

Appendix A – Convergence Statement of Doctrinal Commitments

Introduction

Throughout history, the catholic (universal) church has defined its beliefs through creeds. We affirm the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed, and Athanasian Creed. We consider them boundary markers for the Christian faith.

In recent history, these creeds have fallen into disuse among evangelicals. We encourage their study; however, we have summarized our beliefs below, categorizing them into three groups: first-tier doctrines, second-tier doctrines, and beliefs about cultural hot-button issues. This classification helps clarify our core convictions and encourages thoughtful dialogue on varying topics within the faith.

First-tier doctrines are foundational. Denying them typically results in a departure from orthodox Christianity. Examples include belief about the Trinity, the deity of Christ, resurrection, and salvation. Second-tier doctrines are significant, but they do not define the essence of Christianity. Examples include belief about the end times, modes of baptism, and church governance. Christians can differ on second-tier doctrines without compromising their Christian identity. Finally, we have included a section on cultural hot-button issues because people deserve to know where we stand in our modern context.

Members of Convergence affirm the historic Christian faith as espoused in the following first-tier doctrines. Members might differ on some of the other beliefs in this document.

Elders, Deacons, and staff members must affirm the historic Christian faith as espoused in the following first-tier doctrines. They will also not teach contrary to any other beliefs espoused in this document. Furthermore, the vetting process is designed to ensure that all elders and deacons are aligned with certain second-tier and "hot button" issues, including continuationism, abortion, the LGBTQ agenda, and racism.

First-tier Doctrines

1. We believe in the Triune God (Matthew 28:19): God the Father (John 6:27); God the Son (John 20:28); God the Spirit (Acts 5:3-4); each Person is co-equal and co-eternal.
2. We believe that God created all things, both visible and invisible, out of His goodness and for His glory. (Genesis 1:31; Psalm 104:24; Isaiah 43:7; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11)
3. We believe that all people are sinners by nature and by choice. (Psalm 51:5; Jeremiah 17:9; Romans 3:23; Romans 5:12; Ephesians 2:1-3)
4. We believe that God the Son took on humanity and will forever be fully God and fully man. (John 1:1, 14; 1 Timothy 2:5)
5. We believe that Jesus died on the cross in our place for our sin and that He was bodily resurrected on the third day. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21)
6. We believe that man can be justified only by grace alone and through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone. (Acts 16:31; Romans 4:5; Ephesians 2:8-9)
7. We believe that the Holy Spirit creates (Psalm 104:30), regenerates (Titus 3:5), empowers (Acts 1:8), unites (Ephesians 4:3), purifies (2 Corinthians 3:18), reveals (Acts 2:17-18), secures (Ephesians 1:13-14), and mediates God's presence or blessing (Isaiah 44:3; Romans 5:5).
8. We believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church (see Nicene Creed).
 - a. One. Diverse peoples comprise the unified people of God (Ephesians 4:4-6).
 - b. Holy. God calls the church to purity of doctrine and lifestyle (1 Peter 1:15-16).

- c. Catholic. “Catholic” means universal; the universal church spans time and space (Ephesians 1:22-23).
 - d. Apostolic. Our faith is rooted in the apostolic teaching and compelled by the apostolic mission (Ephesians 2:19-22).
9. We believe that the Bible is God’s inspired and authoritative Word (2 Peter 1:20-21; Psalm 119:11; 2 Timothy 3:15-17).
 10. We believe in the sacraments of water baptism and communion (Acts 2:38-42) (see Appendix E: Baptism Q&A and Appendix F: What Does Communion Do?).
 11. We believe in the future bodily return of the Lord Jesus, commonly called the Second Coming of Christ (Acts 1:11; Revelation 19:11-16).
 12. We believe that God will consign unbelievers to hell and believers to eternal life (John 5:28-29; Revelation 20:11-15).
 13. We believe in the resurrection of the dead and the renewal of creation (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:20-23; Romans 8:18-23).
 14. In summary, we believe what has been deemed orthodox for the last 2,000 years.

Second-tier Doctrines

- We believe in Reformed Soteriology (Soteriology = Study of Salvation), which is commonly delineated with the acronym, TULIP.
 - *Total Depravity*: Because of the Fall, every aspect of humanity is corrupted by sin. This affects a person’s mind, will, emotions, and flesh, making them incapable of coming to God without divine intervention (Rom. 3:10-12; Eph. 2:1).
 - *Unconditional Election*: God chooses certain individuals for salvation based solely on His will and purpose, not on any foreseen merit or action on their part (Eph. 1:4-5; Rom. 9:11-13).
 - *Limited Atonement*: Christ’s atonement is sufficient for all but effective only for the elect. Jesus “died for the world” in the sense that He offered Himself for all; He “died for the church” in the sense that He appeased God’s wrath for their sins alone (Jhn. 10:14-15; Eph. 5:25-27).
 - *Irresistible Grace*: When God intends to save someone, He succeeds in drawing that person to Himself (Jhn. 6:37; Rom. 8:29-30).
 - *Perseverance of the Saints*: Those who are truly saved will by God’s grace continue in their faith until the end (Phil. 1:6; Jhn. 10:28-29).
- We believe in the perpetuity of all the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 1:7; 13:8-12; Eph. 4:11-13).
- We believe in governance by a plurality of male elders who are leaders doing the work of the ministry—not simply policy makers (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim. 5:17)—and who are accountable to God (Heb. 13:17) and the church (1 Tim. 5:19-20; cf. Matt. 18:15-20).
- We believe that man and woman were each created in the image of God to reflect His glory through their masculinity and femininity, respectively. This has ramifications for leadership roles in the home and in the church (Gen. 1:27; 2:18; Eph. 5:22-33; 1 Tim. 2:12-15).
- We believe in believer’s baptism by immersion (Acts 8:38).
- We believe in the “Real Presence” of Christ at the Lord’s Supper, meaning that our Lord is present to us spiritually, hosting us at His Table (Luk. 24:30-35), enabling us by the Spirit to commune with Him (1 Cor. 10:16) as He nourishes us spiritually (Jhn. 6:53-56) and gives us a foretaste of the eschatological Wedding Feast (Rev. 19:7-9).

- We believe that the baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs at conversion (1 Cor. 12:13) and the filling of the Holy Spirit is the repeatable empowering of believers by the Holy Spirit to give prophetic testimony to Jesus (Acts 4:8, 31).

Cultural Hot-Button Issues:

- *Abortion*: life begins in the womb and must be protected (Ps. 139:13-16; Luke 1:15, 39-45). Abortion is sin (Ex. 20:13).
- *Sexuality*: all sexual behavior outside of heterosexual marriage is sinful (Lev. 18). Lust of the heart is likewise sinful, meaning that all pornography is wicked (Matt. 5:28). Transgenderism rejects God's design and deifies humans, granting them the power to define themselves as they please—a prerogative belonging to God alone (Gen. 1:28; Rom. 1:26-27).
- *Race*: all humans are made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27), and Jesus died to redeem all peoples, tearing down the wall of hostility between all (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14). To look down upon another on account of race is to look down on God and deify yourself. It is antithetical to Christianity (1 Jhn. 4:20).
- *Social justice*: Christians are called to pursue justice in society, which can be called social justice (Pr. 31:8-9; Isa. 1:17; Mic. 6:8). Nevertheless, the term "social justice" has been hijacked by some to include unbiblical causes that violate biblical teachings on sexuality.
- *Environmental stewardship*: God created Adam and Eve to steward the earth's resources as an expression of being made in God's image (Gen. 1:26-28). Caring for the environment is godly. As it relates to climate change, however, Christian liberty applies. Believers are free to interpret the available scientific data in keeping with their own conscience and the Spirit's guidance.
- *Politics*: Believers worship one King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we must be careful to avoid political idolatry (Phil. 2:9-11; 3:20; Rev. 19:16). One such manifestation is turning political preferences into first-tier doctrines, on par with historic church creeds. While on one hand we must avoid political idolatry, on the other we must avoid political rebellion. Scripture counsels us to submit to governing authorities—even wicked rulers—as a reflection of our submission to God (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:17). An exception to our call to submit would be in the case of conscientious objection. If wicked rulers require us to contradict Scripture, we must submit to God over them (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).
- *Marriage*: God designed marriage for one husband and one wife, together for life (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:4-6; Heb. 13:4). God forbids Christians from marrying non-Christians (1 Cor. 6:14; 7:39).
- *Children*: If possible, married people should have kids. By bringing them up in the training and instruction of the Lord, parents fulfill their creational commission and the Great Commission (Gen. 1:26-28; Deut. 6:4-7; Matt. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:4-7).
- *Divorce*: God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16). Therefore, every effort—including outside counsel—should be made to avoid it. Nevertheless, God allows for divorce in cases of adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; 19:9) and abandonment (1 Cor. 7:15). Furthermore, severe situations such as domestic abuse could also be cause for divorce (1 Cor. 7:15: "in such cases" indicates that abandonment is one of perhaps several severe situations that could qualify.)
- *Remarriage*: If someone divorces a spouse for an unbiblical reason, his or her remarriage is forbidden (Matt. 5:32; 19:9). However, if the remarriage has already occurred, the individual should repent and then remain in the marriage. In cases where the spouse has suffered divorce for biblical reasons, he or she is not "enslaved" or "bound" (1 Cor. 7:15) and can remarry.
- *Singleness*: Singleness is a gift from God (1 Cor. 7:7), enabling the believer to offer single-minded devotion to Christ (7:32-34). In fulfillment of prophecy, Christ—who never married—redeemed

singleness from its former cursedness (Isa. 56:3-5). Through Him, single believers foreshadow our eternal status as brothers and sisters in Christ (Matt. 19:12; cf. Acts 8:26-40).

Appendix B – Conflict, Sin, and Abuse

LEADERSHIP CONFLICT POLICY (ADDRESSING CONFLICT BETWEEN LEADERS)

Conflict Between Central Elders

If Central Elders (CE), whether Voting or Non-voting, face an impasse,¹ any one of them can call on the Central Deacon (CD) Advisory Board to help bring resolution. If the impasse remains, parties shall call upon the Full Council of Elders (FCE) to help bring resolution. In the spirit of Acts 15, sides will be presented and the will of God sought. While consensus will be aimed for, a majority vote will decide it. Both in the decision and its aftermath, the majority will seek to accommodate and honor the minority voice— “on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor” (1 Cor. 12:23). As stated in the bylaws, the whole church is welcome to attend FCE meetings.

Conflict Between House Church Elders

If House Church Elders (HCE) within a single house church find themselves at an impasse, any one HCE can call for a meeting with the CE, along with the CD Advisory Board, to help bring resolution. In the spirit of Acts 15, sides will be presented and the will of God sought. While consensus will be aimed for, a majority vote will decide it. Both in the decision and its aftermath, the majority will seek to accommodate and honor the minority voice. The house church is welcome to attend the above meeting.

Conflict Between House Church Elders and Central Elders

If the impasse relates to a house church or group of house churches that feels they cannot abide by the decisions of the CE, the interested HCE can appeal the decision by approaching the CE, along with the CD Advisory Board, to help bring resolution. If the impasse remains, the interested HCE can call for a special meeting of the FCE to help bring resolution. In the spirit of Acts 15, sides will be presented and the will of God sought. While consensus will be aimed for, a majority vote will decide it. Both in the decision and its aftermath, the majority will seek to accommodate and honor the minority voice. As stated in the bylaws, the whole church is welcome to attend FCE meetings.

If, at any time, House Church Elders (HCE) have attempted to resolve differences with the CE yet still feel it is not in their best interest to remain part of Convergence, the following procedures will be followed:

- The HCE shall provide to their house church congregation the rationale for their decision. A 2/3 congregational vote within the house church will determine whether it remains part of Convergence or instead becomes an independent house church.
- The HCE shall notify the CE Body of their intent, effecting the separation.
- Note: As house churches are planted, we expect on the frontside that some will decide not to be part of Convergence OKC. As a church for the city—Convergence OKC—we also choose in advance to bless these “separations” so long as orthodoxy and holiness are maintained.

¹ Throughout this policy, “impasse” does not refer to any matter in which elders disagree. Since issues are decided by a majority vote, elders will often disagree. The word “impasse” in this policy instead refers to ethical and spiritual dilemmas where a certain decision or activity would violate one’s conscience—i.e., “it would be sinful to do x.” The New Testament forbids that we violate our own conscience (Rom. 14:22-23; 1 Tim. 1:19) or compel others to do so (Rom. 14:1, 13, 15, 20-21; 1 Cor. 8:9, 12, 23; 10:28-29).

If, at any time, the CE feel that a house church has strayed from its commitments to Convergence OKC as spelled out in the bylaws—but not in a way that violates Christian orthodoxy or orthopraxy—the CE will work with the HCE seeking alignment. If they cannot align, then the house church will be blessed as an independent house church. In cases where house churches violate Christian orthodoxy or orthopraxy, see “CHURCH DISCIPLINE POLICY”.

Unresolved Churchwide Conflict

If, at any time, the FCE determines that a conflict has reached the point that Convergence cannot handle it “in house,” the appropriate elder(s) will reach out to an unbiased entity such as a sister church and/or organization specializing in conflict resolution.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE POLICY (ADDRESSING SIN IN THE CHURCH)

Sins Needing Discipline

Scripture commands churches to confront sin in a process historically labeled “church discipline.” When deciding which sins rise to the level of church discipline, our focus should be on sin that is outward, severe, and unrepentant. Below is a breakdown of each:

- **Outward:** We focus on outward sins like lying, sexual immorality, and espousing heresy, because these are objective. Inward sins like pride, envy, or greed, can be difficult to discern (cf. 1 Sam. 17:28). Nobody knows the heart; we barely know our own (Pr. 20:5; Jer. 17:9; 1 Cor. 4:4).
- **Severe:** In the New Testament, people were excommunicated for sexual immorality that rivaled even the pagans (1 Corinthians 5:1) and for teaching heresy (1 Tim. 1:19-20). Church discipline seemed to be reserved for severe sin.
- **Unrepentant:** We never discipline someone who has repented of sin. The goal of discipline IS their repentance (Matt. 18:15; 2 Cor. 2:5-8). The goal of discipline is not to punish.

The Process of Discipline

With regard to the process of church discipline, it will begin in house churches and follows the steps of Matt. 18:15-20: Individual appeal, plural appeal, churchwide appeal, excommunication.

- **Individual Appeal:** The individual sinned against addresses the one who sinned.
- **Plural Appeal:** If there is no repentance, the individual brings one or two more witnesses to make another appeal.
- **Churchwide Appeal:** If there is still no repentance, the two individuals will coordinate with the House Church Elders (HCE) about a time for public, churchwide intervention (“churchwide” referring to the house church). While it is natural for HCE to oversee parts of this process, they do not have authority to excommunicate. That belongs to the church (Matt. 18:17; 1 Cor. 5:4-5).
- **Excommunication:** If there is still no repentance, the house church collectively disfellowships from the person, continuing to hope and pray for reconciliation and restoration. The HCE and Central Elders (CE) should be in communication throughout this process. By the time it reaches this fourth stage, the HCE will notify the CE, who will then communicate with the Full Council of Elders (FCE), ensuring that the unrepentant person does not move to another house church.

Elders Who Need Discipline

Elders are not above church discipline. Paul alludes to Matthew 18 when he talks about addressing unrepentant elders with “two or three witnesses” (1 Tim. 5:19; Matt. 18:16). If the elder “refuses to

listen to them” (18:17)—that is, if they “persist in sin” (1 Tim. 5:20)—the address becomes public. Jesus says, “tell it to the church” (Matt. 18:17). Paul says, “rebuke them in the presence of all” (1 Tim. 5:20). Rather than being above their congregants, elders are accountable to congregants.

Paul’s allusion to Matthew 18 means we follow the same process for confronting elders as we do for any other church member. Sinning elders (whether CE or HCE) within house churches will receive an individual appeal, then a plural appeal, then a churchwide appeal (“churchwide” referring to the house church), and then excommunication. The process should apply the following ground rules:

- Victims of alleged abuse will not be required to confront their alleged abusers. See *Whistleblower Policy*.
- Members needing support in confronting elders can invite any HCE or CE to assist at any stage. If a female is preferred, members of the Deacon Advisory Board shall be available.
- The HCE Body shall notify the CE Body if the allegation against an elder or staff member could be disqualifying and/or if it reaches the stage of a plural appeal. The CE Body will then advise the process.
- A CE will be removed from his position as such—coincident with his excommunication from a house church, or in having been removed by the process described in §5.7.1.2, whichever happens first.
- If the sinning elder is a CE, and the person sinned against is not in his house church, the same process applies, and the “public appeal” should occur in the CE’s house church.
- If the sinning elder is a CE, and the nature of his sin is “against the whole church”—not just his house church—then the “public appeal” should occur in a Convergence members’ meeting.
- Any excommunication of a CE or staff member will involve a transparent public announcement.
- Assuming these steps are properly followed, no Elder Body shall hinder the churchwide rebuke of any elder. If it happens, concerned members shall reach out to the CE Body along with the CD Advisory Board.

If the HCE body (not just an individual HCE) falls into unrepentant sin—straying from either orthodoxy or orthopraxy—house church members should reach out to the CE, alongside the CD Advisory Board, to support them in obeying Matt. 18:15-20 and 1 Tim. 5:19-20.

House Churches That Need Discipline

If the whole house church (not just the HCE) strays from Christian orthodoxy or orthopraxy, the CE Body will apply the principles of Matt. 18:15-20, 1 Tim. 5:19-20, and Rev. 2-3. These steps will be taken:

- **First**, the CE Body (or representative members) will confront the HCE Body in-person, appealing for repentance, and they will notify the whole house church of this meeting in writing.
- **Second**, the FCE Body will confront the whole house church in writing, appealing for repentance, and they will notify Convergence members of this meeting in writing.
- **Third**, the CE Body (or representative members), along with any select members of the FCE, will address the whole house church in-person, appealing for repentance, and they will notify Convergence members of this meeting in writing. If the in-person meeting is refused, a second letter will be sent from the FCE.
- **Fourth**, the house church, along with any unrepentant house church members, will be disfellowshipped from Convergence OKC. The CE will notify the other house churches.

Restoration

The manner of discipline must always be gentle, and the goal is always “to win your brother” (Matt. 18:15). Even in excommunicating a person (or a house church), we aim for restoration to Christ and His body. If we fail to restore those who repent, they will “be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow” (2 Cor. 2:7), and we will have been “outwitted by Satan” (2:11).

God has entrusted the church with “the keys of the kingdom” (Matt. 16:19; Matt. 18:18)—authority to determine who sits under God’s covering (the church) or within Satan’s domain (cf. 1 Cor. 5:5: “deliver this man to Satan,” *i.e.*, excommunicate him). All keys, and especially these keys, must be handled with care. We can’t “open the door” to unrepentant sin; neither can we close the door to repentant sin.

Instead, we open the door—wide!—to all who truly repent. Just as house churches have authority to excommunicate the unrepentant, they also have authority to restore those who repent (2 Cor. 2:5-11). When this happens with individuals, HCE will notify the FCE. If an entire house church repents, Convergence as a whole will welcome them back in.

Note: As stated in §8.4 of the Bylaws, if someone drops out of the discipline process, they will not be excommunicated, but they will have left on bad terms. If they repent, they will be restored to membership on good terms. When this happens, HCE will notify the FCE (with joy!).

Appeals Process

Should anyone feel that his or her excommunication is unfair or unbiblical, a written appeal can be made to the Central Deacon Advisory Board for reconsideration. Should they feel that the case is strong, they shall bring it before the FCE in a regular or duly-called meeting. Care will be taken to ensure that all the facts are presented. Any elder who played a role in the excommunication must recuse himself from the vote. A majority vote will confirm the decision of the house church to excommunicate. If a majority vote is not achieved, the decision will be reversed.

WHISTLEBLOWER POLICY (ADDRESSING ABUSE IN THE CHURCH)

Every allegation of abuse must be taken seriously. To dismiss the voice of victims—even alleged victims—is to multiply their pain and facilitate further abuse in the church. Therefore, Convergence aims to prevent abuse by training our Elders and Deacons, while also providing avenues for dealing with abuse.

Cases of abuse must be treated differently than cases of sin that is non-abusive. Matthew 18 outlines how we address sin under normal circumstances, but abuse is not normal. For instance, forcing the victim of clergy sexual abuse to confront their abuser one-on-one is cruel, and was never the intention of Matthew 18. In cases of alleged abuse, the following procedure should be followed:

Step 1: Reporting

- The person who alleges abuse should report the allegation formally to a church leader. Persons available for reporting include any elder, deacon, or deaconess
- If a crime has been alleged, Title 10A, Section 1-2-101 of the Oklahoma Statutes requires anyone who hears such an allegation to promptly report it to the Oklahoma Human Services Abuse and Neglect Hotline (Hotline) at 1-800-522-3511. In addition, one must report it to local law enforcement within 24 hours.
- Regardless of whether it is a crime, the leader must also notify the Central Elder (CE) Body within 24 hours.

- Victims of abuse don't always know whether a sin counts as abuse. For clarity:
 - Sexual abuse includes anyone in power leveraging their role for sexual gratification. This can include, but is not limited to, sharing nude or partially nude pictures or video, inappropriate wrestling, brushing, touching, groping, grooming, voyeurism, exposure, and all sexual activity between a person in power and a congregant.
 - Spiritual abuse, as defined by Lisa Oakley and Justin Humphreys in *Escaping the Maze of Spiritual Abuse*, means, "coercion and control of one individual by another in a spiritual context. The target experiences spiritual abuse as a deeply emotional personal attack... This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, pressure to conform, misuse of scripture of the pulpit to control behavior, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position, and isolation from others, especially those external to the abusive context."
 - Other forms of abuse also exist, such as financial, verbal, physical, and legal abuse. Generally, abuse is suffered when a person in power leverages their position for personal advantage at the expense of an individual or the church.
- The alleged victim does not have to be 100% certain whether a leader's sin against him/her constitutes abuse to follow these steps. It can take years for one to realize that the sins of their leaders should be defined as abuse.

Step 2: Protection

- Immediately upon receiving the allegation of abuse, church leaders must take steps to ensure the safety and well-being of any victims or potential victims.
- The Voting CE Body will decide how best to protect the congregation. Other CE and the Central Deacon (CD) Advisory Board will provide counsel for this decision.
- If the allegation is against an entire team of CE, the Full Council of Elders (FCE) must step in to ensure that appropriate protection is in place for the alleged victim and that the accused parties have no role in investigating or exonerating themselves.
- If the allegation is against an entire team of House Church Elders (HCE), the CE must step in to ensure that appropriate protection is in place for the alleged victim and that the accused parties have no role in investigating or exonerating themselves.
- At every step, deaconess members of the Central Deacon Advisory Board will be available to support female victims.
- Whether the whistleblower is an alleged victim or a witness to such, church elders will throw their full energy at protecting that person from being blackballed or slandered. This could include public warnings to violators to stop.

Step 3: Communication

- Once any potential victim(s) is in safe-keeping, the appropriate leaders will communicate about the situation to the whole church.
- Victims' names must never be revealed (unless by the victim's choice).
- Characteristics of healthy public communication: transparency, frequency, compassion, trauma-informed; versus unhealthy: distancing ("this happened years ago"), minimization, blame-shifting, silencing, and religious language that places a transcendent aura over the messy truth.
- "Confidentiality" is of utmost importance, yet it must never be used as a weapon—selectively protecting people in power and harming those without power.

- If members feel that communication has been lacking and that leaders have not been cooperative, they can call for a Members' Meeting. See Bylaws §7.6.1, 7.6.2.

Step 4: Investigation

- Given the wickedness of our own hearts (Jer. 17:9), those investigating the allegation cannot have a personal stake in avoiding exposure.
- An internal or external investigation could be necessary, depending on the situation. The Voting CE will decide on the type of investigation. If the CE Body has a conflict of interest, the FCE Body will vote to decide.
 - *If the investigation is internal*, the FCE will select from amongst themselves a team to perform the investigation, along with anyone in the church especially suited for this task. Special care must be taken to avoid conflicts of interest, or even the appearance thereof.
 - *If the investigation is external*, the FCE will select a Christian professional third-party investigative organization. While a law firm might provide counsel to church leaders, they will have no role in performing the investigation because of their legal duty to protect the church rather than victims. The FCE might ask another church as an unbiased entity, to oversee the third-party investigation.
- All parties agree in advance to publicize the full investigation.

Step 5: Corrective Action

- Whichever entity oversaw the investigation will recommend necessary steps based on the results.
- If the recommended action includes the removal of an elder or deacon from office, the FCE and congregation will vote. Removal proceeds with a simple majority vote from both. See §5.7.1.2.

Step 6: Pastoral Care

- Care and support will be provided to all individuals involved, including victims, witnesses, and the accused.
- Pastoral counseling and support services may be offered as needed and appropriate.
- Victims will not be forced to reconcile with alleged abusers. Reconciliation is beautiful and godly, but true reconciliation requires truth, accountability, and repentance (Luke 17:3). It is also impossible to force.
- Deaconess members of the Central Deacon Advisory Board will be available to support female victims in need. Due consideration will be given to male/female dynamics in the room.

Step 7: Follow-up and Prevention

- After the conclusion of the investigation and any disciplinary action, steps should be taken to prevent similar incidents from occurring in the future.
- This may include implementing new policies and procedures, providing training and education, and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency within the church.

Appendix C – Church of House Churches

The Biblical, Theological, and Historical Case for “A Church of House Churches.”

At the start, I want to emphasize three matters of importance.

First, in advocating for one church model, I am *not* bashing others. The Scripture sets some concrete terms for governance, but it also allows remarkable freedom. I bless other church models. There is no magic bullet. Structure matters; holiness matters more (cf. Rev. 2-3).

Second, a concrete belief of Convergence OKC is that the church should be governed by a plurality of equally authoritative elders who are accountable to God and the flock, and who are shepherds doing the work of ministry, not just policymakers.

- Plurality of elders (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5; Jam. 5:14)
- Equally authoritative (1 Tim. 5:17)
- Accountable to God (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:2-3)
- Accountable to the church (1 Tim. 5:19-20; cf. Matt. 18:15-20)
- Shepherds, not just policymakers (1 Pet. 5:2; Acts 20:28)

Whatever we conclude about “a church of house churches,” it must operate by this concrete belief about church governance.

Third, we cannot evaluate a “church of house churches” without first clarifying what a church is. What are the marks of a true church? This became an important question during the Protestant Reformation, as believers realized that the Roman Catholic Church had departed from the Gospel, abused the sacraments, and condoned unholiness. In response, the Protestant Reformers consistently defined these marks of a true church:

- Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530):
 - Article 7: *“The church is the congregation of the saints in which the gospel is rightly taught and the sacraments rightly administered.”*
 - **Sum: Gospel + Sacraments**
- Belgic Confession (1561):
 - Article 29: *“We believe that we ought to discern diligently and very carefully, by the Word of God, what is the true Church. For all sects which are in the world today are not the true Church, but only those who are governed by the Word of God, who do not stray from it, and who have the right administration of the sacraments and church discipline. Therefore, we believe that the marks of the true Church are: the faithful preaching of the Word of God, the right administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ, and the practice of church discipline.”*
 - **Sum: Scripture + Sacraments + Church Discipline**
- Westminster Confession of Faith (1646):

- 25.2-3: *“The visible Church, which is also called the Church of Christ, is a congregation of faithful men, in which the Gospel is preached, and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ’s institution. The Church is a company of faithful people gathered together in the name of Christ for the worship of God, and for the mutual edification of its members.”*
- **Sum: Obedience + Gospel + Sacraments + Gatherings + Worship/Edification**
- Savoy Declaration (1658):
 - 26.4: *“The marks of a true church are the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments, and the practice of church discipline.”*
 - **Sum: Scripture + Sacraments + Church Discipline**
- BONUS: Sam Storms (2010):
 - They are under the authority and guidance of duly appointed Leaders
 - They are regularly taught the Word of God
 - They celebrate the ordinances of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
 - They consistently practice Church Discipline
 - **Sum: Leaders + Scripture + Sacraments + Church Discipline**

All the boundary markers for a true church include the right teaching of Scripture and administration of the sacraments. Some include the mention of gathered faithful believers (but all assume this), and most include church discipline.

Sam adds “duly appointed leaders.” Every true church must either have duly appointed leaders OR be in the process of establishing them. Paul and Barnabas return to churches they planted months prior to “appoint elders in every church” (Acts 14:23). Technically, the church existed before elders were established, but the apostles prioritized establishing leaders to carry on the work of shepherding (cf. Titus 1:5).

With the marks of a true church in mind, this Study Guide will make the case that—at least in some instances—the early church seemed to operate as “a church of house churches.” While I believe this inference is accurate, I am not making the case that “a church of house churches” is mandated or inherently superior. Instead, I intend to show that it is *biblically modeled, theologically sound, and historically tested*. Below we will explore each claim.

BIBLICALLY MODELED – *a church of house churches is modeled in Scripture*

Evidence in Jerusalem:

- Acts 2:42-47: *“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”*

- Acts 4:4: *"But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand."*
- Acts 5:42: *"And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus."*
- By Acts 4:4, there were already five thousand men—essentially, families—and those numbers continued to explode (5:14; 6:1, 7). They could not achieve all the marks of a true church exclusively in a large gathering, so they met in homes (2:42-47; 5:42).
- While we can't say with certainty whether or not church discipline occurred in these smaller settings, every other mark of the church appears to be present (teaching, sacraments, obedience, worship, etc.). In the broadest sense, by a historic definition, these home gatherings could be called "churches," even though they belonged to the broader church in Jerusalem.
- Dr. Gregg Allison (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary), commenting on Acts 2:42-47: *"So, in this passage, we have an example of a church of Christ-followers who, for the purposes of teaching the Word, edification, the Lord's Supper, prayer, giving, and the like, were dispersed into various dwellings. **Such distributed meetings were still the church in Jerusalem.**"*

Evidence in Corinth:

- Rom. 16:23 (written from Corinth): *"Gaius, whose hospitality I and **the whole church** here enjoy, sends you his greetings. Erastus, who is the city's director of public works, and our brother Quartus, send you their greetings."*
- 1 Cor. 1:2: *"**To the church of God in Corinth**, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours."*
- 1 Cor. 14:23: *"So **if the whole church comes together** and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?"*
- 1 Cor. 16:19: *"The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does **the church that meets at their house.**"*
- Paul addressed his authoritative letter to "the church of God in Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2), but the church in Corinth consisted of multiple house churches. This is why Paul mentions "the whole church" in 1 Cor. 14:23. As Dr. Gregg Allison comments, *"The word 'whole' would be redundant if 'ekklesia' [or, 'church'] always means an assembly of all the church's members."*
- Therefore, Paul could refer to a gathering of a few dozen in the home of Aquila and Priscilla as "the church that meets in their house," even though it was part of the broader church in Corinth that met regularly for worship, teaching, fellowship, and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:20ff; 14:23ff).
- Dr. Gordon Fee in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, discussing 1 Cor. 14:23: *"The language for their assembling together is nearly identical to that found in 11:20: 'the whole church comes together at the same place.' Along with the salutation and the*

evidence from Rom. 16:23, this implies that **all the believers from all the house churches met together in some way.**

- Dr. Gregg Allison: “If we engage in a bit of informed speculation, we can imagine the Corinthian Christians gathering as ‘the whole church,’ perhaps in the house of Gaius (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 14:23), and as the church assembled in the house of Titius Justus (Acts 18:7), the home of Crispus (Acts 18:8), and the house of Stephanas (1 Cor. 16:15). **Whether meeting all together as the whole church in a large house or space, or congregating as parts of the church in smaller homes, the assemblies were considered to be the church: one church existing as multiple congregations or locations.**”

Evidence in Rome:

- Rom. 16:3-5: “Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but **all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. Greet also the church in their house.**”
- Paul is writing to Roman Christians, a subset of whom belonged to “the church in their [Prisca and Aquila’s] house.” Apparently, then, the Roman church included multiple house churches within it. (See more below under “HISTORICALLY TESTED”)
- Dr. Douglas Moo (in his commentary on Romans): “Paul precedes this customary general exhortation [to greet one another with a holy kiss] with commands that **the church in Rome** greet on his behalf 26 individuals, two ‘families,’ and **three ‘house churches’**... the list [of names] makes clear... the **pattern of church organization in Rome, for Paul identifies at least three, and perhaps five, separate house churches** (vv. 5, 14, 15; cf. also vv. 10, 11). Early Christians did not have large public facilities for meeting, so they used their own houses. And since even the largest houses of the wealthiest Christian would hold no more than seventy or eighty for worship, growth beyond that point required that the **Christians split up into house churches.**”
- Dr. Moo interprets the multiple lists of households in Romans 16 as probable house churches, all of which comprised the overall church in Rome.

Evidence in Colossae:

- Philemon 1:2: “To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker—also to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and **to the church that meets in your home...**”
- Philemon was located in Colossae. Since Philemon’s name is not mentioned in Colossians, Paul’s letter to Colossae was certainly written to more than just Philemon’s house church. Paul would have intended it to reach all the house churches, which, in some way, he viewed as a singular church in Colossae.
- The evidence in Colossae is admittedly weaker, but it at least does suggest the practice of meeting in house churches that related closely to each other.

Evidence in Laodicea:

- Col. 4:15-16: “Give my greetings **to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house.** After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea.”

- Laodicea had Christian “brothers” who did not also belong to the “church” in Nympha’s house. Where did these other brothers go to church, if not to Nympha’s house church? The next verse does not mention another house church, but rather a broad designation: “the church of the Laodiceans”. Nympha’s house church apparently belonged to “the church of the Laodiceans”. We can reasonably conjecture that these “brothers” in Laodicea attended different house churches that together comprised the “church of the Laodiceans.” A church of house churches.
- Dr. John Simpson and F.F. Bruce (commentary on Colossians): “*Priscilla and Aquila were accustomed to extend the hospitality of their home to such groups in the successive cities where they lived—e.g. Ephesus (1 Cor. 16:19) and Rome (Rom. 16:5). At Colossae itself Philemon’s house was used for this purpose (Philem. 2). We may compare Lydia’s house in Philippi (Acts 16:15, 40) and Gaius’ at Corinth (Rom. 16:23). Such house churches appear to have been smaller circles of fellowship within the larger fellowship of the city ekklesia [church].*”

General Thoughts:

- Dr. Michael Kruger (President, Reformed Theological Seminary): “*Thus, the church at a particular city seems to have been viewed as a single unit—despite the fact that it was probably composed of multiple smaller congregations meeting in homes. Some scholars even think that all the house churches in these cities would have, on occasion, gathered together in a single meeting to worship (1 Cor. 14:23) or to hear Paul’s letters being read” (Rom. 16:3-16).*”
- In applying the name “church” to these smaller assemblies, it is implied that they bore the marks of a true church—rather than being viewed as a partial or fractional expression of church like many modern small groups.
- In applying the name “church” also to larger assemblies—like “the whole church” in Rome (Rom. 16:23) or Corinth (1 Cor. 14:23)—it is implied that the house churches viewed themselves not as independent islands but as part of a larger local expression that also met as a “whole church” for worship and edification.
- Scholars consistently identify these “house churches” not as mere small groups or cells of one big church, like we do in the West. Nor were they viewed as totally independent churches that rarely met in large gatherings, as is common in some modern house church expressions. Instead, New Testament house churches were apparently viewed as *a church within the church*—a “church of house churches.”

THEOLOGICALLY SOUND – *a church of house churches coheres with historic ecclesiology*

* “Ecclesiology” means “the study of the church”

The Nicene Creed refers to the “one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.”

- a. *One*: Diverse peoples comprise the unified people of God (Eph. 4:4-6)
- b. *Holy*: God calls the church to purity of doctrine and lifestyle (1 Pet. 1:15-16)
- c. *Catholic*: “catholic” means universal; the universal church spans time and space (Eph. 1:22-23)

- d. *Apostolic*: our faith is rooted in the apostolic teaching and compelled by the apostolic mission (Eph. 2:19-22)

If a “church of house churches” failed to exhibit these theological affirmations, it would argue against such a structure. If a “church of house churches” is suited to fulfill these well, it argues for the theological soundness of such a structure.

The Church as *One*:

Churches in the New Testament were not islands. They related closely in matters of doctrinal guidance (Acts 15:31), financial support (Acts 11:29-30; 1 Cor. 16:1-3), serving one another (Acts 11:27-30), and mission endeavors (Phil. 2:25; 2 Cor. 8:18-19). They also pressed through divisions based on ethnicity (Acts 6:1-6; 10:34-35; Eph. 2:14-16), socioeconomic status (1 Cor. 11:20-22; Gal. 3:28), or biblical convictions over secondary and tertiary matters (1 Cor. 8:7-13). The outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost created a diverse church (Acts 2:17ff), expanding the gospel beyond its Jewish borders.

Scattered churches that never gather and rarely partner do not as naturally exhibit the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph. 4:3). The same could be said of ethnically homogenous churches. A “church of house churches” exhibits the church’s oneness by naturally encouraging interdependence and cooperation among diverse house churches.

Imagine house churches across OKC that reach into every ethnicity, to rich and poor alike, gathering each week to worship in a large gathering as one diverse church.

The Church as *Holy*:

One of God’s primary means for making us holy is community. We need fellow believers to confess our sins to (Jam. 5:16), to pray for us (1 Thess. 5:25), to encourage us (Heb. 10:24-25), to rebuke us (Matt. 18:15), to worship with us (Col. 3:16), to mentor us (2 Tim. 2:2), and more. Everyone becomes like the people they surround themselves with (Pr. 13:20).

The more deeply a church practices community, the more it will grow in holiness. House churches provide a natural space for deep community. At the same time, a “church of house churches” helps us connect with the broader community and be instructed by seasoned pastors who guide us not only in holy behavior but holy doctrine.

The Church as *Catholic*:

The “catholic” church refers not to Roman Catholics but to the universal church of Jesus Christ, which spans time and space (Eph. 1:22-23). The New Testament never limits the church to any locale. Rather, local churches manifest the glory of Christ’s body—the universal church—by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

Before God poured out His Spirit, God’s people were mostly Jews who mostly worshiped at specific times and places. After Pentecost, the Spirit broke out from the house of the Lord—the temple—and “filled the entire house where they were sitting” (Acts 2:2). The Book of Acts

traces the Spirit's move "from house to house" (5:42; 20:20) and from person to person. Now, the Spirit fills all people, not just special people. Now, the Spirit fills homes where we gather, not just a temple in Jerusalem.

In short, the Holy Spirit makes our little churches catholic.

The more a church elevates the sacredness of certain people (pastors) and certain places (a church building), the less it emphasizes catholicity because it confines the Spirit's work to time and space. In contrast, the more we elevate the Spirit's work across time and space—through diverse people and places—the more catholic our expression is.

A "church of house churches" acknowledges the benefit of clergy and large gatherings but, ideally, without overemphasizing them as the "end-all-be-all" of Christian expression. By raising up qualified leaders in every house church, we emphasize the catholicity of the church across time and space—in house churches that meet in all times and places.

The Church as Apostolic:

The church has historically defined itself as "apostolic" because it clings to apostolic doctrine and embraces the apostolic mission: "go and make disciples."

Doctrinally, the large gathering helps ensure that our smaller gatherings remain sound. Missionally, house churches help contextualize our mission. "Contextualization" means we modify our methods—but not our message—to save the lost. Paul reached Jews and Gentiles by adapting to their culture, but he never adapted the gospel (1 Cor. 9).

It is harder to "contextualize" in a large gathering than it is in small gatherings that are embedded in diverse communities. House churches naturally contextualize because they don't have to build as long of a bridge to meet people where they are at. House churches literally meet people where they are at. It's like I pray each week: "Make our homes both a refuge and a bridge between Christ and the world."

HISTORICALLY TESTED – *a church of house churches is not "new" but time-honored*

We base our theology on Scripture, not history. However, history provides the guardrails for interpreting Scripture. Novel doctrines must be rejected.

In the survey below, we will observe church models from the second century to today. The section closes with five modern case studies that exemplify either "a church of churches" or "a church of house churches."

The Second Century (Kruger)

"The letter of 1 Clement, for example, writes on behalf of 'the Church of God... in Rome' and writes to 'the church of God... in Corinth'. Despite the fact that Rome and Corinth are probably composed of numerous house churches, the author apparently views them, in some fashion, as

a single entity. The author even refers to the 'presbyters' in Corinth, implying that the church there is ruled by a single body of elders.

Likewise, Polycarp writes, 'to the Church of God... in Philippi' even though the city, most likely, has numerous house-based congregations. Thus there appears to be some awareness that multiple congregations in a single locale are somehow linked together. And Polycarp calls the Philippians to submit to their 'presbyters', implying again that the Philippian church was unified under a single ruling body. The church governance during the first and early second century provides a possible explanation for how churches in a single city were linked together in this fashion.

As a church began in a particular city it would have often been small enough to meet in a single house and would have been governed simply by a group of elders/presbyters. As such congregations grew in numbers and were forced to meet in additional houses, there may have been situations where a single group of elders found themselves ruling over multiple congregations in different locations throughout the city.

These multiple congregations would have been naturally connected by the fact that they were led by the same group of elders. Thus, Christians in a given city, even worshipping in different house churches, would have been able to maintain some common identity under the leadership of a single body of presbyters."

From about the Third Century till the Reformation:

While I do not hold to episcopal/presbyterian forms of church government (with hierarchies of bishops/assemblies that govern regions/churches), one can observe how these systems developed historically. Deeply interdependent churches sought to maintain relationships despite explosive growth. In addition, since the original apostles died out, churches sought to replicate apostolic hierarchies. Episcopal church governance overwhelmingly prevailed until the Protestant Reformation when Reformers broke away from Rome.

The Protestant Reformation:

Hugh Wamble (Dissertation for Southern Baptist Theological Seminary): *"It was normal for a local church to have a scattered constituency and to be composed of several congregations. For convenience or protection, the membership was divided into several parts for worship."*

Gregg Allison (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary): *"The arrangement [of multi-site churches] was particularly prominent throughout Britain during times of persecution such as the Restoration. In rural areas also, the 'conventicles' or smaller congregations were parts of the originating church. For example, the Liston church (Wales) of John Miles consisted of widely scattered congregations: Abergavenny, Llanwenarth, Llangibby, Abervan, Llanddewi, and Llanelly. In many such cases, one pastor would preach at these various sites, engaging in itineration for the conventicles. Occasionally, a number of capable preachers served multiple congregations."*

In the first and second century, God's people apparently organized themselves as "a church of churches." The episcopal structure that took root from there maintained this idea, but it added layers of hierarchy (rector, bishop, archbishop, etc.) that gradually included the Pope. The

Protestant Reformation sent the Reformers into hiding and forced more decentralized gatherings that resembled, once again, “a church of churches.” These became prototypes for the “multi-site” movement of the twentieth century.

Twentieth and Twenty-first Century:

The multi-site church phenomenon took off, far outpacing megachurches. Biblical justification for the multisite movement was found in the passages about house churches.

It was not without problems, however. Campuses sometimes aggrandized “the mother ship” and struggled with resources. It is said that multisite churches grow faster than their leadership teams can grow to lead them. Dr. Gregg Allison, whom I have quoted often in this Study Guide, believes that “the future of multisite” is what he calls—“multichurch.”

Allison differentiates the terms like this:

- **Multi-site churches:** one church meeting as multiple *campuses* in a city.
- **Multi-church churches:** one church meeting as multiple *churches* in a city.

The main difference between the two is in the “locus of power.” Multi-site churches concentrate higher levels of decision-making authority at the top. Multi-church churches empower leaders of “churches within the overall church” to make more decisions.

Below, I outline a few case studies from recent history that adopt forms of this approach:

Case 1: Sojourn Church (Louisville, KY)

Dr. Gregg Allison wrote a book (alongside Brad House) called, *Multichurch: Exploring the Future of Multisite*. Allison is a seminary professor, pastor, and Reformed Charismatic. In the book, he tells the story of how Sojourn Church commissioned him to provide the biblical and theological rationale for moving forward as a multi-site, and ultimately, multi-church expression.

The transition to multi-site was driven by rapid growth, but the transition from multi-site to multi-church was driven by the hangover of rapid growth: strained resources and leadership burn-out. Campus pastors felt disconnected from the “mother ship.” Decisions handed down to them did not always appreciate their “boots on the ground” reality.

Beginning in 2015, over the next three years, Sojourn transitioned to a multi-church model. They have since grown in a more sustainable way that better empowers leaders.

Case 2: Frontline Church (Oklahoma City, OK)

A local example of the “multi-church model” is Frontline Church. (I am not certain whether they claim to be multi-church, but their language fits the definition.) Frontline’s website reads, “Welcome to Frontline Church! We are **one church with multiple congregations** gathering in Oklahoma City, Edmond, Shawnee, and Yukon. Our mission is to multiply gospel communities that love God, love people, and push back darkness. Choose a congregation near you to learn how we can help connect you to the life of the church.”

Notice that they share a common name (identity) and mission. They also share doctrine, ministry philosophy, and organizational structure. At the same time, they have multiple congregations stretched across the region with their own leaders who have power to make decisions for their congregation. Sometimes, they all gather to worship as one big church.

Convergence OKC seeks to achieve something similar, but smaller. We are not a very big church comprised of pretty big churches. We are a church of house churches. Furthermore, we will not occasionally gather as one big church. We will gather weekly. (I'm not suggesting one way is superior but only noting differences. Praise God for Frontline!)

Case 3: Church Project (Houston, TX)

Jason Shepperd pastors a "a church of house churches" in Houston, and he wrote a book about it: *A Church of House Churches: An Articulated and Applied Ecclesiology*. (My Michael Kruger quotes came from his book.)

Shepperd served as a student pastor and then a teaching pastor in a large church for years. When his Senior Pastor retired, Shepperd was slated to fill his shoes. He was set for life and ministry—but something didn't feel right. His experience in missions and study of church history nagged him until he could no longer bear it. He met with his Senior Pastor and gave him the hard news: he was leaving to start a church.

Or, really, a "church of house churches." By God's grace, the Senior Pastor blessed his move and continued mentoring him. About 40 people showed up to Shepperd's first interest meetings, and those same 40 came months later, in January 2010, for their first worship gathering. Together, they divided into two house churches. These were churches within the church—fully operational with the true marks of a church.

By the end of the year, one hundred people were part of the corporate gathering, and they added another hundred that next year. Between years two and four, a thousand more joined them. Eleven years in, and they had 8-10,000 people.

But these were not casual attenders or consumers. They were "house church pastors" and their deeply engaged flocks.

Furthermore, they have expanded far beyond Houston. These "multi-church" plants—what Shepperd calls "Church Projects"—span the globe:

- Nine "Church Projects" in America with 100+ house churches
- Seven "Church Projects" in Haiti with 25 house churches
- Eight "Church Projects" in Central America with 37 house churches
- One "Church Project" in Malawi with 8 house churches

Case 4: Restoration Church (Denver, CO):

Ron Johnson is the Founding Pastor of Restoration Church in Denver. Johnson was inspired by the church growth movement in the 80s and 90s, applying the seeker-sensitive model to plant four fast-growing churches.

On the fourth church plant—Restoration Church—Johnson made a deal with God: this church would be more than evangelistic (like his other seeker-sensitive churches); this church would make disciples who make disciples and plant churches that plant churches.

When Covid hit, Johnson reevaluated his commitment. While the church had achieved many wonderful things, it was not making disciples who make disciples or planting churches that plant churches. He knew something had to change. Covid provided a unique opportunity.

Instead of waiting passively for the government to let them assemble, Restoration Church began launching “Zoom house churches,” which they called “Simple Churches.” Gradually, these met in person. Over the course of fourteen months, they saw one hundred baptisms.

They knew they were on to something.

By the time Restoration Church resumed its large weekend services, a disciplemaking movement had taken off, especially among refugees: Indians, Pakistanis, Afghans, and more. They’ve planted 900 Simple Churches in Denver, 250 in India, and 100 in other parts of the country. These are churches that plant churches, and they raise up disciples who make disciples. From January to May, they celebrated 700 baptisms.

All of this has occurred in parallel with Restoration’s normal weekend services.

Case 5: “Unnamed Church and Country”

In this final case study, I will be intentionally vague about the pastor, his church, and his country because his country restricts access to the gospel. In safer settings, I have mentioned my involvement with this pastor.

The leader in question ministered in a country that restricted them to home gatherings. They could only host public gatherings under special circumstances. In 2014, he came in contact with foreign missionaries who told stories about “church planting movements” around the world where millions of people were getting saved. These movements took place over dinner tables and in homes, which fit well within his government’s mandate.

With training in the basic principles of disciplemaking and multiplication, this Assembly of God pastor began investing his life in a handful of “faithful men who can teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2). To make a long story short, his movement has since launched 20,000 small groups on their way to becoming churches and 3,500 house churches in six major cities. I have personally witnessed this movement. It is stunning.

In this leader's own city, God opened a door for them to gather publicly, not just house to house. They meet every Sunday morning as a singular church and all throughout the city as individual, fully functioning house churches. It is a church of house churches.

TWO PRACTICAL QUESTIONS

Both of these questions have been implicitly answered above, but let's be clear by addressing them directly.

QUESTION 1: Were New Testament house churches any different from modern house church networks?

Church networks tend to be more loosely affiliated and focused on one primary task. For instance, the churches in Acts 29 do not often meet with each other, and their focus is church planting. The Convergence Church Network (which we will be part of) will meet annually and focuses on the gifts of the Spirit. House church networks like the Simple Church Network meet only occasionally, and they focus mostly on establishing simple house churches rather than complex organizational structures.

A "church of house churches" is not the same as a house church network because we are a church, not a network. We will meet together weekly as a "whole church" (Rom. 16:23; 1 Cor. 14:23) to glorify God and edify one another. Furthermore, we will not primarily focus on one purpose (like church planting or spiritual gifts); instead, we will aim to exhibit all the marks of a true church.

QUESTION 2: Were New Testament house churches any different from small groups in a big church?

A "big church consisting of many small groups" is a reasonable interpretation of the biblical data, but so is "a church of house churches."

The primary differences relate to the marks of a true church and the locus of power. Without delving into too much detail, our "house churches" will exhibit the marks of a true church, and their leaders will be empowered to make decisions for their house church that go well beyond what is typical in the average small group.

Again, I am not suggesting superiority but rather highlighting differences.

Baptism Q&A

- I. What is baptism?
 - a. Baptism is an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace received in salvation.
 - i. Baptism signifies that the *instrumental cause*² of salvation—faith—is present.
 - ii. Baptism signifies the *essence* of salvation (elaborated on in the epistles): death and resurrection (Rom. 6:1-4), deliverance from judgment/Satan and allegiance to God (1 Pet. 3:18-22), forgiveness and cleansing from sin (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Heb. 6:2; 1 Pet. 3:21), being clothed with Christ's transformation (Gal. 3:27), and it is an initial rite of membership into the New Covenant (Col. 2:11-12).
 - b. Heralds of the gospel throughout Acts call people to conversion, using any combination of these three words: faith, repentance, and baptism.
 - i. Acts 2:38: *"And Peter said to them, **Repent** and be **baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*
 - ii. Acts 16:30-31: *"Then he brought them out and said, 'Sirs, what must I do to be saved?' And they said, '**Believe** in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.'"*
 - iii. Acts 20:21: *"...testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of **repentance** toward God and of **faith** in our Lord Jesus Christ."*
 - c. The close link between faith, repentance, and baptism throughout Acts means we should likewise closely associate these words.
 - i. Faith and repentance should thus not precede baptism by many months or years (as is the case with long-delayed adult baptisms).³
 - ii. Baptism should thus not precede faith and repentance by many months or years (as is the case with infant baptism).⁴
 - iii. When we call others to conversion, we should as readily call them to be baptized as to believe and repent.

² The Reformers used the language of "instrumental cause" to depict how faith is the means by which we receive Christ's righteousness—what Paul called, "justification by faith." The instrumental cause contrasts with the "meritorious cause" of salvation, which is Christ's obedience and substitutionary death for sinners. Throughout this handout, faith and repentance are typically treated together, for they occur simultaneously and equate to one's "heart conversion." In terms of logical sequence, however, faith precedes repentance, for we must believe in Christ in order to turn to Him.

³ I am speaking in generalities; exceptional circumstances can be imagined. One exception is the baptism of children. My children were probably saved for several years before I baptized them, but I waited long enough to ensure that (1) I could see tangible fruit of faith/repentance in their lives, which is harder to discern in kids, (2) they would remember being baptized when they grew older, and (3) they weren't doing this for me but for God.

⁴ Some argue that baptism saves the infant and thus it is not disassociated with conversion, but this cannot be true.

- II. Does baptism cause eternal salvation?
- a. Despite their close association, we must not muddle faith, repentance, and baptism. Throughout Scripture, faith and repentance take pride of place. God justifies the sinner based on the inward work of grace in the heart—not on getting wet.
 - i. Cornelius' household is saved *before* baptism: ***While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, "Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days"*** (Acts 10:44-48).
 - ii. The Gentiles were granted "**repentance that leads life**" (11:18), for God "**cleansed their hearts by faith**" (15:9).
 - b. Baptism consummates conversion, but faith and repentance (conversion of the heart) initiate the conversion process. A truly converted heart desires the sacrament of conversion—baptism—not to effect salvation but to magnify it.
 - c. Despite their distinctions, faith, repentance, and baptism so closely intertwine that the apostles did not always separate them over technical differences. Instead, they used the terms almost interchangeably, sometimes applying "salvation" language to baptism.
 - i. Acts 2:38: "And Peter said to them, 'Repent and **be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the forgiveness of your sins**, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"
 - ii. Acts 22:16: "And now why do you wait? Rise and **be baptized and wash away your sins**, calling on his name."
 - iii. 1 Pet. 3:21: "**Baptism**, which corresponds to this, **now saves you**, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ."
 - d. It is best not to explain these texts away ("What Peter really meant was..."), but rather to explain them as a manner of speech that occurs in every language.
 - i. Every language includes figurative speech such as "synecdoche," which means "part for the whole" (think "boots on the ground" for soldiers or "fifty head" for cattle). Since faith, repentance, and baptism all relate to conversion, the apostles could substitute any one of these for all of them—part for the whole.
 - ii. Therefore, when Peter says, "Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of sins," he intends something like, "Be converted and receive forgiveness," or "Come to Jesus and find forgiveness."
 - iii. Those who emphasize the need for baptism to be truly saved must explain away verses like Acts 10:44-48 and 15:9. Those who say, "What

Peter/Ananias really meant was [insert butchered explanation]” explain away Acts 2:38 and 22:16.

- iv. The best approach explains every text without explaining any of them away.

III. What does baptism do?

- a. Baptism outwardly signifies the inward and spiritual grace of salvation.
- b. Baptism consummates conversion (without equating to it). Historically, this is why baptism has been called a “seal.” It “seals the deal,” so to speak.
- c. Baptism identifies us with the Triune God.
 - i. Jesus teaches us to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit because disciples of Jesus identify themselves with the co-equal and co-eternal Persons of the one Godhead (Matt. 28:19).
 - ii. Acts depicts baptism “in the name of Jesus” (2:38; 8:16; 10:48; 19:5), but this was not a baptismal formula. Instead, just like the church prayed in Jesus’ name (2:21), healed in Jesus’ name (4:12), preached in Jesus’ name (4:18), and suffered in Jesus’ name (5:41), the church also baptized in Jesus’ name. This was not a baptismal or liturgical formula but rather a way of living life. The church did all these things by the power of and for the glory of Jesus (cf. Acts 1:1; 4:10).
 - iii. This matters because Oneness Pentecostals baptize only in Jesus’ name—refusing to name the Father and the Spirit—using the language in Acts as justification for the heresy of modalism.
 - 1. Modalism teaches that God has different “modes” or “manifestations”—like water that manifests as a solid, liquid, or gas.
 - 2. This contradicts Trinitarian doctrine, where one God exists in three Persons—Father, Son, and Spirit—who are co-equal and co-eternal.
- d. Baptism identifies us with the church.
 - i. Baptism in the Spirit and baptism in water closely correlate throughout Acts (Acts 2:38-41; 8:15-17; 9:17-18; 10:44-48; 19:5-7).
 - ii. Since baptism in the Spirit unites us with the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13), we should expect similar signification for baptism in water, especially since both are associated with conversion.
 - iii. This purpose is confirmed in Acts 2, where Acts 2:41 (“those who received the word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls”) flows into 2:42 (“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers”).
 - iv. Baptized people are “added” to the church, where they devote themselves to Jesus and each other. Luke thus leverages this prototype in Jerusalem to teach us how baptism in water identifies us with the church.

- v. We should not baptize people who plan to avoid joining a local church. This would violate the meaning of baptism.
 - e. Baptism is a “means of grace.”
 - i. This does not mean that baptism merits eternal salvation (see II). Instead, when accompanied by faith, baptism confers upon recipients the grace that it signifies, empowering God’s people to live out the reality to which it points.
 - ii. Baptism is not a means of salvation but a sacramental channel of God’s sanctifying grace and blessing to the faithful in Jesus Christ.
 - iii. Luke conveys this in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch, whom Jesus leads from the desert to a pool, reminding us of God’s promises to transform—through the Messiah and His Spirit—our deserts into pools (Isa. 32:14-18; 35:1-10).
 - iv. Baptismal waters are neither magical nor dry of spiritual power. Instead, they are means of grace where Jesus meets us in the water.
- IV. How should Christians be baptized—by sprinkling, pouring (affusion), or immersion?
- a. Dr. Eckhard Schnabel translates the Greek word *baptizo*—which English Bibles transliterate into “baptize”—as “immerse,” arguing that this is the normal meaning.
 - b. There are no clear examples of sprinkling or pouring water in the New Testament.
 - c. Not every NT baptism provides sufficient detail to know the mode of baptism, but Acts 8:38-39 comes close: “*And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they **both went down into the water**, Philip and the eunuch, and he **baptized** him. 39 And when they **came up out of the water**, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.*”
 - d. Some argue that Philip did not immerse the eunuch, but this is special pleading.
 - e. The *Didache*, which was written around the time of the New Testament, counseled Christians to immerse if possible, but if not possible, to pour: “*Concerning baptism, baptize in this way. After you have spoken all these things, baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit in running water. If you do not have running water, baptize in other water. If you are not able in cold, then in warm. If you do not have either, pour out water three times on the head “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Before the baptism the one baptizing and the one being baptized are to fast, and any others who are able. Command the one being baptized to fast beforehand a day or two*” (Didache 7:1-4).
 - f. Immersion is ideal because the New Testament models it, the Greek word implies it, and the symbolism (death/resurrection, cf. Rom. 6:1-5) suggests it.
 - g. As “mode of baptism” is a second-tier doctrine, this should not materially divide Christians. The biggest question is not *how* but *whether* a Christian has been baptized.

- V. When should Christians be baptized?
- a. Throughout Acts, we only have examples of people being baptized after making a credible profession of faith.
 - i. Acts 2:41: *So those who **received his word** were **baptized**, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.*
 - ii. Acts 8:12: *But when they **believed** Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were **baptized**, both men and women.*
 - iii. Acts 10:47: *Can anyone withhold water for **baptizing** these people, who **have received the Holy Spirit** just as we have?*
 - iv. Acts 18:8: *And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul **believed** and were **baptized**.*
 - b. Throughout Acts, Luke emphasizes the need for prompt baptism, following a profession of faith.
 - i. Acts 8:36: *And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "**See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?**"*
 - ii. Acts 10:47: ***Can anyone withhold water for baptizing** these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?*
 - iii. Acts 16:33: *And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their wounds; and he was **baptized at once**, he and all his family.*
 - iv. Acts 19:4-5: *And Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, Jesus." **On hearing this, they were baptized** in the name of the Lord Jesus.*
 - v. Acts 22:16: *And now **why do you wait? Rise and be baptized** and wash away your sins, calling on his name.'*
 - vi. True faith desires prompt baptism. The longest stretch between initial faith and its expression in baptism is three days (9:9, 17-19).
 - c. Some argue that we can baptize before a credible profession of faith—in infancy—based (in part) on the household baptisms in Acts, where it is supposed that some in those households *might* have been babies.
 - i. We don't base major theological beliefs and practices on what a text might say.
 - ii. Furthermore, the text shows that these households professed faith:
 - 1. Acts 16:30-32: *Then he brought them out and said, "**Sirs, what must I do to be saved?**" And they said, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.**" And they **spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house.**"*
 - 2. Acts 18:8: *Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, **believed** in the Lord, **together with his entire household**. And many of the Corinthians hearing Paul believed and were baptized.*
 - iii. Luke does not convey that Paul sprinkled babies but rather that his missionary strategy focused on households over individuals. Paul appeals

to members of each household who are capable of professing faith (16:32; 18:8).

- iv. Proponents of infant baptism also argue that (1) church history widely practiced it, (2) it mirrors circumcision under the Old Covenant where babies received a sign of the covenant (Col. 2:11-12), (3) children of believers are sanctified (1 Cor. 7:14), and (4) Lutherans argue that infants are saved through faith that God grants at baptism, citing Luke 1:41-44 as evidence that babies can have faith.
 - 1. Church history more widely practiced infant baptism, but many churches did not. In addition, while church history carries weight, Scripture carries far more. If God wanted such a significant act of obedience from His people, we would have expected clear commands to that effect.
 - 2. While circumcision indeed parallels baptism in that both signify covenant membership, the connection stops there. We must consider the difference between the covenants. The Old Covenant included unbelievers; the New Covenant includes only believers (2 Cor. 3; Heb. 8:6-11). Since infants cannot give credible evidence of faith, we should not baptize them.
 - 3. Children are “sanctified” in that they are set apart for God’s purposes. They are in the “splash zone” of grace, if you will. This is different from saying they are saved.
 - 4. It does seem possible that infants could have faith since John the Baptist expressed faith in utero. However, that is the key: he *expressed* faith—prophetically testifying to Christ’s presence by leaping in the womb. In very few cases (if any?) can we testify to the existence of faith in babies.
- d. Some argue that the lesson of Simon the Sorcerer provides a cautionary tale about baptizing people too promptly—before they prove themselves over a long duration.
 - i. An argument can be made that Simon was saved because Luke says he “believed and was baptized” along with the rest of the city who was saved (8:12-13). If he was truly saved, it was right to baptize him.
 - ii. Even if he was unsaved (which church history typically suggests), this passage would still not teach us to delay baptism.
 - 1. If Luke intended to teach us to delay baptism, he would not have so frequently illustrated prompt baptisms in Acts.
 - 2. If Luke intended to teach us to delay baptism, he would have censured Philip for baptizing Simon too quickly. Instead, Luke narrates another story of Philip promptly baptizing someone in the next section (8:26-40).
 - iii. Simon’s fall into sin teaches the opposite lesson. Rather than delaying baptism on account of a potential “fall” back into sin, we should baptize

promptly, knowing that God doesn't hold us responsible for "downriver" disobedience.

- e. Thoughts about baptizing children:
 - i. Young children can have genuine faith (1 Sm. 3; Ps. 8:2; Mt. 21:15-16) and thus can be baptized.
 - ii. There can be wisdom in proceeding judiciously with children. Parents should consider: (1) Is there tangible fruit of faith and repentance? (2) Are they old enough to remember being baptized? (3) Are they trying to please their parents or God?
- f. Thoughts about rebaptizing people:
 - i. Scripture emphasizes that there is "one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).
 - ii. We have no examples of "rebaptism" in Acts. The men in Acts 19 had only received John's baptism, not Christian baptism.
 - iii. Rebaptism can be appropriate, but we should not rush to be rebaptized every time we turn back to God. Baptized Christians turning back to God should do so through prayer, confession, and participation in the Lord's Supper.
 - iv. Rebaptism is appropriate if someone was baptized before becoming a Christian.
 - 1. *Those baptized in Jesus' name only*: You should get rebaptized because your first "baptism" was into the heretical doctrine of modalism.
 - 2. *Those baptized in infancy*: Convergence will accept into membership those baptized only in infancy, even though we disagree with it. Infant baptism was practiced throughout history, and many beloved siblings in Christ affirm it. While we teach believers' baptism, we leave up to one's conscience whether to be rebaptized. If you were baptized as an infant, you should not feel condemned. If you feel convicted to get rebaptized, we will baptize you.
 - 3. *Those baptized in childhood*: Those baptized as young children should not be rebaptized if they were truly saved beforehand—even if they "fell away" and came back later. Sometimes the moment of conversion can be hard to pinpoint, however. If you feel certain you were unsaved before baptism, we will process potential rebaptism with you.

VI. Where should Christians be baptized?

- a. Acts records thousands of baptisms but only one official church service (Acts 20).
- b. It is permissible to baptize outside of a formal church service, but there is also beauty in celebrating baptism during worship services of the gathered church (which has been more common in church history).
- c. If you get baptized outside of a church service, we encourage you not to do so outside of church community. Remember, baptism in water correlates to baptism

in the Spirit, which unites us to the body of Christ. While the Ethiopian eunuch gets baptized with no witnesses besides Philip, every other baptism appears to have numerous witnesses.

- d. If you get baptized outside of a church service, we encourage you to dialogue with a pastor about it. Sometimes complications arise—such as how to treat one who was baptized in Jesus’ name only—and it is wise to get pastoral counsel.
- e. If you get baptized outside of a church service, consider videotaping it so we can all celebrate with you!

Appendix F – What Does Communion Do?

What Does Communion Do?

I. Communion is a means of sanctifying grace.

- a. “means of grace” is historic language depicting how God imparts blessing to underserving sinners. Prior to the nineteenth century, Baptists described these means as *“sacramental events in which God is acting in the life of believers.”*
- b. This contrasts with the Roman view of the Mass as sacrifice and the Memorialist view in which Communion is chiefly an act of man’s remembrance, not God’s grace.
- c. Communion is not a means of salvation but a sacramental channel of God’s sanctifying grace and blessing to the faithful in Christ Jesus.
 - i. This appendix uses “ordinances” and “sacraments” interchangeably.
 - ii. Some Protestants have opted for the language of “ordinances” to distance themselves from the Roman Catholic multiplication of sacraments (they have seven). Protestants believe only two of these seven were officially ordained (thus, “ordinances”) by Christ—Baptism and Communion.
 - iii. Other Protestants maintain the language of “sacraments” to emphasize that Baptism and Communion are primarily acts of God, who meets us and channels His sanctifying grace to us.
- d. 1 Corinthians 10:1-4: *“For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”*
 - i. Paul compares Israel’s passage through the Red Sea to Christian baptism and Israel’s provision of food and drink to the Lord’s Supper.
 - ii. In fact, he does more than compare; he shows how Israel’s experience prophetically foreshadows our *more* miraculous provision in the Supper.
 - iii. Contextually, Paul is teeing up his argument against idolatry (see next Roman numeral), but his “tee up” educates. Communion is not primarily

an act of man. Just as manna in the wilderness and water from the rock were acts of God meeting the needs of His people, the bread and wine are primarily acts of God, whereby He meets our spiritual needs.

- e. This does not diminish our role in communion—*“do this in remembrance of me”* (1 Cor. 11:24-25)—but rather grounds our obedient *“remembrance”* beneath the umbrella of God’s grace.
 - i. *“remembrance”* in Jewish thought meant more than cognitive reflection. When the thief on the Cross asked Jesus to “remember” him (Lk. 23:42), he was not merely asking Jesus to think of him, but to act on his behalf.
 - ii. Immediately after saying, *“do this in remembrance of me,”* Paul explains the meaning, *“**For** as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”* (1 Cor. 11:26).
 - iii. To remember Jesus in communion is not just to think about Him, but to act on His behalf—to proclaim Him. The act of eating and drinking—so long as it is in sincere faith and not mixed devotion (see next Roman Numeral)—remembers and proclaims Jesus. This is why Augustine called communion, “the visible word,” and Thomas Watson, “a visible sermon.”
 - iv. In other words, to “remember” Jesus and “proclaim” Him are synonymous terms depicting what faithful communion achieves.
- f. A few more church fathers who viewed communion as a means of grace:
 - i. Cyprian (third century) viewed it as imparting strength to martyrs: *“We must equip those whom we wish to be safe against the adversary with the armor of the Lord’s food. For how shall we teach or incite them to shed their blood in confession of his name, if we deny them Christ’s blood when they are about to fight? Or how can we make them fit for the cup of martyrdom, if we do not first admit them to drink in the church the cup of the Lord by the right of communion?”*
 - ii. John Calvin (sixteenth century) viewed it as spiritual food that nourishes us: *“For us the fact that the Lord’s body was once for all so sacrificed for us that we may now feed upon it, and by feeding feel in ourselves the working of that unique sacrifice.”*
- g. If every faith-filled participation in the Lord’s Supper promises sanctifying grace, why should we not want it as often as possible?

II. Communion pledges our allegiance to God over the devil.

- a. Paul’s prior point about communion guards against communion as a bare memorial, but this merely prepared for his warning against idolatry.
- b. 1 Cor. 10:5-8, 14-22: *“Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, ‘The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.’ We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day... Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of*

blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. Shall we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?"

- c. Just as God's miraculous provisions of food and drink did not magically prevent Israel from eating and drinking before a golden calf (he quotes Ex. 32:6 in 1 Cor. 10:7), Paul warns: communion will not magically save you from idolatry.
- d. While communion is a means of grace (1 Cor. 10:1-4), it is not magical (10:5ff). It does not guarantee grace. Rather, the means of grace become effective by the Spirit when we come to the table in sincere faith.
- e. John Mark Hicks: *"While Israel ate and drank the "same spiritual" nourishment that the church does, they also ate and drank at idolatrous tables... Israel attempted to eat at two tables—the table of the Lord and the table of idols. God's covenant people were disloyal. Consequently, they were "struck down in the wilderness."*
- f. When we partake in communion, then, we are pledging our allegiance to God over idols; to God over demons; to God over all. If our allegiance is divided—even if we are Christians—we should not partake of the Supper.
- g. In pledging our allegiance to God over the devil, we effectively declare His victory over the devil. Psalm 23 speaks typologically of communion when it says, "He prepares a table before us in the presence of our enemies." Communion is a victory meal. It "talks smack" to the devil.
- h. Luther: *"If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are aimed at you every moment, you would be glad to come to the sacrament as often as you can."*

III. Christ is present in Communion.

- a. How Christ is present in Communion has been debated for centuries:
 - i. Transubstantiation (Catholic): *"His body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine, the bread and wine having been changed in substance, by God's power, into his body and blood."*—Fourth Lateran Council, canon 1.
 - ii. Consubstantiation (Anglican): The true substance of the body and blood of Christ are present *alongside* the true presence of bread and wine.
 - iii. Sacramental Union (Lutheran): The true substance of the body and blood of Christ are *sacramentally united* to the true substance of bread and wine, much like the human and divine natures of Christ are united.

- iv. Spiritual Real Presence: *"I teach that Christ, though absent according to his body, is nevertheless not only present with us according to his divine power, but also makes his flesh vivifying for us."* This Reformed view, articulated by Calvin, holds that Christ is present, not bodily—for His body is in heaven (Act 1:9-11)—but by His Spirit.
- v. Memorial (Contemporary evangelical): The Lord's Supper is not an act of meeting the risen Christ, but merely an act of obedience, whereby we remember—in the words of John Sutcliffe—our "absent saviour."
- b. "This is my body" does not mean Christ's physical body is present in the Supper any more than "I am the gate" (Jhn. 10:9) means Christ is a literal door with hinges. Jesus makes clear in John 6:63 that "it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing." The material elements of communion do not become physical flesh; their power to transform comes by the Spirit.
- c. Nevertheless, Immanuel is also not an "absent saviour," as the memorialists claim. Christ's presence in communion is taught by Paul in 1 Cor. 10.
 - i. 1 Cor. 10:16: *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*
 - 1. "participation" (Gk. *koinonos*) relates to the word often translated as "fellowship," and it is where we get the name, "communion" (the KJV and NKJV translate the word, "communion").
 - 2. But how do we fellowship or commune or participate in Christ's body and blood? Verse 18 helps us.
 - ii. 1 Cor. 10:18: *Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants (Gk. *koinonos*) in the altar?*
 - 1. Israel's participation at the altar did not mean they fellowshiped with the literal body and blood of the slain animal. Rather, it meant that those who ate the sacrificial meat enjoyed the benefits of the altar as they ate "before the Lord" (Deut. 26:7).
 - 2. Likewise, our participation in the body of the blood of Christ does not mean that we fellowship with literal body and blood. Rather, we enjoy the benefits of the Cross as we eat before the Lord, who hosts us—communes with us—at His table.
 - 3. The Westminster (Presbyterian), Savoy (Congregationalist), and Second London Baptist Confessions all share the same wording, which articulates Christ's spiritual presence in the Supper: *"as believers partake of the bread and the wine, Christ is 'spiritually present' to them and nourishing them."*
- d. If Jesus invited you over for dinner, would you say yes? How often?

IV. Communion unifies us.

- a. The laity were deprived of full communion for much of church history. This injustice was rooted in bad theology, where communion was viewed as a

sacrifice that could secure earthly blessings and purgatorial relief. Lay participation was irrelevant, as priests performed “sacrifices” alone.

- b. Protestants likewise have often misunderstood communion as a time of deep, personal, even morbid introspection. This sour mood not only misaligns with God’s intention for the meal (cf. Acts 2:46), but isolates us, as we determine our “worthiness” of the Supper.
- c. To participate in the Supper in a “worthy” manner does not mean we morbidly look inward, however. Communion is a meal of joy. It is a time for looking outward at Christ, not inward, at ourselves. It is a time for remembering Christ’s sacrifice, not our sinfulness—except to repent of it.
- d. When Paul warns the Corinthians against “unworthy” participation in the Supper (11:27-34), it is because they had turned communion into a source of “divisions” (11:18) and “factions” (11:19) between the haves and have-nots, with rich people getting drunk and leaving the poor without any food or drink (11:17-22).
- e. The meal was intended not to divide, but to unite: *“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread”* (10:17). No wonder Paul says their ritualistic participation cannot properly be called the Lord’s Supper (11:20)! When we violate God’s purpose for the Supper—to unite—we eat and drink in an unworthy manner.
- f. For all the divisions in our world today, what if the church—in all its diversity—would gather around the same table and allow the Spirit to cement a unity amongst us, which the world can only dream of?

V. Communion complements the spoken Word.

- a. After Jesus rose, He spoke with two disciples on the road to Emmaus, whose *“eyes were kept from recognizing him”* (Lk. 24:16). After they expressed sadness over the crucifixion, Jesus rebuked their slowness to believe (24:25). Proceeding then to preach the Gospel from *“Moses and all the Prophets”* (24:26), their hearts burned at the message, but they still didn’t get it. Christ had risen!
- b. It wasn’t until they dined with Jesus that He who had *“opened the Scriptures”* now *“opened their eyes”* to perceive Him: *“When he was at table with them, he **took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, “Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he **opened to us the Scriptures?**”** (Lk. 24:30-32).*
- c. On the surface, this has nothing to do with communion, but the connection is implied. The formula, *“took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it”* matches precisely what we find in the first communion (22:19). Furthermore, the revelation of Jesus’ identity is delayed until the moment He broke bread, which is Luke’s normal language for communion (Acts 2:42, 46). Finally, Jesus dined with them as a guest (Lk. 24:29) but instead becomes the host (24:30). This resembles what occurs in Communion. We invite Jesus like a guest at our table, only to find that our Risen Savior hosts us.

- d. Luke's artistry—implying rather than explaining the connection—matches what we find elsewhere in Scripture. For instance, God's seventh day rest, Abraham's circumcision and tithe, and the Levirate marriage law are all taught in Genesis, even before Moses commanded them. Likewise, we inferentially learn about communion in Luke 24, even before the church begins practicing it.
- e. Discerning readers learn that Communion complements the spoken message of the Gospel because the meal opens our eyes to the presence of our Risen Savior, just as it did for the disciples at Emmaus.
- f. Historically, Word and Table have been paired in Christian thought:
 - i. Acts 2:46: *"And day by day, attending the temple together [for teaching] and breaking bread in their homes [communion], they received their food with glad and generous hearts."*
 - ii. Acts 20:7: *"On the first day of the week, when we gathered to break bread, Paul talked with them... and he prolonged his speech till midnight."*
 - iii. Thomas Watson: *"The Word is a trumpet to proclaim Christ. The sacrament is a glass to represent Him."*
 - iv. John Mark Hicks: *"The Word interprets the table as the table embodies the Word. The table without the Word is subject to misunderstanding, and the Word without the table misses the experience of the living Christ as host. The two belong together."*

VI. Communion renews our covenant with God

- a. Exodus 24:7-11 *"Then he took the **Book of the Covenant** and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, 'All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.'* And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, *'Behold the **blood of the covenant** that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.'* Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and **they saw the God of Israel**. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; **they beheld God, and ate and drank.**"
- b. This covenant ceremony involved blood, a pledge, a theophany (manifestation of God), and eating and drinking. In the Ancient Near East, covenants were sealed with a meal, much like we share a meal after weddings in the modern West.
- c. This Old Covenant background foreshadows our New Covenant feast, where Jesus says, *"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood"* (1 Cor. 11:25).
- d. Communion is a covenant renewal ceremony, akin to renewing one's wedding vows. It is as if we are pledging, by God's empowering grace, *"All that the LORD has spoken we will [try our darndest to] do."* Rather than seeing God with our eyes, we see God the Son with eyes of faith, present to feed and empower us for fulfilling our pledge. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New empowers (2 Cor. 3)
- e. Why would we not want to renew our covenant with God weekly?

VII. Communion is our New Passover

- a. Jesus did not invent Communion out of the blue; He modified the Passover. Passover was an annual feast in which Israel remembered the way God judged their Egyptian slave-drivers and “passed over” the Israelites whose homes were marked by the blood of a sacrificial lamb.
- b. Jesus instituted the first Communion over a Passover meal, died during Passover, and now Scripture calls Him our Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7).
- c. By Acts 20, the city that had crucified Christ during Passover had become too dangerous for Paul to visit for Passover. Paul then celebrates not the Old Passover, but the New; not in Jerusalem, but in Troas; not with Jews, but with Gentiles; not on the 14th of Nisan, but on the first day of the week, the day Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus reinvents Passover because He is not a Dead Passover Lamb; He is a Resurrected Savior. Communion should not resemble a funeral!
- d. Thomas Watson: *“Neglect of the Sacrament runs men into a gospel penalty. It was infinite goodness in Christ to broach that blessed vessel of His body and let His sacred blood stream out. It is evil for us wilfully to omit such an ordinance wherein the trophy of mercy is so richly displayed and our salvation so nearly concerned. Well may Christ take this as an undervaluing of Him, and interpret it as no better than a bidding Him to keep His feast to Himself. He who did not observe the passover was to be cut off, Numbers 9:13.”*

VIII. Communion positions us for Pentecostal power.

- a. Luke draws a direct line from the “upper room” (Lk. 22:12) of the Lord’s Passover (communion) to the “upper room” (Acts 1:13) of Pentecost. The former occurs just before the resurrection/ascension; the latter occurs just after. The bridge between these events is Jesus’ resurrection/ascension.
- b. We should thus not be surprised that Luke twice more mentions an “upper room,” and each is associated with a resurrection (9:37ff; 20:8ff).
- c. Strengthening this bridge, the latter resurrection occurs while the church shares communion! Luke’s message appears to be two-fold:
 - i. There is no Pentecost without Passover. Jesus is the Passover Lamb, who through His death, resurrection, and ascension, gives His church power.
 - ii. Communion is not like Passover, where the Passover Lamb stays dead. Jesus is our *Risen* Passover Lamb, to which these resurrections testify.
- d. The line between (the new) Passover and Pentecost—between communion and power—seems to be validated in church history. For the first four centuries, the gifts of the Spirit flourished, as the church was nourished by Word and Table. After the fourth century, all three (Word, Table, Gifts) diminished. Only at rare moments has the church recovered all three.⁵ Could it be that now is the time?

IX. Communion Anticipates the Wedding Supper of the Lamb

⁵ I recognize I’m painting with a broad brush.

- a. When Jesus instituted Communion, He said, *"I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom"* (Matt. 26:29).
- b. Jesus was referring to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb, which is prophesied in numerous places:
 - i. Isa. 25:6-8: *"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken."*
 - ii. Matt. 8:11-12: *"I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*
 - iii. Rev. 19:9: *"And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.' And he said to me, 'These are the true words of God.'"*
- c. The Wedding Supper of the Lamb is a feast hosted by Jesus upon His return, where we receive the reward for our labors, and—this BLOWS my mind—Almighty King Jesus humbles Himself to serve US!
 - i. Luke 12:37 *Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.*
- d. Communion is a foretaste of this great feast. As we await our eschatological entrée, why would we resist a weekly appetizer, served by our Lord Himself?

X. Communion participates in the New Creation.

- a. Jesus is called *"the firstborn from the dead"* (Col. 1:18; Rev. 1:5). This does not mean that Jesus had a beginning; He is everlasting (Isa. 9:6; Jhn. 1:1). Rather, it means, *"that in everything he might be preeminent"* (Col. 1:18) as the first to rise from the grave—a precursor to those who follow (1 Cor. 15:23).
- b. Since *"the last enemy to be destroyed is death"* (1 Cor. 15:26), Jesus' victory over death inaugurates new creation, which consummates upon His return.
- c. The "old creation" was good (Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, etc.) but cursed by man's sin (Gen. 3:17; Rom. 8:20). Rather than abandoning creation, however, Jesus redeems it.
- d. The elements of bread and wine (and baptismal water) come from the old creation. But because of Christ's presence, the elements become a foretaste of new creation, when God's manifest presence makes *"all things new"* (Rev. 21:5).
- e. John Mark Hicks writes eloquently on this dimension of the Supper:
 - i. *In the age to come, all creation will mediate God's presence to us. Everywhere we look, we will behold His splendor and enjoy His fellowship.*

But here, we get a foretaste in water, bread, and wine, the materials of old creation, vivified by the Spirit, and inaugurating new creation."

- ii. *"The Lord's supper is bread and wine, but more than bread and wine. It is not a 'regular' meal. We may experience God through any meal, whether it is the nightly family meal, the church potluck, or the annual Thanksgiving dinner. Old creation is still good and still mediates God's presence. But the Lord's supper is more. The Lord's supper is the experience of new creation. The bread and wine of the old creation become means by which we experience the new. It is still bread and wine—created materiality, it is not annihilated—but it is also a participation in the reality of the new creation through the presence of Christ."*
- iii. *"When the eschatological dimension of the table is neglected, the supper is easily reduced to a singular purpose such as remembering the death of Christ. There is no eschatological dynamic in the present but only an absent Christ whose return we await through memory."*
- f. Thomas Watson: *"The Lord condescends to our weakness. Were we made up all of spirit, there would be no need of bread and wine."*
- g. My dad says, "Everyone wants to go to heaven, but no one wants to die." In the Supper, we taste eternity without tasting death. Why would we not eat it often?