

Understanding the Sacraments
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 5: The Lord's Supper

Opening Question: Why is sharing a meal with someone so important in developing your relationship?

Summary of Lessons 1-4

- God relates to his people through covenants in both Old and New Testaments.
- Covenants include signs and seals that convey both blessing and curse.
- Baptism like circumcision brings one into the covenant. It provides the context for our identity and relationship with God.
- Sacraments do more than just cause us to remember. They are means of grace.

Both sacraments are instituted by Christ and stewarded by Christ's under-shepherds, the elders of the church (1 Cor. 4:1f.)

- The rite of baptism and admittance to the Lord's Table is the responsibility of the church.
- It would be meaningless, even spiritually detrimental, to baptize apart from the church or admit yourself to the Lord's Supper. The same could be said of parents baptizing or admitting their children to communion. It would confuse the institutions of church and family.
- Baptism is not our response to God. We are called to respond to our baptism. If it is a visible sign of the gospel, then like the gospel our role is to respond with faith.

This is My Body

John 6:53–55, *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. [54] Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. [55] For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*

Jesus says, *"This is my body."* Matthew 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, and 1 Corinthians 11:24

- Why not say, "This represents my body"? or, "Think of this bread as if it were my body"

John Calvin in *Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, explained,

All the benefit which we should seek in the Supper is annihilated if Jesus Christ be not there given to us as the substance and foundation of all... Thus it is with the communion, which we have in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. It is a spiritual mystery that can neither be seen by the eye nor comprehended by the human understanding.

Where is Jesus? Is he transformed into the bread and wine? Is he far away from us and the sacraments just bring him to mind?

Calvin answering the critics who complain that the Protestant view of the Lord's Supper means Jesus is absent and there is no real communion with him. Calvin says, *"We, on the contrary, maintain that no extent of space interferes with the boundless energy of the Spirit, which transfuses life into us from the flesh of Christ."*

"Where is Jesus?" is really the question "Where is heaven and how do heaven and earth relate?"

The Spirit uses means of grace to connect Christ and his saving benefits to his people, received by faith. Therefore, taking communion without faith in Christ is meaningless (or worse, 1 Cor. 11). These aren't magic tokens of spiritual power! But communion works with God's word and prayer as a vital way we participate in Christ.

The Lord's Supper and Passover?

Did Christ celebrate the Passover in the Lord's Supper?

"While there is certainly a connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper, the more specific background passage is Exodus 24:9-11 and the ratification of the covenant. The Passover was not an end in itself, but pointed to the covenantal goal of Exodus 24, worshipping and fellowship in God's presence." J.V. Fesko

The phrase "blood of the covenant" in Ex. 24:8 shows up only one other place in the OT, but four times in the NT (Mat. 26:28, Mk. 14:24; Heb. 9:20; 10:29).

- In Exodus, only Moses, Aaron, priests, and elders ate the covenant meal in God's presence unharmed (as professing adults).
- In the NT, only Christ and His disciples participated.
- Baptism is initiation and the Lord's Supper is confirmation.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

*[27] Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body **eats and drinks judgment on himself.***

- The condition of partaking worthily is the ability to "examine" him or herself.
- "Unworthy manner" refers to the purpose of the Supper and not to the presence of a particular sin in the person's life.
- By what standard should you examine yourself?
 - 1 Cor. 10:16 tells us that the **standard** is **not our sinlessness** but our "cup is participation in the blood of Christ...bread is participation in the body of Christ"

- Note also that this examination cannot be done **privately** lest Paul's prior teaching authority of the church to demit a person from the Lord's table presupposes that the person is admitted by the church. (See 1 Cor. 5:3-13)
- [NOTE: Don't confuse the advice given in Matthew 5:23-24 with the Lord's Supper:

"So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, [24] leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

This passage is criticizing those have wronged others but have only sought forgiveness through the temple system. Your offering isn't a way to avoid the hard work of reconciliation. Bringing your gift to the temple to be forgiven is not the same as coming to the Lord's Supper.]

"examine themselves"

- The stakes: the passage includes a warning about eating and drinking judgment on yourself. Those unable to "examine themselves" could elicit the covenant curses represented in covenant signs and seals.
- What is needed for someone to examine themselves? "A person psychologically, developmentally, existentially able to distinguish 'self-will' from parents and/or 'others-will' in order to conduct a meaningful self-examination."
- Unlike baptism which is a "converting ordinance," the Supper is a "confirming ordinance." For a child, there is no pressure to convert. They are baptized; we expect they are growing into faith and that they belong. But there is a danger in giving confirmation or assurance to a faith that cannot be credibly discerned.

How do you partake in a "worthy manner"?

1. Faith in Christ: Can the receiver discern Christ?

1Cor. 10:14 *Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?*

E.g. Is the recipient ready to assume the responsibilities of exclusive loyalty to Christ as Lord. Has the recipient been able to discern between faith in Christ and idolatry, at least in some meaningful way.

Has the recipient discerned the idol of moralism/legalism (which is particularly tempting for children)? In other words, can the child discern in him/herself Christ death (personal brokenness to the point where they no longer trust in their own righteousness) and Christ resurrection (person faith in Christ as to receive the ongoing newness of life in Christ..)

2. Church membership: Can the receiver understand his/her obligations to the community of believers?

1 Cor. 11:17ff *“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.*

E.g. Is the recipient ready to assume the responsibilities of communion with other believers, as to seek God’s help seeking the welfare and interest of the others in the church as an expression of 1 Cor. 10:16b-17? “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread....”

These considerations are the content of an exam the pastors and session give to a covenant child for communicate membership. We aren’t looking for the mere repetition of information. This isn’t an exam to make them a Christian. We use the above standard to determine if we can discern a credible profession of faith so that we can deliver assurance.

The sacraments frame our understanding of child discipleship and our strategy for teaching and training children.

Baptism

- It tells us that children belong in our community and that we have membership obligations to them.
- It gives the children an identity that should inform how they think about themselves (they belong, and these promises are for them).
- It encourages them to view God as Father and their connection to Christ as a lifelong relationship.

Lord’s Supper

- It becomes our goal in child discipleship. We want our children to grow into assurance of salvation.
- It holds forth a church discerned confirmation rather than an individualistic, subjective understanding of their standing with Christ.
- It points them to the importance of membership obligation with other church members beyond their family.

What happens when you confuse or combine the purposes of both sacraments?

Frequent Questions about Baptism:

Is baptism still legitimate if parents were not true believers?

Is baptism still legitimate if it was done in a liberal church or by a pastor who is no longer a Christian?

Is the original baptism still legitimate if the child leaves the faith and later comes back?

Frequent Questions about the Lord’s Supper:

Can you practice the Lord’s Supper outside of a worship service? In family worship?

Can you substitute bread and wine for other things (pizza and beer, cake and juice)?

What is the point of excommunication?