

CHAPTER 30 - THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Purpose of the Lord's Supper

1. *The Lord's Supper was instituted by the Lord on the same night in which He was betrayed. It is to be observed in His churches to the world's end, for a perpetual remembrance of Him and to show forth the sacrifice of Himself in His death. It was instituted also to confirm saints in the belief that all the benefits stemming from Christ's sacrifice belong to them. Furthermore, it is meant to promote their spiritual nourishment and growth in Christ, and to strengthen the ties that bind them to all the duties they owe to Him. The Lord's Supper is also a bond and pledge of the fellowship which believers have with Christ and with one another.*

(a) The Lord's Supper is an **institution** of Christ. It is a command of Christ, the Head of the church, instituted on the night of His betrayal, during the celebration of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:26-28, Mark 14:22-24, Luke 22:15-20, see also 1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

(b) It is a **church ordinance**. It was not given for the individual, the family or the state, but for the celebration of the local church. This is its context in the early church (Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:20ff.). It is the church that must regulate its use, both how it is to be observed, and who is to participate. Why this is so will be clearly seen under the purposes of the Lord's Supper.

(c) It is a **perpetual ordinance**. As long as this world lasts it is to be celebrated (1 Corinthians 11:26). Churches have no right to abandon its use; and believers have no right to ignore its use.

(d) Its **main purpose**. To "remember" Christ (1 Corinthians 11:24,25). This is not the sort of remembrance we call 'nostalgia' – just remembering the good old times. It is like God's remembrance, which is a call to action (Genesis 8:1, Exodus 2:24). We are to remember Christ in His sacrificial death, His body and blood. It is impossible to call the cross of Christ to mind without it having a profound impact upon our own thinking. Think about the awfulness of the sufferings, especially being forsaken by His Father; those sufferings were on our behalf; yet by these sufferings God's wrath is satisfied, we are acceptable to Him, and we have an eternal salvation. Can you think about these things and not remember Him with a deep *love*, because the cross is the great expression of His love to us (Romans 5:8, 1 John 4:10); with *sorrow* for sin, because it is our sin that made Him suffer, and His sufferings show how awful our sin really is before God; with holy *joy*, because through Christ we are now reconciled to God.

(e) Its **other purposes**.

1. It *confirms* to the saints that all the benefits from Christ's death are actually ours. Christ commands us to actually eat and drink, to take the elements offered into ourselves. This is a very strong symbolic action – just as taking food brings surely brings benefits to our bodies.
2. It *promotes* spiritual nourishment and growth in Christ. Through the remembrance it should encourage faith, enflame love, deepen sorrow, and excite joy. It should also enlarge and strengthen our hope of the second coming and of the glory that is to be revealed (1 Corinthians 11:26).
3. It *strengthens* commitment to give ourselves wholly to Christ. We partake of those elements of His self-sacrifice for us. We are not our own, we are bought with a price. We can only respond by giving our lives for His glory (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). By eating and drinking we again consecrate ourselves to Him.

4. It *signifies* fellowship with Christ. The word “communion” means fellowship (1 Corinthians 10:16). The Lord’s Supper is not an empty ceremony, but one where the participant has special fellowship with Christ (see section 7).
5. It also *signifies* fellowship with the other participants. Paul emphasizes that there is “one” bread (1 Corinthians 10:17). It is so important to be sure that we really are in fellowship with our brethren, and we “pledge” to continue in that fellowship after the Supper.

The Nature of the Lord’s Supper

2. *In this ordinance Christ is not offered up to His Father, nor is any real sacrifice made in any sense of that term for remission of sin of the living or the dead. The Supper is only a memorial of the one offering up of Christ, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all. It is also a spiritual offering up of all possible praise to God for the once-for-all work of Calvary. Hence the popish sacrifice of the mass, as it is called, is utterly abominable, and injurious to Christ’s own sacrifice which is the sole propitiation for all the sins of the elect.*

(a) **Negatively.** It is not a “real sacrifice” (lines 1-2). The teaching of ‘transubstantiation’ is not true (see section 6), and the elements are not changed into the body and blood of Christ, so that Christ is “not offered up to His Father” in the Lord’s Supper. Because sacrifices are offered up for the “remission of sin”, it is denied that the Lord’s Supper has this power, whether for the “living or the dead”. This is the Roman Catholic practice when the mass (requiem) is performed for the sins of those who have died.

(b) **Positively.** It is “only a memorial” (lines 2-4). This is clearly indicated by the words “in remembrance of Me” (1 Corinthians 11:24 & 25). The Lord’s Supper is not a repeat of Christ’s sacrifice but a remembrance of it (see section 1). The eating of the bread and the drinking of the wine does not help us magically or physically, but spiritually and mentally as we remember what took place. This is why we must make sure that our minds and spirits are fully engaged (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). But it is also called a “spiritual offering”, in which we give to God a sacrifice of praise for what God has done in Christ on the cross (see Hebrews 13:15).

(c) **Application** - Against the “popish sacrifice of the mass” (lines 5-6). The Confession calls it “abominable”, a very strong word, but wholly fitting. To pretend to repeat Christ’s sacrifice is blasphemous, and takes away the glory from the one, complete and efficacious sacrifice of Christ. We must emphasize the completed nature of the sacrifice of Christ. The book of Hebrews compares Christ’s sacrifice with those repeated sacrifices of the Old Testament which could never take away sins (10:1-4), especially the yearly Day of Atonement. The blood of Christ has obtained an *eternal* redemption (9:11-12). By comparison, He has suffered *once for all* at the *end of the age* (9:25-26). Great stress is laid on the fact that Christ’s sacrifice is *once for all* (10:10), a *single* offering (10:12,14). The real point is: if Christ’s one sacrifice has obtained forgiveness of sins, there is no need for any other sacrifice (10:18).

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper

3. *In this ordinance the Lord Jesus has directed His ministers to pray, and to bless the elements of bread and wine, and in this way to set them apart from a common to a holy use. They are to take and break the bread, then to take the cup, and to give both to the communicants, they themselves at the same time participating in the communion.*

4. *The denial of the cup to the people, the worshipping of the elements, the carrying of them about for the purpose of adoration, and the reserving of them for any pretended religious use, are all contrary to the nature of the ordinance and to Christ's intention in appointing it.*

(a) **Proper celebration** (section 3). There are three main things to be done:

1. *Prayer* – This is to be offered by the ‘minister’ or his appointed representative; to bless the elements by way of thanksgiving and seeking God’s blessing on the eating (1 Corinthians 10:16, as with all food, 1 Timothy 4:4-5). Such prayer sets the elements apart for their special purpose to act as a ‘remembrance’.
2. *Taking the bread* – This is the common bread of daily life (here unleavened), which is prayed over, broken, and given to the communicants (see Matthew 26:26). So the Lord’s Supper became known as the “breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42, 20:7).
3. *Taking the cup* – This was the usual drink of the fermented juice of the grape. Again thanks was given, and all were to drink (Matthew 26:27).

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper is thus a very simple affair, as opposed to all the rituals that have become associated with it over the centuries.

(b) **False celebration** (section 4). This is directed against the mass of the Roman Catholics. Because of their doctrine of transubstantiation, many totally false practices have arisen. Three types are mentioned here:

1. *The denial of the cup to the people* – Because they believe the elements become the literal body and blood of Christ, there was the fear of spillage of the wine. So they deny it to the people under the teaching that the blood is in the flesh and so all of Christ is equally in every particle of the bread. This practice only began officially in the 15th. Century and for opposing it John Hus was martyred.
2. *Worshipping, lifting up, and adoring the elements* – If transubstantiation has taken place then Christ is physically present and He is to be worshipped. This is the most solemn moment in the celebration of the mass, in preparation for which, a bell is rung.
3. *Reserving the elements for pretended religious use* – Supposedly being transformed, the elements are kept in a special box. It is a cause for special celebration and adoration if the box is removed to somewhere else.

How easily superstitions have arisen over the Lord’s Supper, so that it has become an automatic means of grace for the participants. Its truly spiritual nature has been substituted with a carnal one. This is always a danger in the church – and we must watch out when external, physical things are made the most important. One of the English martyrs of the reformation said: “When the devil gets into the church, up go the candles, and down goes the pulpit”.

The Elements in the Lord's Supper

5. *The outward elements in the Lord's Supper – bread and wine – duly set apart for the use appointed by Christ, bear such a relation to the Lord crucified that, in a true sense although in terms used figuratively, they are sometimes called by the names of the things they represent, namely, the body and blood of Christ, even though, in substance and nature, they still remain truly only bread and wine, as they were before being set apart for their special use.*

6. *The doctrine commonly called transubstantiation which maintains that in the supper the substance of bread and wine is changed into the substance of Christ's body and blood through consecration by a priest or in any other way, is repugnant not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason. Furthermore, it overthrows the nature of the ordinance, and has been, and is, the cause of all kinds of superstitions and gross idolatries.*

(a) **The elements do not change** (section 5). The bread and wine remain bread and wine.

(b) **The figurative use of the bread and wine** (section 5). This figurative use only refers to the elements that have been set apart for use in the Lord's Supper. Because the bread and wine represent the body and blood of Christ, they are sometimes called the body and blood of Christ although they remain bread and wine (1 Corinthians 10:16, 11:27). This is the explanation of the phrase, "This is my body". The Bible often uses such language where a person or thing is identified with that which it represents, e.g. Christ is a vine (John 15:1), Herod is a fox (Luke 13:32). In the institution of the Lord's Supper itself the cup is called "the new covenant in my blood" when it refers to the wine that is inside the cup (1 Corinthians 11:25).

(c) **The error of transubstantiation** (section 6). This became a fixed doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church in AD 1215. It teaches that the bread and the wine actually change into the real body and blood of Christ by the prayer of the officiating priest. Three reasons are given for rejecting this doctrine:

1. *Repugnant to Scripture* – "This is my body" is not to be taken literally. It contradicts the circumstances of the last supper where Jesus was physically present. It becomes a type of cannibalism. It forgets that the purpose of the supper is "remembrance", assuming the absence of what is to be remembered. It is against the Biblical doctrine of Christ's true humanity, which is in one place even now in heaven; but the doctrine of transubstantiation assumes that Christ's body is everywhere the Supper is performed.
2. *Repugnant to common sense and reason* – Those who believe in transubstantiation, and who participate in the Supper, know that the bread and wine still taste like bread and wine! They believe in the change against their senses, simply because it is what the Church teaches them to believe.
3. *The cause of all kinds of superstitions and gross idolatries* – The bread and wine, supposedly changed into the body and blood of Christ, become objects of adoration. The priest, who is able to work such a mighty miracle, becomes the object of fear, upon whom one's spiritual life depends. Other things are mentioned in section 4.

The Reception of the Lord's Supper

7. *Those who, as worthy participants, outwardly eat and drink the visible bread and wine in this ordinance, at the same time receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and receive all the benefits accruing from His death. This they do really and indeed, not as if feeding upon the actual flesh and blood of a person's body, but inwardly and by faith. In the supper the body and blood of Christ are present to the faith of believers, not in any actual physical way, but in a way of spiritual apprehension, just as the bread and wine themselves are present to their outward physical senses.*

8. *All persons who participate at the Lord's table unworthily sin against the body and blood of the Lord, and their eating and drinking brings them under divine judgment. It follows, therefore, that all ignorant and ungodly persons, being unfit to enjoy fellowship with Christ, are similarly unworthy to be communicants at the Lord's table; and while they remain as they are they cannot rightly be admitted to partake of Christ's holy ordinance, for thereby great sin against Christ would be committed.*

(a) **Worthy Reception** (section 7). Being "worthy participants" (see 1 Corinthians 11:27) has nothing to do with personal worthiness as we are all sinners remembering the death of Christ which was for sinners. We are 'worthy' when we participate in the Lord's table as He intended (so the instructions in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29). The following 3 things must be understood:

1. Christ is *spiritually present*. Christ is not present "in any actual physical way", which is both against the Catholic teaching of transubstantiation, and the Lutheran teaching of consubstantiation (= although the bread and wine are not changed, Christ is physically present 'in, with and under' the elements). In the same way that the elements are present to our outward physical senses, as we see, touch and taste them; so Christ himself as represented by the elements is present to our spiritual senses. Anyway there would be no benefit of receiving the physical body and blood of Christ because what is significant about them is not their physical composition but that they were the purchase price of our redemption.
2. Christ is *received by faith*. Because He is only spiritually (but truly) present, it is only faith that can receive Him and the benefits of His death. We must believe that the elements are not just food, the Corinthian mistake, but that they represent the Saviour. Whenever we exercise faith in Christ we receive the same blessings, but the Lord's table is an especially helpful way to spiritually feed on Christ. The same language is used in John 6:53-58 but is explained to be spiritual, that is, by faith (see vv. 29,35,40,47, see v. 64, the language of coming to Christ = faith in vv. 35,37,44-45, and the contrast between flesh and spirit in v. 63). The physical action of eating is an act of appropriation (to take to be one's own), for food only benefits if it is eaten. Christ profits us only if He is appropriated by faith.
3. The *benefits* of receiving Christ. These are the same benefits as when we put our trust in Christ when we hear the word of God. Only in the Lord's table the same word is in symbol form. What are "the benefits that accrue from His death"? Justification, reconciliation, adoption, redemption, glorification. To know that we have received such benefits through Christ's death is to increase humility for we do not deserve anything, joy, assurance and zeal.

(b) **Unworthy reception** (section 8). Those who participate “unworthily” do so not because they are sinners (if it were possible to be without sin, the Lord’s table would be unnecessary), but because they fail to see Christ and Him crucified in the elements. Specifically, it is carelessness by no self-examination as to whether we are going to remember Christ, failing to exercise faith as the elements are received, and not really receiving them as symbols of the body and blood of Christ. It is to “profane the body and blood of the Lord” by treating them as ordinary (1 Corinthians 11:27). If we truly believe that the Supper symbolizes the Lord’s death and partake of the elements mindful of that reality, then we are worthy. But nowhere are we ever encouraged to stay away from the table. If we examine ourselves, and find ourselves unworthy, then we should repent and then participate (see 1 Corinthians 11:28).

1. By *professing Christians* (lines 1-2). The consequence of participating unworthily is “divine judgment” (see 1 Corinthians 11:29-30). This is not to be translated ‘damnation’ as in KJV. The judgment was temporary sickness and even death in the Corinthian church, and it was for the purpose of being disciplined so as not to “be condemned along with the world” (1 Corinthians 11:32). The presence of sickness and death in the church was meant to bring the church to repentance (see Hebrews 12:10-11). Discipline is for the purpose of final salvation not condemnation.
2. By the “*ignorant and ungodly*” (lines 2-4). Anyone who is ignorant of the basic truths about Jesus and the cross cannot possibly ‘remember’ Him. Anyone whose life is ungodly shows he has never known the power of the cross in His life. This is a reference to those who live in sin and show no marks of repentance. Such know nothing about fellowship with Christ, so cannot fellowship with Him at His table.
3. Those who are unworthy *must not be admitted* to the Lord’s table (lines 4-6). The Confession states that it would be a “great sin against Christ” for such to be welcomed. It is a “holy ordinance” and is only for those who profess to be true Christians and know what they are doing. It is therefore the solemn duty of the church (through its leaders) to refuse those who are unworthy. This is to prevent them from sinning and adding guilt to their lives. We must not fellowship with the openly ungodly if they profess to be Christians (1 Corinthians 5:9-13). Open Communion, the practice of opening the Lord’s table to all who wish to partake, must therefore be rejected. The church has a responsibility to guard the table. The Lord’s table ought to be restricted to church members and any others who are members of true churches elsewhere. If someone professes to be a believer but lives near the local church then he should first become a member. Why would he wish to fellowship with us at the table, but not fellowship by identifying as a church member?