

Worship: Its Purpose and Practice
Class 9: The Lord's Supper

Introduction: What Is a Sacrament?

- *“Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of grace, immediately instituted by God, to represent Christ, and His benefits; and to confirm our interest in Him: as also, to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the Church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to His Word.”* (WCF 27.1)
 - A sign: A visible representation of something else (a symbol)
 - These “signposts” point us to Jesus and all that he’s done for us (Rom 4:11; 1 Cor 5:7-8a)
 - A sacrament is the visible Word
 - A seal: The sacraments reaffirm God’s promises to us and reassure our faith.
 - *“The sign is also a seal: it confirms to the believing conscience that that righteousness [the righteousness of Christ] belongs personally to us.”*¹
 - *“In this Sacrament we have such full witness of all these things that we must certainly consider them as if Christ here present were himself set before our eyes and touched by our hands. For his word cannot lie or deceive us....”*²
- Why do we need sacraments? Why didn’t God just give us the preaching of the Word?
 - *“For seeing we are so weak that we cannot receive him with true heartfelt trust, when he is presented to us by simple doctrine and preaching, the Father of mercy, disdainig not to condescend in this matter to our infirmity, has been pleased to add to his word a visible sign, by which he might represent the substance of his promises, to confirm and fortify us by delivering us from all doubt and uncertainty.”*³

What Is the Lord's Supper?

- *“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also he took the cup, 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 often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”* (1 Cor 11:23-29)

¹ Howard Griffith, *Spreading the Feast: Instruction and Meditations for Ministry at the Lord's Table* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2015), 33.

² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.17.3.

³ John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord*, Section 5. Accessed at https://www.the-highway.com/supper1_Calvin.html.

- 1) The Lord's Supper is a covenantal meal
 - God marks the progress of his plan of salvation by the meals his people eat
 - The Passover (Ex 12)
 - The meal on Mt. Sinai that ratified the Old Covenant (Ex 24:8-11)
 - The animal sacrifices normally included some kind of meal
 - We find the same pattern in the Lord's Supper
- 2) In this meal, we feed on Christ by faith
 - A variety of views:
 - The memorial view: Jesus is not present in the Supper; we simply remember his death.
 - However, "remembering" isn't just recalling some facts; it's a covenantal act
 - The Reformed view
 - We truly commune with Christ as we feed on him (1 Cor 10:16; Jn 6:53-56)
 - Literal presence views
 - Roman Catholic Church: Through a miracle, the bread and the wine are transformed into Christ's physical body and blood (transubstantiation)
 - Lutheran Church: Christ's human body and blood are "with" and "in" the bread and the wine (sometimes called consubstantiation)
 - However, we don't believe these views because, according to Scripture, Christ's human body is in heaven right now (Ps 110:1; Acts 1:11)
 - Christ is present by the power of the Spirit
 - *"The bond of this connection is therefore the Spirit of Christ, with whom we are joined in unity, and is like a channel through which all that Christ himself is and has is conveyed to us."*⁴
 - *"Communion with Christ comes about by the work of the Holy Spirit as we eat and drink, believing. Eating the bread thus is taking Christ into our hearts anew. Drink the cup thus is receiving Christ's blood. This happens not physically or locally, but through the ministry of the Spirit. What we see are the signs; what we have is the reality."*⁵
 - Why is this a big deal?

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.12.

⁵ Griffith, *Spreading the Feast*, 53.

Assorted Questions

1. Who may partake of the Lord's Supper?
 - WSC 97: *It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.*
 - J. C. Ryle: *"A sense of our own utter unworthiness is the best worthiness that we can bring to the Lord's Table. A deep feeling of our own entire indebtedness to Christ for all we have and hope for, is the best feeling we can bring with us."*⁶
 - John Calvin handout

2. How should I partake of the Lord's Supper?
 - With thankfulness, joy, and celebration.

3. When should I not come to the Lord's Supper?
 - *"Table fellowship is rightly more than an individual matter. As church officers have the authority to admit a person to Communion, so, on proper grounds, they may exclude him or her. But individual members do not have the right to put themselves out of Communion. Sins unconfessed should be confessed, and relationships reconciled, but these are not, strictly speaking, prerequisites for eating and drinking. They are postrequisites."*⁷
 - *"[N]one of us has the right to excommunicate others or ourselves; this solemn responsibility is given to the elders. If we are living in unbelief and open rebellion against God's commands, we should come under the discipline of the church and allow its admonitions and censures to lead us to repentance. However, all members in good standing must be admitted to the Table, and none may excuse himself or herself from this feast."*⁸

4. How frequently should the Church partake in the Lord's Supper?
 - *"If we duly consider the end which our Lord has in view, we shall perceive that the use should be more frequent than many make it: for the more infirmity presses, the more necessary is it frequently to have recourse to what may and will serve to confirm our faith, and advance us in purity of life; and, therefore, the practice of all well-ordered churches should be to celebrate the Supper frequently, so far as the capacity of the people will admit."*⁹

⁶ J. C. Ryle, "The Lord's Supper," accessed at https://www.gracegems.org/Ryle/lords_supper.htm.

⁷ Griffith, *Spreading the Feast*, 59.

⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 819.

⁹ John Calvin, *Short Treatise on the Supper of Our Lord*, Section 29.