

“Visual Aids for the Church” (1 Corinthians 11:23–26; 1:14–17)

Last night, Lori and I had the privilege of witnessing Annika McMillan marry Matt Baldwin. During the ring ceremony, I was reminded of the symbolic significance of the wedding ring. A wedding ring serves as the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual bond that unites two hearts in love that has no end. A wedding ring is a constant reminder of the commitment a husband or wife has made. I like to say, “My wedding ring reminds women that I’m unavailable. More importantly, my wedding ring reminds me that I’m unavailable.” My wedding ring is a great visual reminder of my commitment to Lori.

Similarly, we all need visual reminders in the spiritual realm. The New Testament uses two outward and visible signs that depict an inward and spiritual relationship with Jesus Christ. These two visual aids are water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The book of 1 Corinthians discusses these two visual aids that serve to remind us of our relationship with Christ. *We all need reminders.*

The first visual aid that I would like to discuss is the Lord’s Supper.¹ In 1 Cor 11:23–26, Paul gives a brief theology of the Lord’s Supper. In doing so, he reminds us to remember that the Lord’s Supper pictures Christ’s self-sacrifice on behalf of His people.² He writes, **“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often³ as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”** In 11:23, Paul explains that he “received” (*paralambano*) instruction about the Lord’s Supper from Jesus. However, the verbs “received” (*paralambano*) and “delivered” (*paradidomi*) typically refer to teaching passed on to the apostles from Jesus.⁴ Thus, it’s fairly certain that Paul received these words from one of the gospel writers, most likely his traveling companion Luke.⁵

Twice in this section (11:24, 25), Paul urges the Corinthians to “remember” Christ’s death. This is the primary purpose of the Lord’s Supper. By partaking of the bread and the cup, we remember that Jesus Christ took our hell that we might have His heaven. It is His “body on our behalf.”⁶ The Lord’s Supper is God’s way of getting us to keep the cross of Christ central in the life of the church. We use the Lord’s Supper to draw close to Jesus in gratitude for what He has done for the entire church through His cross. As we draw near to Him through His Supper, He will draw near to us.⁷

Many couples renew their marriage vows on an anniversary of their wedding. Some couples plan large celebrations; others simply renew their vows before each other. Either way, this act declares a confirmation of original vows and a commitment to continued faithfulness. But we can also think of the new covenant with the tenderness and devotion of renewed marriage vows. Unlike a human marriage, however, the new covenant represents God’s declaration of His devotion and commitment, even though the other covenant partner, His people, had not remained faithful. When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we remember what Jesus has done for us in spite of ourselves. He is faithful even though we’re faithless.⁸

The remembrance of the Lord’s Supper ought to lead to a response. Verse 26 states that when we remember the Lord’s Supper we “proclaim” (*katangelo*)⁹ Jesus’ death until He comes. By means of the Lord’s Supper we show in a physical way Christ’s death and what it accomplished for our salvation and corporate fellowship. The result should be that we honor our spiritual union with Christ and each other.

A well-known painting of the Vietnam Wall depicts a young widow and her daughter standing at the wall, reaching up and touching the name of the husband and father who died. The reflection in the polished granite is not of the mother and daughter but of the husband and father reaching out his hand to touch theirs. That is the Lord's Supper. We arrive at the table and reach out our hands to take the bread and the cup. In response to our act of faith, Jesus touches us.¹⁰ The significance of the Lord's Supper is this: We remember Christ and proclaim Him because He laid down His life for us. If you've never believed in Jesus Christ's person and work, please do so today.

When I was sixteen years old I climbed the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. I remember entering the massive marble building, and viewing the gigantic statue of Abraham Lincoln. Even though the majestic figure seated in that chair bears the likeness of Abraham Lincoln, it only represents him. That building and statue are intended to bring to our remembrance with the sixteenth president of the US accomplished for our country. It is a memorial. The time I spend at this memorial gave me a greater sense of appreciation for the work of Abraham Lincoln. I couldn't help but feel a sense of closeness to him.

Similarly, the Lord's Supper is a powerful memorial. Even though it's merely a tiny chip of bread and a miniature cup, it represents Jesus Christ's body and blood.

How does Emmanuel practice the Lord's Supper? We practice "open communion." This means that anyone who has believed in Jesus Christ as Savior is free to partake of the elements. You do not need to be a member of Emmanuel Bible Fellowship. We practice communion on the first Sunday of the month.¹¹

The second visual aid that I would like to discuss is water baptism. In 1 Cor 1:14–17 Paul writes, **"I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, so that no one would say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other."**¹² **For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void."** The context of this passage (1:10–4:21) deals with divisions in the church. These schisms centered on personality preferences. Paul deliberately did not baptize his converts so there would be no question as to whose disciples they were. This was one way he kept Christ central in his ministry. Paul believed baptism was important, but it was valid whether he or any other believer administered it. He was not superior to other believers in this respect. The members of Stephanus' family were the first converts in the Roman province of Achaia (16:15). It was unimportant to Paul whom he personally baptized. This is clear because he temporarily forgot that he had baptized these people. As he continued to write, the Lord brought them to mind.

Obviously, baptism is a very prominent theme in these verses, mentioned six times here by Paul. I take it that some, at least, took pride in the person who baptized them. Some people appear to have been proud and looked down on others who were not baptized by as great a celebrity as their baptizer. Paul lets the air out of the tires of these proud name droppers by telling them that baptism is not a celebrity affair, and compared to the preaching of the gospel, baptizing is a lower priority to him. Do they take pride in the one who baptizes them? Paul is glad he has not made baptizing a priority, and thus that he has baptized very few of the Corinthians.

Paul, Peter (Acts 10:48), and Jesus (John 4:1–2) seem to have delegated the responsibility of baptism to others.¹³ I do the very same thing. I try not to baptize people unless I have been instrumental in their spiritual lives. Instead, my goal is to have parents, siblings, friends, and disciplers conduct baptisms. This can be more meaningful to the person being baptized and it empowers those who aren't pastors to lead. Furthermore, there is biblical precedence for it.

Paul closes our passage in 1:17 with these powerful words: **“For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.”** Paul’s mission was not dunking converts; it was preaching the gospel! It is thus evident that Paul viewed his preaching of the gospel as having a much higher priority than baptizing new converts. It can hardly be overlooked that Paul saw salvation as something which occurs independently of baptism. Baptism is important. It is the believer’s public identification with Jesus Christ. But baptism is not viewed as the means of one’s salvation; rather it is the outward manifestation of salvation. Paul rejects the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. Otherwise, if he thought baptism was the means of salvation, he would have made it a much higher priority than he did. People are saved by believing the gospel, and it was Paul’s priority to preach it. Baptism took second place to preaching in Paul’s life and ministry.

Baptism is an external expression of this internal reality that took place. Baptism doesn't save us; Jesus' blood saves us. Baptism is an act whereby the believer in Jesus Christ chooses to stand before the world to give an outward picture of something that happened to them when they trusted Christ. It could have taken place ten years ago or just that day. The imagery we have as we stand in the water is that when the person puts you under the water it represents being buried with Christ in his death. When you are brought up, it symbolizes being raised with him to new life. And we understand that everyone who was baptized in the Scriptures, were baptized after placing their faith in Christ. So we don't believe in adult baptism, we believe in *believers'* baptism. That is, baptism is something that we do after we have accepted Christ. Baptism is the act of being immersed in water to publicly identify a private decision one has made regarding Jesus Christ.

Baptism is an outward expression of an inward reality (1 Pet 3:21).

Baptism is a witness to the believer’s identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:3–5).

Baptism symbolizes the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16).

Baptism signifies the ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).

Baptism is a demonstration that one has “chosen sides” with God (Matt 10:32–33).

Who should be baptized?

All who have trusted Christ for salvation should be baptized (Acts 2:42; 10:47).

There is no biblical record of anyone being baptized who wasn’t old enough to believe in Christ.

When should a believer be baptized?

A believer should be baptized as soon as possible (Acts 2:41; 8:37; 9:18; 10:47; 16:33).

Baptism follows conversion and precedes teaching (Matt 28:19).

Why does Emmanuel practice immersion?

The Greek word *baptizo* means “to immerse or dip in water.”

Christ and the early Christians were immersed in water (Matt 3:6, 16; John 3:23; Acts 8:38–39).

Immersion is the best picture of Christ’s burial and resurrection.

What is Emmanuel’s practice with regard to baptism?

Baptism is required before a person can become a member of Emmanuel.

A prospective member must have been baptized by immersion after he or she trusted in Christ.

A believer can be baptized on any Sunday

Any believer can baptize another believer (1 Pet 2:4–5).

When a big time professional athlete (like Shaq or Jordan) commits to a team, he signs a contract which binds him to the team. Following this action there is usually a press conference to announce the newly formed allegiance. They make the announcement, someone from the organization holds up a team jersey with the new player's name and number on it. It is a public declaration of the player's commitment to that team. Being saved is like the signing of the contract. It's pretty much a private thing. Salvation is where a...

Scripture References

1 Corinthians 1:14–17

Matthew 28:18–20

Acts 2:41; 8:36–39; 10:47–48; 16:33

1 Corinthians 11:23–26

Matthew 26:17–27

Mark 14:22–25

Luke 22:19–20

Study Questions

1. Have I been baptized? If so, when was I baptized? Who performed it? Where was it conducted? Who attended? How did my baptism impact me? In what way(s) did it impact those who were present? Would I do anything differently?
2. Have I ever had the privilege of baptizing a fellow believer? If so, how would I describe the experience? What did it mean to me? What did it mean to the one baptized? How can I encourage others to enter into the waters of baptism?
3. When did I first partake of the Lord's Supper? What did it mean to me then? What does it mean to me now? What memories do I have of observing the Lord's Supper?
4. Have I ever led a communion meditation? If so, what did I say? If I were to lead a communion meditation, how would I present the elements to the congregation? What would I say to help others understand the Lord's Supper in a new and fresh way?
5. How can I cultivate a deeper appreciation for baptism and the Lord's Supper? How can I teach my children and grandchildren the significance of these two Christian visual aids? How can I avoid taking these two great ordinances for granted?

Notes

¹ The Lord's Supper was instituted immediately following the observance of the Passover and serves as the fulfillment of the Passover (Matt 26:17–26).

² Throughout his letter, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to imitate Christ's sacrificial humility by having an unselfish attitude and love for one another (1:18–2:2; 8:1, 11; 10:31–11:1; 13:1–14:1; 15:1–3; 16:14, 22).

³ The phrase "as often" may indicate a weekly basis when compared with 1 Cor 16:2 and Acts 20:7. The latter text mentions the first day of the week as a time for breaking bread. Differently, breaking bread occurs daily in the earliest days of the church (Acts 2:42–47). If the amount of times one celebrates the Lord's Supper were an important issue for Jesus, Paul, or the Synoptic writers, perhaps they would have instituted a more structured schedule. The words "as often" do suggest a repetitive celebration was expected.

⁴ Verbrugge 2007:220 writes, "The two verbs Paul uses here *paralambano* and *paradidomi* are words the apostle sometimes uses as technical words for receiving and passing on church traditions and teachings (for the former, see 1 Cor 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6; for the latter, see 1 Cor 11:2; 15:3, plus the related noun *paradosis*, 'teaching,' in 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6). Because the teaching of the apostles derived from Jesus himself, Paul is able to say that ultimately he received it 'from the Lord.'"

⁵ Paul's rendition of the Lord's Supper institution in 1 Corinthians is the first written account. Of the three renditions of the institution in the Synoptic Gospels (Matt 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24; Luke 22:17–20), Paul's words are closest to those of his traveling companion Luke. See Raymond F. Collins, *First Corinthians*. SP 7. Ed. Daniel J. Harrington. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), 426.

⁶ The Lord's Supper signifies a celebration of the reconciliation of God with humankind. Drinking from the cup shows a connection between the participant and the atoning power of Christ's death.

⁷ Michael Eaton, *Preaching Through the Bible: 1 Corinthians 10–16* (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1998), 38.

⁸ See 2 Tim 2:13.

⁹ "Proclaim" (*katangelo*) is a present active indicative, not an imperative. Paul uses this verb in Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 2:1; 9:14; Phil 1:17, 18; and Col 1:28; cf. 2 Mac 8:36; 9:17; Acts 3:24; 4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; and 26:23.

¹⁰ Preaching Today citation: Rich Bersett, Belleville, IL.

¹¹ It is important to note that there are no commands with regard to the frequency of the Lord's Supper. However, leaders throughout church history have favored weekly observance of the Lord's Supper (e.g., Calvin, Luther, Wesley, Zwingli).

¹² Perhaps Sosthenes or Stephanas himself jogged Paul's memory. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians: Based on the Revised Standard Version*, New Century Bible (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1971), 34.

¹³ Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 42.