

Sanctification in Community: The Doctrine of the Church

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II. The Definition, Purposes, and Functions of the Local Church

Edward T. Hiscox defines the local church as “a company of regenerate persons, baptized on a profession of faith in Christ; united in covenant for worship, instruction, the observance of Christian ordinances, and for such service as the gospel requires; recognizing and accepting Christ as their supreme Lord and Lawgiver, and taking His Word as their only and sufficient rule of faith and practice in all matters of conscience and religion” (*New Directory for Baptist Churches*, p. 20). Upon dissection of this definition, we discover the following:

A. The Elements Requisite to a Local Church

1. Genuine believers in the Lord Jesus Christ,

Acts 2:41: Those who had received his word were...added.

Acts 2:47: The Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

2. Who have been immersed publicly upon profession of faith in Christ,

Acts 2:41: Those who were baptized...were added.

Matthew 28:19–20 also appears to be a progression: “Disciple...Baptize...Teach.”

3. Who confess a fixed and common corpus of biblical doctrine,
Acts 2:42: They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching.
See Romans 6:17; 16:17; Titus 1:9; Jude 3
4. Who share a common purpose (function/mission):
Gathering for corporate prayer, reading, confession, instruction, singing, fellowship, and dispersing to carry out the Great Commission.
5. Who observe the two ordinances,
Acts 2:41–42: They were baptized...and devoted to...the breaking of bread.
6. Who possess independent, corporate autonomy,
There is no biblical evidence for a hierarchy of ecclesial authority. Even the apostles operated under the auspices of local churches (Acts 13:2; 15:3–4, 22; 1 Cor 16:3). The multiple “one another” passages in the epistles also suggest that the churches were equipped to govern their own affairs without necessary assistance from other churches. This does not mean that individual churches sustain no relationship at all with other churches, cannot receive formal counsel from other churches, cannot partner with other churches for the sake of the Gospel, or cannot accept help (human/material resources) from other churches (all these may be demonstrated from Scripture), but no church must yield to a source of authority beyond Christ and the Scriptures alone in the carrying out of its ecclesiastical functions.
7. Who own the Bible as their only and sufficient rule of faith and practice,
1 Peter 1:3: His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence.

To these elements, we might add the following:

8. Who are organized with biblical officers,
1 Timothy 3:1–13
9. Who meet together at regular and stated times.
Acts 20:7: On the first day of the week we were gathered together to break bread.
1 Corinthians 16:2: On the first day of every week each one of you is to put aside and save, as he may prosper, so that no collections be made when I come.

B. The Elements of Worship in the Gathered Church

1 Timothy 4:13 (Bill Mounce): Until I come, be devoted to **the reading** of Scripture, to **the exhortation**, and to **the teaching**.

Acts 2:42—They continued to meet together in the temple courts, devoting themselves to **the apostles' teaching** and to **the fellowship**, to **the breaking of bread** and to **the prayers**.

The question of the elements of Christian worship has long been a matter of contention. Baptists have historically held to the *regulative principle of worship*, viz., that “the acceptable way of worshiping the true God, is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imagination and devices of men, nor the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scriptures” (from the London Baptist Confession).

This principle, which contrasts with the “normative principle” (viz., that the Church may include in its worship anything that the Bible does not explicitly forbid), suggests that the two key verses above (and others like them) do not merely describe what the early church did, but also prescribe what the church must do. Specifically, they define the *elements* of worship, or the fixed parts of the liturgy that must appear in the course of regular worship. In our texts, the elements of worship appear uniformly with the definite article (not visible in all modern translations):

- The reading
- The exhortation
- The teaching
- The fellowship
- The breaking of bread
- The prayers

1. The Reading

The first item on Paul’s list is **the reading**. This is the totality of the words reflected in the original, but nearly every modern translation reflects the understanding that Paul is referring not to reading in general, but to the universal practice of the *public reading of the Scriptures*. This tops Paul’s list because it is the most rudimentary function of public worship—to expose people to the Bible. In the history of the church, the reading has traditionally been substantial, including a chapter from each testament weekly. The whole Bible can be read in about ten years with this schedule.

2. The Exhortation (e.g., the Sermon)

The definite article suggests more than that we are to be a people who consciously exhort one another. We should be that, but that’s not what this verse is saying. Rather, it communicates an expectation that the young minister Timothy be “devoted to *the sermon*.” The implication here is that the sermon was a prominent element of every regular worship service. This practice exceeds the mere reading of Scripture to include close examination, explanation, and application of the text to all of life.

3. The Teaching

Of all elements of worship, the “teaching” receives by far the greatest attention in terms of the testimony of the whole NT. This is, perhaps, a great surprise, especially in view of the fact that we don’t normally have a block in our liturgy called “The Teaching.” It is important to note that Paul is not conflating preaching and teaching into one element here. He’s identifying a distinct element of Christian worship.

The early practice of first developing and then either *singing* or *reciting* creeds and confessions is well established, originating in the Scriptures themselves. Perhaps the best known of the biblical creeds appears in 1 Corinthians 15, where Paul lists for his readers several matters of “first importance,” namely that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.” Another creed is found in Philippians 2, where the self-emptying and exaltation of Christ come to us with a polished cadence that suggests it was memorized and recited/sung in the early church. The well-worn passage detailing the procedure for the Lord’s Table (1 Corinthians 11) has similar features. In all, we have no fewer than eight NT creeds, and as many as thirteen.

So how should “the teaching” manifest in modern worship?

- a. The use of creeds and catechisms (a staple of Christian worship in nearly every era but our own) may be revived.
- b. The adoption of careful doctrinal summaries in song is also a well-worn method of communicating “the teaching.” Many, in fact, understand the term *hymn* (e.g., Eph 5:19) to communicate exactly that. In any case, both Paul and Luke are commanding churches to collectively give attention to the preparation and regular review of the theological essentials that bind the faith and practice of the church.

4. The Fellowship.

The term *fellowship* is a common one in the NT, and has as its basic meaning that of “sharing.” This could reference of interpersonal conversation that we have before or after the worship service. But the pattern here seems to identify “the fellowship” as an element in the formal liturgy. It is interesting that in the NT, fully a third of the uses of this term (*koinonia*), and almost all of the uses of this term with the article, refer to the sharing of *resources*. In Romans 15:26, 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 9:13, and Hebrews 13:16, this construction is best translated as “the collection” or “the contribution”—a weekly “sharing” that equates to the modern practice of taking up an offering. If that is the case, then Luke is not referring primarily to edifying conversations between church members (which we certainly should have), but to formal *resource* sharing, in which we privilege those who are of the “household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

5. The Breaking of Bread

This element almost certainly refers to the *Lord’s Table*. The Lord’s Table, as we shall discover below, is one of two formal rites assigned to the church (the other is baptism), and the primary function of both is to define and celebrate the community: baptism is an initiation rite into the ecclesiastical community (we are baptized into the body); communion is a continuation rite by which community is both policed and celebrated (note the emphasis in 1 Cor 11). That baptism is not mentioned in our key texts as an element of *regular* worship is likely explained by the fact that baptism occurs incidentally, that is, only when new believers are admitted. The Lord’s Table, however, is to be practiced regularly.

6. The Prayers

Again the article suggests that there existed a very well-known and firmly established practice of *focused* prayers that were universally a part of the liturgy of the apostolic church. Churches have always been a place of public prayer, and despite a modern decline in this practice, need to renew their devotion to prayer and, to the point, to *the prayers*.

Question: Is it appropriate to call these elements “means of grace”?

Because of confusion perpetrated in some Christian traditions (chiefly Romanism) that the Church dispenses *saving* or *justifying* grace via its sacraments, some Protestants decline to call the elements of worship “means of grace.” But this omission can, I think, diminish the function of gathered worship. The Scriptures clearly indicate that we may “minister grace” to one another in our hymnody (Col 3:16) and in our conversations (Eph 4:29; Col 4:6). The act of giving is called a “grace” (1 Cor 8:1, 6, 7); the bestowal and use of spiritual gifts in the church is called a “grace” (Eph 4:7); in the act of prayer we receive “grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16); and the sermon is repeatedly called a “word of grace.” These are not instances of justifying grace, but sanctifying grace—we are nourished and enriched by them in our Christian walk.

All this suggests that the nexus of sanctification is not principally individual, but communal. We receive much of what we need for life and godliness in the community of the saints. We neglect the assembly at great peril.

III. Membership in the Local Church

The idea of local church membership has fallen on hard times in Baptist life. Many eschew the need for membership entirely; others view it as optional, favoring instead individual sovereignty in church life. Even those who do favor membership often regard membership as voluntary, to be pursued, transferred, or abandoned at the pleasure of the individual rather than at the will of the body. This ambivalence runs contrary to biblical description of NT Church life.

A. The Fact of Church Membership

The concept of the “unchurched believer” is foreign to the New Testament. Salvation and baptism *de facto* placed one into the local, baptizing body. The letters of the NT were written in large part to churches. The “one another” injunctions demand continuing, formal Christian relationships. In fact, a significant portion of NT revelation cannot be applied apart from the life of the church.

1. A membership roll was maintained.

Acts 2:41: 3000 were *added*.

Acts 4:4: The number of the men came to be about five thousand.

2. Membership standards were enforced with whole church discipline.

- Matthew 18:17: If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.
- 1 Corinthians 5:13: But those who are *outside*, God judges. Remove the wicked man *from among yourselves*.
- 2 Thessalonians 3:14: If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.
3. Church decisions assume a membership.
- Acts 6:2: Select *from among you* seven men of good reputation...
- Acts 15:22: The apostles and elders, with the whole church, decided to choose *some of their own men* and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.
4. The church even maintained sub-lists of specific members.
- 1 Timothy 5:9: A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man,...
5. Many other NT passages make no sense apart from a local church membership.
- That the *whole* church could *all* be gathered *together* (Acts 2:1, 44; 14:27; 15:30; 1 Cor 11:33) implies that it is a fixed body of known persons.
 - The many “among you” passages indicate that one is either in or out of the assembly; furthermore, someone (even poss. a believer) may even be “in the midst” of a “whole church that has gathered together” (1 Cor 14:23), but still not be *among* them (v. 25; cf. 1 John 2:19).
 - The many “one another” injunctions cannot work apart from carefully defined and observable Christian identity markers.
 - Christian leaders are shepherds of particular and identifiable flocks (1 Pet 5:2), and correspondingly, church members have particular and identifiable leaders (Heb 13:17).
6. As we shall see below, the ordinances of the church make no sense apart from a carefully defined local church membership.

B. The Theological Purposes of Church Membership

- Church Membership establishes for all inquirers the identity of those who are “in” (believers in good standing in a local assembly) and those who are “out” (including both unbelievers *and also* believers who are either [a] not in good standing or are [b] merely visiting). In Leeman’s words, church membership is “the declaration [by an authorized examining body] that a professing individual is an official, licensed, card-carrying, *bona fide* Jesus representative” (*Church Membership*, 79). It answers the question “**Who are we?**”
- Church Membership serves as a covenant or contract of believers with one another

for mutual welfare, fellowship, and discipline. Again, citing Leeman, “Church membership is a formal relationship between a local church and a Christian characterized by the church’s affirmation and oversight of a Christian’s discipleship and the Christian’s submission to living out his or her discipleship in the care of the church” (64). It answers the question, “**To whom and for whom am I responsible?**”

- It identifies the flock for which pastors must give an account (Acts 20:28; Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:2).
 - It specifies whom the church must include in its fellowships, both formal and informal (1 Cor 11:33).
 - It supplies all the requisite parts that must cooperate to do the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11–16; 25–32).
 - It establishes the perimeters of the church’s sphere of discipline, whether instructive or punitive. The church is concerned with those who are “inside” but not those who are “outside,” that is, in God’s sphere (2 Cor 5:13).
 - It identifies the household of faith that is the special object of good deeds (Gal 6:10).
 - It establishes a beachhead for Christian witness (John 17:20–23; Eph 3:10; 2 Pet 2:9–12).
3. Church Membership also identifies, specifically in a Baptist context, who may legitimately participate in decision-making aspects of the local church. It answers the question, “**Who speaks for us?**”

C. The Duties of Church Members

Historically, Baptist churches and manuals made significant emphasis on the duties of members. Today, however, little emphasis on the duties of membership is made in many Baptist circles. This is terribly unfortunate, because (1) it makes members believe that they have no responsibilities to the body, causing them to be neglectful and even flippant about church life, (2) it feeds the perception that the church exists to meet the needs of its members rather than members the needs of the church, and (3) it denies any standard of conduct by which to measure the beliefs and behavior of members to ensure spiritual growth (and the converse, to prevent and correct spiritual deviance or apathy).

1. Duties to Pastors and Leaders

- a. To pray for their effectiveness in the gospel (1 Thess 5:25; Eph 6:19; Col 4:3; Heb 13:18) and protection from attack without and within (2 Thess 3:2).
- b. To obey them in any matter that falls under his official capacity (Heb 13:17).
- c. To visibly honor, esteem, and reward them, not as charity, but as debt (1 Cor 9:3–14; Gal 6:6; Phil 2:29; 1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Tim 5:17).
- d. To actively support him and resist those who would discredit him (1 Tim 5:19; 2 Tim 1:16; 4:16; 3 John 9, 10).

2. Duties to Fellow-Members

- a. To assemble regularly for mutual edification and stimulus to good deeds (Heb 10:24–25; 1 Thess 5:11), and particularly to celebrate regularly the believers’ union with Christ as observed in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:17–34).
- b. To pray for one another (Jas 5:16).
- c. To support fellow-members in grief, financial trouble, and sickness (Gal 6:10; 1 John 4:7–11; Jas 1:27; 2:15–16)
- d. To actively discover the cause of interpersonal tensions and admonish fellow-members observed in sin (Matt 5:23–24; 18:15–18; Rom 15:14; 1 Thess 5:14; Heb 3:13).
- e. To prevent disunity by the exercise of self-sacrifice, prayer, confrontation, and refraining from meddling and gossip (Rom 15:1ff; 1 Cor 13:7; 2 Cor 12:20; Gal 6:1–2; 2 Thess 3:11; 1 Tim 5:13; 6:4; Jas 3:18; 4:11).

In so establishing these duties, the church provides the principal context for Christian sanctification. While professional counseling may sometimes be helpful, the locus of counseling is the local church. Not only do the elements of corporate worship (public prayer, the reading of Scripture, singing, exhortation through preaching, the regular practice of the Christian ordinances, and fellowship) establish the foundation for biblical counseling, but the many “one another” passages imply that mutual counseling should be the continuous experience of all believers at all times within the community of faith.

IV. The Ordinances of the Local Church

A. The Meaning of an Ordinance

An ordinance an **outward rite that Christ has appointed to be administered in his church as a visible sign of the union of the believer with Christ *his gathered body*.**

B. Baptism: Ensuring Congregational Purity by Guarding the Door to the Church

See esp. Mark Dever, “Baptism in the Context of the Local Church,” in *Believer’s Baptism: A Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H, 2006).

“Believer’s baptism is important because it is the principal means by which [a regenerate church] membership is preserved” (Hammett, 95).

This statement may seem odd in modern churches that almost exclusively emphasize baptism as the believer’s *personal* affirmation of *individual* union with Christ: a public profession of solidarity with Christ and first public step of Christian obedience. The following is not intended to diminish this function of baptism, but to resurrect a lost emphasis of baptism—the church’s use of the rite to collectively affirm that the one being baptized bears all the marks of a true believer and so confirm the corporate unity of the whole church with him. This, then, serves as (1) a principal means of Christian assurance and (2) an important vehicle for protecting the purity of the body.

1. The Meaning of Baptism

Baptism is a symbol and public announcement of the believer's union with Christ.

- a. The believer is *individually* united with Christ by participation in his death and burial (the believer's death to sin) and resurrection (the believer's walk in the new, abundant life of regeneration that culminates in his ultimate resurrection).

Romans 6:4–5: We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.

Galatians 3:26–27: You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Colossians 2:12–13: [You have] been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him, having forgiven us all our transgressions.

- b. The believer is also *corporately* united to the body (i.e., the church) of Christ. This function of baptism has largely been lost by the modern church: Water Baptism is a *church* ordinance.

- (1) The *symbolism* of physical immersion draws primarily from its spiritual counterpart in Spirit Baptism into the universal body of Christ:

1 Corinthians 12:12–13: For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Gal 3:28: [You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus; all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.] There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Summary: **Water baptism symbolizes on a local, visible level what Spirit baptism accomplishes on a universal, invisible level.**

- (2) The *uniqueness of water baptism to this age* demonstrates its significance to the local church.

Matthew 28:19: Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them...

Acts 2:41: Those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

- (3) The *institution of water baptism as a precursor to inclusion into the new community of God* demonstrates its significance for local church life.

Acts 2:41: Those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

1 Peter 3:21: The significance of baptism is “not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God,” a likely reference to a public pledge of ecclesiastical commitment voiced to God, in conjunction with the rite of baptism, as witnessed by and shared with the local community.

Colossians 2:11–12: In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men but with the circumcision done by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead.

Summary: Water Baptism is the Entry Rite into the Christian Church.

2. The Administration of Baptism

- a. The church is the only proper administrator of baptism. Baptism is a *church* ordinance, not merely a *Christian* ordinance. Only the church has as its property the guardianship of the truth (1 Tim 3:15). It alone is qualified to examine and approve the validity of a believer’s profession (Acts 10:44–48; 11:18).
- b. The procedure for baptism.
 - (1) The church ascertains that the candidate grasps the necessary content of the Gospel and has a credible profession of faith. **This is the church’s principal venue for preserving the purity of the local body.**
 - (2) The church votes to affirm the manifest faith of the candidate and receive him into membership via baptism.
 - (3) The church may appoint anyone it wishes to immerse the candidate. Usually this is a pastor in the baptizing church, but in the absence of this option, the church may legitimately appoint one of its members or the pastor of a sister church to perform the baptism. There is no biblical mandate in this case.
 - (4) Baptism is properly received only once.
 - The NT writers anticipated that churches would “accept” or “receive” previously baptized members on the basis of a letter alone (Rom 14:2; 15:7; 16:2; Phlm 17).
 - While water baptism precipitates entry into the local body of believers, it also points symbolically to the believer’s personal union with Christ and his entry into the church universal, both of which happen once and cannot be lost. As such, to repeat this rite would be to confuse its symbolism.

C. Communion (The Lord’s Supper): Ensuring Congregational Purity by Maintaining the Community of the Church

See esp. Ray Van Neste, “The Lord’s Supper in the Context of the Local Church,” in *The Lord’s Supper: Remembering and Proclaiming Christ Until He Comes* (Nashville: B&H, 2010).

1. The Meaning of Communion

Just as baptism served as an *entry* or *initiation* rite celebrating a believer’s union with

Christ and his Church, the Table serves as a *continuation* rite in which believers perpetually re-examine and celebrate the communion that was established in baptism.

- a. The believer celebrates his continuing *individual* union with Christ by re, e, bering his atoning work.

Matthew 26:26: Take, eat; this is my body...my blood...which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.

John 6:53–56: Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves.

1 Corinthians 10:16: Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 11:24–26: Do this in *remembrance of me* (3x).

- b. The believer celebrates his continuing *corporate* union with the body (i.e., the church) of Christ.

Communion is more than a memorial of the believer's individual union with Christ: it is a celebration of the corporate union of all believers in the body of Christ. This is Paul's primary emphasis in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34:

2. The Administration of The Lord's Table

- a. As was true with the ordinance of baptism, the church is the only proper administrator of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is a *church* ordinance.

(1) Communion was celebrated biblically "when you come together as a church" (Acts 2:42–44; 20:7; 1 Cor 11:33 cf. vv. 18, 20).

(2) Arguing further from 1 Corinthians 11, we note that Paul says that the Corinthian believers were *not really eating the Lord's Supper* because only *part* of the local body was present (1 Cor 11:28–29 cf. vv. 21, 33).

(3) 1 Corinthians 5:11 indicates that the enforcement of final church discipline (cf. also vv. 2, 13; Matt 18:17; 2 Cor 2:6) includes the withdrawal of fellowship and specifically of *eating*. This almost certainly includes the Lord's Table in its scope.

- b. The Procedure for Observing the Lord's Supper

(1) Communion is practiced perpetually in the life of the church "until he comes." Unlike baptism, which celebrates the believer's one-time act of uniting with Christ and with the visible body, communion is a covenant renewal that celebrates the believer's commitment to the visible body of Christ and to the duties of Church membership. Scripture sets no schedule for the observance of the Table except to say that it should be observed "often" (1 Cor 11:26).

(2) Once a schedule is established, it is announced in advance in order that preparations be made:

- (a) Interpersonal conflicts between members are to be resolved to preserve the unity of the body and prevent sins from festering.

Matthew 18:15: If a brother sins against you or personal fellowship has otherwise dissolved, restoration should occur before a community rite is celebrated.

1 Corinthians 11:28–32—A man should examine himself; in this way he should eat the bread and drink from the cup. For whoever eats and drinks *without recognizing the body*, eats and drinks judgment on himself. This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep.

- (b) Whole church discipline is finalized so as to exclude from participation anyone who might not be eating in a worthy manner.

1 Corinthians 5:4–5, 11–13—When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, hand this man over to Satan.... With such a man do not even eat.

Note: While these notes do not cover the whole topic of church discipline, the value of this practice for the health and sanctification of the church cannot be overstated. Final church discipline is effectively a whole-church determination that a believer has established a persistent pattern of unconfessed sin and is no longer showing the fruits of faith. It is effectively the church's announcement that they no longer are confident of their original assessment of the candidate's faith when he was accepted for membership (Matt 18:18). By so releasing the offender from the church, the church revokes a principal vehicle of Christian assurance (1 John 2:19; Heb 10:25–27; 35–36), an act that ideally (1) terrifies the offender into repentance and in any case (2) maintains the purity of the Church.

- (c) The church receives into its fellowship the following:

- New members, either by baptism, letter, or experience,
- Restored members who have repented in the face of discipline,
- Transient members of other churches are invited to participate according to the church's policy.

- (3) The administrator should review the biblical requirements for fellowship at the Lord's Table:

- (a) Regeneration

- Biblically, this is the consistent pattern.

Acts 2:41–42: So then, *those who had received his word*...were continually devoting themselves...to the breaking of bread.

1 Corinthians 11:32: God's chastisement for eating the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner occurs in lieu of condemnation with the world.

- The theological symbolism of the rite also requires regeneration. In order for one to participate in the *continuing* benefits of Christ's crosswork, he must have received the first benefit: *regeneration*.

(b) Baptism

- Biblically, this is the consistent pattern.

Acts 2:41–42: So then, *those who...were baptized* were continually devoting themselves...to the breaking of bread.

- The theological symbolism of the rite also suggests the priority of baptism to the Lord’s Table. Baptism symbolizes a believer’s one-time *entry* into union with Christ. Logically, it must precede a rite that celebrates the believer’s *continuing participation* in Christ.

(c) Church Membership

- Biblically, this is the consistent pattern.

Acts 2:41–42: So then, *those who were added...* were continually devoting themselves...to the breaking of bread.

- The material above on communion as a *church* ordinance also suggests the necessity for church membership. Communion is observed “when you gather together *as a church*” (1 Cor 11:18), that is, as a *whole* church.

(d) An Orderly Walk

As is demonstrated above and further below, one of the more visible results of church discipline is the withholding of fellowship, particularly that of eating together (1 Cor 5:11). The Table is a God-ordained means for the church to police and correct the conduct of her members.

Summary: As we conclude our study of sanctification in community, it is only reasonable that we end with a celebration of the community as the principal locus of Christian sanctification. By gathering regularly in covenant with each other we receive not only the grace necessary for sanctification (the ordinary means of grace and elements of corporate worship), find mutual accountability in our journey toward godliness (Church membership), and regular reminders of both the privilege and responsibility of Christian saints (the formal celebration of the ordinances and the continuous, informal practice of the “one-another” commands that dominate the New Testament).