

COVENANT MEMORIAL

A Fresh Perspective on Real Presence

Essay No 7

A Shift in Emphasis

The Covenant Memorial emphasis is not the invention of new doctrine, but the **re-centring of old doctrine around neglected biblical grammars**. The ideas might feel “fresh” because they’ve been crowded out by later debates that trained everyone to look somewhere else.

1. The Shift Is One of Focus, Not Innovation

Nothing we’ve articulated is alien to Scripture, the Fathers, or serious Reformation theology. What’s changed is **where the weight is carried**.

Most modern discussion of:

- atonement,
- Eucharist,
- Real Presence,

has been dominated by **mechanism questions**:

- How does forgiveness “work”?
- Where exactly is Christ located?
- What metaphysical change happens?
- Which theory explains the cross best?

A Covenant Memorial approach pushes us back toward **covenant-action grammar**:

- What has God promised?
- How does God act when his covenant is remembered?
- How do signs function when God binds himself to them?
- How does obedience protect (not produce) grace?

That grammar was always there — it just stopped being the controlling frame.

2. Why These Emphases Feel Unusual Today

a) Memorial became psychologised

“Do this in remembrance of me” was quietly reinterpreted as:

“Think about Jesus while you do this.”

Once that move happened, everything else thinned out:

- Presence had to be redefined (either denied or over-physicalised),
- Sacrifice had to be rethought (in terms of recollection of a past event rather than on-going participation in the benefits of that event),
- The Supper lost ecclesial gravity.

Recovering **memorial as enacted covenant** automatically restores thickness — which feels unusual because most people have never heard it explained that way.

b) Atonement was reduced to one model

Penal Substitution became — in many evangelical settings — not *the foundational* model supporting other models but *the only* model, excluding the others.

Once that happened:

- Repentance, reconciliation, and covenant loyalty became marginal instead of integral aspects
- The Eucharist became a reminder of payment rather than participation in reconciliation
- Passover logic lost its interpretive authority

Reintroducing these elements can feel disruptive, even when it is strictly faithful.

c) Patristic voices were filtered through later debates

Many evangelicals know the Fathers *selectively*:

- quotes are used to “prove presence” or “prove symbolism”,
- categories are backfilled from medieval or modern frameworks.

Letting the Fathers speak in their own register — thanksgiving, participation, transformation, covenant — often surprises people because it doesn’t line up neatly with later polemics.

3. What This Approach Is (and Is Not)

It is not:

- a denial of PSA,
- a dilution of Real Presence,
- a rejection of evangelical convictions,
- a move toward vague “mystery”.

It is:

- a recovery of biblical action-logic,
- a re-integration of Eucharist, ethics, and ecclesiology,
- a refusal to let later abstractions dominate Scripture,
- a retrieval of how God actually *acts* in covenant.

In other words, it is **deep tradition remembered differently**, not revisionism.

4. Why This Often Resonates When People Hear It

Many leaders and congregations intuitively sense:

- that Communion should *do* something,
- that symbolism alone doesn't account for Scripture,
- that repeated sacrifice language is wrong,
- that presence matters, but not in a crude way.

The framework: we remember / he remembers articulates what people feel but cannot name. That's often the sign of a theologically faithful retrieval rather than novelty.

5. A Final Observational Word

Care has been taken throughout not to:

- over-systematise,
- flatten differences,
- force agreement,
- or overclaim certainty.

This is an attempt at theological maturity.

What this recovers is something the Church always had but no longer knew how to say **in an evangelical accent**.