blood, symbolised in the Eucharist, ties into traditional African worldviews where blood has salvific power. He emphasises that for "many African Christians, the Eucharist speaks to spiritual realities and physical, socio-economic, and communal existential needs (Boaheng, 2025,8)." Jean-Marc Ela, a noted Cameroonian theologian, suggested that Christian sacraments, including the Eucharist, should use local rather than imported products, reflecting African culture and self-sufficiency. He saw this as part of restoring dignity to believers and enabling the Church to be rooted in local contexts (Ela, as cited in various biographical summaries, see in wiki sources).

However, exact page-numbered theological expositions are less readily found. Hence, African theologians tend to see Communion not only as a theological doctrine but as a lived practice that must reflect African community life, symbols, and interdependence.

2. Communion, Community, and Ubuntu / Relationality: Another dominant theme is the notion that Communion is deeply relational and communal in ways that African thought already affirms. The philosophy of ubuntu (analogous relational philosophies) aligns closely with communion ecclesiology in African theology. In the article Letsema: Communion ecclesiology in action, Resane (2023) examines the Setswana philosophy of letsema (which emphasises community mutual aid, cooperation, and collective work), comparing it with communion ecclesiology. Resane argues that communion ecclesiology understood as *koinonia* can be enriched by Letsema and Botho/ubuntu philosophies, reinforcing the idea that Communion is not just a ritual but an active expression of community, sharing, and mutual responsibility (Resane, 2023,5). Tegha Afuhwi Nji's thesis Re-Imagining an African Family Ecclesiology in Dialogue with Ratzinger's Christo-Pneuma Communion Ecclesiology similarly stresses that in African ecclesiology, the Church is often perceived as family, and this "family" metaphor emphasises solidarity, relational authority, mutual care, and hospitality. Communion is thus both symbol and source of the family identity of the Church (Nji 2020,64). In *Koinonia* as Communion: Rethinking Communion in Igbo Traditional Society as *Oriko*, the practice of *oriko* (a meal shared in the Igbo traditional society) is used to draw parallels with Christian Communion. The article shows how *oriko* represents relationship, responsibility, love, and shared identity among community members. Thus, Communion is interpreted as participation in a shared life, not an elite ritual (Akubue, 2022,11). These writings show that for many African theologians, Communion is less about individual worthiness and more about communal belonging, relational responsibility, and participation in the life of the Church.
3. Communion and Socio-Economic / Ethical Dimensions: Because African theologians often engage with poverty, injustice, health crises, and

colonial/postcolonial legacies, Communion is not a purely spiritual or symbolic act; instead, it has socio-economic and ethical implications. Boaheng (2025,7) states that African Christians struggle to see how the theology of the Eucharist can address their “daily challenges.” He pushes for an Eucharistic theology that integrates the spiritual with the material, meaning that Communion should affect how believers engage with poverty, justice, and community care. “In *The Holy Communion and African rituals: An encounter between African religion and Christianity*, the authors draw parallels between African ritual meals and Christian communion, highlighting how communal meals in African societies often incorporate elements of sharing, reconciliation, solidarity and how Christian communion, when practiced authentically, should similarly foster unity, care for the marginalised, forgiveness, and restoration” (Ngcobo 2022,5). Thus, many African theologians assert that Communion must not be detached from ethical living: communion shapes and is shaped by how the community treats people with low incomes, reconciles internally, and resists injustice.

4. Critique of Individualism and Exclusivism: A recurring critique is that Western Christianity (or imported forms of Christianity) often emphasises individual worthiness, private faith, and exclusionary practices around Communion. African theologians usually contrast this with more inclusive, relational, communal views. In *The Holy Communion and African rituals*, the article points out that in many denominations, Communion is restricted to baptised or “holier” individuals. The authors argue this is in tension with the New Testament witness (e.g., community, fellowship) and African ethics of inclusion and hospitality (Ngcobo 2022,9). In *Koinonia as Communion in Igbo Traditional Society*, the authors show that precolonial Igbo communal fellowship was inclusive, particularly through *oriko* meals, which reinstated excluded individuals (e.g. excommunicated) to the community via sharing of meals (Akubue 2022,13). They thereby challenge Christian practices that make Communion a marker of separation. Resane (2023,4) in the Letsema study criticises “privatism” in faith, the individualistic orientation dominant in Western theology, which undermines community mutual responsibility in African settings. Communion ecclesiology

must counter that by restoring participation, shared responsibility, and interdependence.

5. **Communion as Church Identity and Ecclesiology:** Many African theologians see Communion as not just a sacrament but central to the identity and being of the Church. It shapes what the Church is and how it lives. Ferdinand Nwaigbo's *Church as a Communion: An African Christian Perspective* emphasises that the local Church in Africa should understand itself as Communion, not merely a hierarchical institution but a body of mutual participation, living together in Christ. Communion shapes governance, liturgy, mission, and witness (Nwaigbo, 1996). Tegha Afuhwi Nji's work also sees Communion as foundational: her thesis argues that the Church is born from the Eucharist, and that communion/family ecclesiology is inseparable. The Church as family is ecclesiology grounded in Communion: relational, hospitable, mission-oriented (Nji 2020,65). Laurenti Magesa (now passed, but with extensive writings) often emphasised that spiritual practices, including ordinances, must contribute to community, moral formation, reconciliation, and transformation of societies. While Magesa is more often cited in ethics and inculturation than in detailed Eucharistic theology with precise communion doctrine, his perspective colours how African sacramental theology sees Communion in relation to the Church's role in society.

Baptist Church's View on Communion

For Baptists, the observance of Communion is not merely a ritual but a symbolic act that reflects their theological distinctives regarding salvation, the Church, and the believer's relationship with Christ. Unlike Roman Catholicism or Anglicanism traditions that emphasise sacramental grace, Baptists approach Communion primarily as an ordinance, an act of obedience to Christ rather than a channel of saving grace (Hammett, 2005,172). This distinction shapes Baptist theology and practice, as it reinforces their emphasis on believers' baptism, the autonomy of the local Church, and the priesthood of all believers.

- a. **The Symbolic Nature of Communion:** Central to the Baptist understanding is the belief that Communion is a symbolic memorial rather than a sacrament that conveys grace. This view is rooted in Jesus' command during the Last Supper: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19, NIV). Baptists emphasise the memorial aspect, teaching that the bread and cup represent the body and blood of Christ without becoming them in substance or essence (McBeth 1987,435). Rejecting the doctrines of transubstantiation (Catholic) and consubstantiation (Lutheran), Baptists stress that the elements are symbols pointing to Christ's atoning sacrifice. Leon McBeth (1987,437) highlights that Baptists, influenced by Reformation principles, adopted a "Zwinglian" view of the Supper, where the focus is remembrance, thanksgiving, and proclamation of Christ's death." Thus, Baptists see Communion not as a sacrament imparting grace but as an act of obedience and testimony of faith.
- b. **Ordinance Framework:** Baptists generally categorise Communion as one of the two ordinances instituted by Christ, the other being baptism (Hammett, 2005, 173). This reflects their rejection of sacramentalism in favour of ordinances, which signify acts commanded by Christ for His disciples but not inherently salvific. Mark Dever (2012,89) explains that "the ordinance framework emphasises both the didactic and covenantal dimensions of Communion: it teaches believers about Christ's sacrifice and affirms their covenant identity as members of the Church." The ordinance view ensures that Communion is not misunderstood as contributing to justification or regeneration. Instead, it is a visible sign of the inward reality of faith already received by grace through Christ alone.
- c. **Participants in Communion:** Another distinctive Baptist view concerns who may partake in Communion. Traditionally, Baptists hold that Communion is restricted to baptised believers who have professed personal faith in Christ and followed Him in baptism by immersion (Dever 2012, 91). This position flows from the Baptist conviction that the ordinances are for believers only. However, Baptists are divided on the degree of restriction in administering Communion:
 - i. **Closed Communion:** practised in some conservative Baptist churches, where only local congregation members can participate.

- ii. Close Communion: allows baptised believers from churches of like faith and order to partake.
- iii. Open Communion: permits all professing Christians to participate, regardless of denominational affiliation.

While “closed” and “close” Communion emphasise Baptist distinctives of baptism and church membership, “open” Communion reflects a broader evangelical spirit of unity (McBeth 1987,439). These variations demonstrate how Baptist polity, emphasising local church autonomy, allows for different practices while retaining theological consistency.

- d. Communion as a Covenant Meal: Beyond memorial symbolism, Baptists interpret Communion as a covenantal meal. It affirms the believer’s ongoing fellowship with Christ and with the body of Christ, the Church. Hammett (2005,175) notes that “Communion reinforces the communal dimension of salvation: while faith is personal, it is never private.” The Supper thus functions as both a vertical act of remembrance of Christ and a horizontal act of unity among believers.

Baptists emphasise that the meal symbolises Christ’s past sacrifice and anticipates His future return. The Apostle Paul writes, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor. 11:26, NIV). For Baptists, this eschatological aspect imbues Communion with hope, reminding believers of the promise of Christ’s second coming and the future messianic banquet (Dever, 2012,92).

Baptist Church Orders of Service for Communion Service

In Baptist tradition, the Lord’s Supper (Communion) is regarded as one of the two ordinances of the Church, the other being baptism. Unlike sacraments in different traditions, ordinances in Baptist theology are symbolic acts of obedience instituted by Christ (Dever 2012,55). The Baptist Communion service emphasises remembrance, proclamation of Christ’s death, and self-examination, rather than sacramental grace or transubstantiation. The service order emphasises preaching,

prayer, Scripture, and congregational participation in the bread and cup (Hammett, 2005,164).

- i. Call to Worship: The Communion service begins with a call to worship, inviting the congregation into God's presence. This often includes a Scripture passage such as Psalm 95:6, "Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." In Baptist services, the call to worship reminds the congregation that Communion is an act of obedience and thanksgiving (Garrett, 2009,298).
- ii. Opening Hymn and Invocation: The congregation sings a hymn highlighting Christ's death and sacrifice, such as There Is a Fountain Filled with Blood. Afterward, the pastor leads in an invocation prayer, asking God's blessing on the service and focusing hearts on the sacred act of remembering Christ (Webber 2008,87).
- iii. Scripture Reading: A reading from the New Testament is central, typically 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, where Paul recounts the institution of the Lord's Supper. Some Baptist pastors may also include readings from the Gospels (Matt. 26:26–30) to connect the service directly to Jesus' words. This grounds the ordinance in biblical authority (Dever, 2012,60).
- iv. Short Exhortation or Sermonette: The pastor often delivers a brief exhortation or mini-sermon before distributing the elements. The message emphasises three Baptist themes:
 1. Remembrance of Christ's sacrifice - The bread and cup are symbols of His body and blood.
 2. Proclamation of the gospel - Communion testifies publicly to Christ's death until He returns.
 3. Self-examination – Participants are urged to approach the table in humility and faith (Hammett, 2005,166).
- v. Prayer of Confession and Thanksgiving: Unlike more liturgical traditions, Baptists typically use a spontaneous pastoral prayer of confession and thanksgiving. The prayer acknowledges human sin, asks for forgiveness, and expresses gratitude for salvation through Christ's atoning death (Stott 2007,124).

- vi. Distribution of the Bread: The pastor explains the meaning of the bread, quoting Jesus' words: "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24). Deacons or elders usually assist in distributing the bread to the congregation. In many Baptist churches, all participants wait until everyone has received the bread, then eat together as a sign of unity (Garrett, 2009,302).
- vii. Distribution of the Cup: Next, the pastor explains the meaning of the cup, reading from Scripture: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:25). The cup, often grape juice rather than wine, is distributed by deacons. As with the bread, the congregation usually drinks together as a corporate testimony of faith (Hammett, 2005,168).
- viii. Hymn of Remembrance: After the bread and cup, the congregation sings a hymn of thanksgiving. A common Baptist tradition is to sing the Blessed Be the Tie That Binds hymn, echoing Matthew 26:30, where Jesus and His disciples sang a hymn after the Last Supper (Dever, 2012,61).
- ix. Closing Prayer: The pastor offers a prayer of dedication, asking that the meaning of the Supper strengthen believers' faith and inspire them to live faithfully in the world. This reflects the Baptist emphasis that Communion is not an end but a reminder to embody Christian witness daily (Stott, 2007,128).
- x. Benediction: The service concludes with a benediction such as Numbers 6:24–26 or 2 Corinthians 13:14. This final blessing commissions the congregation to leave with renewed commitment to Christ's mission (Garrett, 2009,305).

Implications of Communion

- 1. Theological Implications: The theological understanding of Communion, often called the Lord's Supper or Eucharist, has historically deeply affected Christian identity, faith practice, and spiritual formation. Across centuries, Christian traditions have debated whether Communion should be seen as a measure of righteousness, a sacramental participation that affirms one's holiness before God or as a memorial code, a symbolic act commemorating Christ's redemptive sacrifice. Theologically, Communion as a memorial code underscores that righteousness is not attained through the act but through faith in Christ's atoning

sacrifice (Eph. 2:8-9). This prevents the distortion of Communion into a legalistic or ritualistic measure of holiness, affirming instead that it is a symbolic proclamation of Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor. 11:23–26). When misinterpreted as a measure of righteousness, Communion risks becoming a performance-based test of worthiness, undermining the doctrine of grace. Adequately understood, Communion points believers toward Christ's finished work, fosters unity in the body of Christ, and shapes ethical living as a response to grace rather than a prerequisite.

2. Implications for the Churches or Denominations: The understanding of Communion as either a measure of righteousness or a memorial code directly shapes denominational identity, worship practices, and doctrinal boundaries. Firstly, churches that treat Communion as a measure of righteousness often emphasise sacramental theology. For example, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and some Anglican traditions view the Eucharist as a means of grace through which participants receive spiritual renewal and more profound union with Christ (McGrath, 2017,221). This perspective often leads to liturgical practices such as frequent Mass, priestly mediation, and the necessity of confession before participation. It creates a sense of reverence, mystery, and exclusivity, as not all believers may be considered spiritually “worthy” to partake (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). In contrast, denominations such as Baptists, many Reformed traditions, and Pentecostals often interpret Communion as a memorial code an ordinance symbolising remembrance of Christ's death rather than a direct channel of righteousness. This leads to practices that stress simplicity, accessibility, and community participation. For instance, in Baptist churches, the Lord's Supper is a symbolic reminder of salvation already received by faith rather than a sacrament that imparts righteousness (Grenz 2000,348). The implication here is denominational differentiation. Communion theology continues to mark denominational boundaries, shaping ecumenical relationships. Churches that see Communion as sacramental often restrict participation to members of their own Communion (closed table), while those viewing it as

memorial tend to practice open table fellowship. This difference fosters theological richness and denominational division (Marshall, 2016,133).

3. Implications for the Christian Body: Beyond denominational boundaries, the wider Christian body faces implications of unity, diversity, and ecumenism concerning Communion. When viewed as a measure of righteousness, communion underscores holiness and accountability. It reminds the Christian body of the importance of repentance, self-examination, and spiritual discipline (1 Corinthians 11:28). This fosters a deeper pursuit of holiness but can risk creating a sense of elitism within the broader body of Christ. The requirement of “worthiness” may fracture fellowship when some believers are excluded due to doctrinal, moral, or denominational differences (Ferguson 2018,179). On the other hand, the memorial understanding emphasises inclusivity and unity. It frames Communion as a shared act of remembering Christ’s sacrificial love and proclaiming his death until he returns (1 Corinthians 11:26). In this light, Communion becomes a unifying symbol across traditions, pointing all believers back to the cross rather than focusing on denominational differences (Erickson, 2013,112). Therefore, Communion has a double implication for the Christian body: it can deepen divisions when understood sacramentally or foster ecumenical unity when practised as a memorial code. The ongoing dialogue between traditions highlights the challenges and opportunities for greater Christian unity around the Lord’s Table (Torrance 1996,91).
4. Implications to the Individual: At the personal level, the meaning of Communion carries profound spiritual, moral, and psychological implications. For individuals who see Communion as a measure of righteousness, participation becomes a moment of deep reflection on one’s spiritual state. The Apostle Paul’s admonition to “examine yourselves” (1 Corinthians 11:28) is interpreted as a moral and spiritual purity requirement. This can encourage accountability, repentance, and holiness in daily living. Giving bread and wine becomes a tangible affirmation of God’s sanctifying grace, strengthening personal faith (Packer 1993,124). However, this interpretation can also foster fear, guilt, and

exclusion. Some individuals may avoid Communion altogether out of unworthiness, hindering their sense of belonging within the Christian community (Fee 2014,417). In contrast, when understood as a memorial code, Communion reassures believers of their acceptance in Christ. It shifts the focus from personal worthiness to Christ's completed work on the cross. For individuals, this can be liberating: Communion becomes an act of gratitude, a celebration of grace, and a reaffirmation of hope in Christ's return (Grudem, 2020,882). Thus, Communion shapes individual spirituality as a discipline of righteousness or a practice of remembrance. Both affect how believers relate to God, themselves, and others.

5. Implications to Society: Communion affects the Church and carries social significance. Communion can inspire social ethics rooted in holiness, justice, and accountability when seen as a measure of righteousness. The seriousness of the sacrament is reflected in believers' moral conduct within society, encouraging integrity, honesty, and compassion (Barth 1961,45). At the same time, this interpretation can create a social divide, especially in pluralistic societies where non-Christians or even Christians of differing traditions may feel excluded from the communal fellowship. Exclusivity around Communion sometimes reflects broader exclusivity in social interactions, contributing to sectarianism (Walls 2002,74). On the other hand, the memorial perspective emphasises inclusivity, hospitality, and reconciliation. Communion as a memorial of Christ's sacrificial love can inspire believers to work toward social justice, peace, and reconciliation in society. It becomes a moral compass reminding Christians of their call to serve the marginalised, promote peace, and resist oppression (Cone 2011,156). Communion provides a social ethic: whether sacramental or memorial, it influences how Christians live in the public sphere, engage in social responsibility, and model Christ's love in society.
6. Implications to Institutions: Finally, Communion has implications for Christian institutions such as schools, seminaries, and health facilities, as well as for societal institutions influenced by Christianity. Within Christian educational

institutions, Communion shapes theological formation and spiritual disciplines. For example, seminaries in sacramental traditions often train ministers to administer the Eucharist as a channel of grace, emphasising liturgy, doctrine, and sacramental theology (Oden 2006,202). In memorialist traditions, institutions prioritise teaching Communion's symbolic and communal significance, fostering biblical literacy and discipleship. Healthcare and charitable institutions also reflect Communion's implications. The sacramental view often inspires acts of service as extensions of Christ's presence in the world, while the memorialist perspective highlights Christ's example of sacrificial love as a model for care, compassion, and advocacy. Moreover, broader societal institutions, such as legal and political systems, may indirectly be influenced by Communion theology. The Eucharistic ethic of justice, peace, and shared humanity contributes to discourses around human dignity, community responsibility, and social welfare (Wright 2006,273). Thus, Communion's theological interpretations inform religious practices and shape institutional ethos and mission.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The doctrine and practice of Communion remain central to Christian identity, worship, and theological reflection. This study has shown that Communion is not merely a ritual that measures personal righteousness but primarily a memorial code that recalls Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection. While some traditions have interpreted Communion as a gauge of holiness or spiritual worthiness, the broader biblical and theological evidence emphasises its role as a covenantal sign of grace, unity, and remembrance (1 Cor. 11:23–26). Partaking does not establish righteousness but reflects a believer's faith in Christ's completed work. Moreover, Communion has communal, ecclesial, and societal implications. It fosters spiritual unity within the body of Christ, challenges churches to uphold moral integrity, and calls individuals to continual self-examination in light of God's grace. Communion stands as a moral and ethical compass for institutions and society, reminding Christians of their responsibility to reflect Christ's love, justice, and humility in the world. Thus, Communion is best understood as a sacred memorial code, an ordinance

that proclaims Christ's saving work while simultaneously shaping righteous living through grace, not works.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. For Churches and Denominations: Churches should emphasise the memorial aspect of Communion while teaching believers that it does not in itself confer righteousness. Proper catechesis and doctrinal clarity will prevent legalistic or ritualistic misunderstandings.
2. For the Christian Body: The universal Church must use Communion to promote unity, reconciliation, and mutual love across denominational and cultural divides, recognising it as a shared proclamation of Christ's redemptive work.
3. For Individual Believers: Christians should approach the Lord's Table with humility, gratitude, and self-examination, not as a test of worthiness but as a means of drawing nearer to God's grace and renewing covenantal faith.
4. For Society: Communion's ethical implications should inspire believers to live out Christlike values in society, promoting justice, reconciliation, and compassion as outward expressions of the inward grace celebrated at the table.
5. For Institutions: Theological institutions and seminaries should integrate robust teaching on the theology and practice of Communion into their curricula, ensuring ministers are equipped to guide congregations in a biblically faithful understanding of the ordinance.

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