

**THE OBSERVANCE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER IN
THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN BAPTIST CHURCH:**

A BIBLICAL EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

The interpretation and observance of the Lord's Supper has for long been conceived by the Nigerian Baptist Church through the eyes of the Christian missionary who first brought the gospel to Nigeria.

The relatively insignificant impact that the participation in the ordinance has on the spiritual life of the participants therefore poses a challenge for the need to evaluate the contemporary understanding and practice of it in line with the Bible for possible areas of variance.

To this end major doctrinal views of the ordinance were examined, followed by the researcher's biblical understanding of its observance from the New Testament perspective. The current practices were analysed and on the basis of this, recommendations were offered that will make the observance of the Lord's Supper Bible-based and devoid of Western missionary ideological imposition.

B. Conclusion

This study shows that, while Baptist Churches are trying to conform to the biblical observance of the Lord's Supper as did the early Church, there is significant difference in the interpretation and application of the concept. The exclusion of polygamists from the ordinance is not biblical but was due to the enforcement of early missionary culture on the Nigerian Churches of which Baptist as a denomination is one. With the adoption of new stance on polygamy

and the Lord's supper, the Nigerian Baptist Convention is becoming more biblical in her approach now than ever before.

The study also shows that while the members observe the Lord's Supper on the outward, their conduct in life does not signify the profound truth and power expected of the recipient. This may mean that their understanding and interpretation of the whole concept is a reflection of their behaviour. No wonder that the ordinance has to a greater extent lost its value in most of the Baptist Churches.

It is therefore worth mentioning that the spirituality, as well as the obligatory aspect of the Lord's Supper, which has gone into oblivion must be re-enlivened if the ordinance will be of any religious significance to the contemporary Baptist worshippers. The taking of it should be a propelling force to live a holy and sanctified life and to embark on aggressive evangelism; any other goal apart from this is like celebrating Christmas without Christ. If indeed it is the Lord's Supper, it must be taken as the Lord of the Supper teaches and directs it. The essence of observing the supper should be scripturally based and not on the toga of denominationalism. To be a true Baptist is to owe total allegiance to the fundamental truth of the Word of God.

As we remember his suffering, sacrificial atoning death, as we remember his body that was delivered up for us, as we remember the cup which is the new covenant in his blood which was poured out for us, three things must result from our lives each time we remember him at the Table.¹

¹C. A.Olowola, pp. 14-15.

- i. Our hearts must be filled with gratitude unto God for all he had done for us in his Son. We must be grateful unto him and express this unto him.
- ii. Coming to his table must end in renewed dedication of our lives to God afresh in living for him and in his service. It must surely be impossible to leave the table without a deeper devotion to the Lord.
- iii. As we meet with him in the ordinance, we should look forward to that blessed hope he has given unto us, when we shall be finally saved from the presence of sin into his glorious presence.

C. Recommendations

In view of the noticeable deficiencies in the interpretation (understanding) and observance of the Lord's Supper in the contemporary Baptist Churches, the following recommendations were proffered.

1. It is high time that different churches in Nigeria find a meeting ground where an agreement can be reached as to the biblical eligibility to the Lord's Supper. This is necessary so that our denominational gift will be used for building up the body of Christ rather than causing confusion and hatred in Christendom.
2. Churches should be encouraged to celebrate the ordinance fortnightly, monthly, or as the need may arise but do not need to wait till the yearly Easter time.
3. Church members and pastors must be thoroughly schooled on the necessity of the Lord's Supper to correct the age-long paganistic

impression of seeing the ordinance as a ritual rather than the expression of Christian union with Christ.

4. The celebration should be seen as part of Christian worship and therefore the elements should be handled with reverence in the spirit of rededicating and renewing one's union with Christ from contrite and penitent heart.
5. For the Lord's Supper to be meaningful the worshippers must have faith and implicit confidence in what they do and in God they worship.
6. While God is love and the Church must preach it, yet the Church is too preoccupied with preaching about the love of God and his readiness to forgive always to the detriment of his justice. It is recommended that Christians should realise that the Lord will judge his people, "for it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."² The Church should start teaching her members the grave consequences of eating and drinking the Supper unworthily i.e. not living the demand of the Supper. God's gift cannot and should not be taken for granted.
7. Where an ordained minister could not be reached, student pastors, deacons or church leaders should be allowed to administer the ordinance instead of depriving the church from enjoying communion with Christ.
8. While it may be deduced that baptism always preceded the taking of Supper, this should not be taken as a strict and rigid rule without exception. There is the need for flexibility judging from Cornelius' account in Acts. 10.

²Hebrew 10:31

9. No one should be coerced, cajoled or induced to partake in the Lord's supper for any reason. It should be made voluntary with a clear conscience on individual volition.
10. The Nigerian Baptist convention should be commended for allowing biblical reason to prevail on the issue of polygamy and church membership.³ The Convention Secretariat should however, as a matter of urgency harmonise the newly recommended and approved stance, and enforce it on all the churches cooperating with her. This should be executed with caution as the radicals, the liberals and the conservatives within should be enlightened so as not to adversely affect the church polity.
11. The Nigerian Baptist Convention should keep to this new order and teach their members to understand the biblical interpretation and implications of observing the Lord's Supper, rather than thinking that the prostituted way is the only right way.
12. Young people should be properly taught about what marriage involves and intending couples should be mandated to undergo intensive pre-marital counselling.
13. Youth and the young adults should be warned through proper teaching of the spiritual risk of deliberate refusal to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is a spiritual gambling for anyone on the ground of the fear of Christian responsibility to delay his participation on the Supper till a later date in life.

³Book of Reports, p. 220.

