

Chapter XXVII: The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper was instituted at the time of the passover shortly before the death of Jesus, Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25. The new sacrament was linked up with the central element in the paschal meal. The bread that was eaten with the lamb was consecrated to a new use, and so was the wine of the third cup, "the cup of blessing." The broken bread and the wine symbolize the Lord's broken body and shed blood; the physical eating and drinking of these point to a spiritual appropriation of the fruits of the sacrifice of Christ; and the whole sacrament is a constant reminder of His redemptive death.

1. The Lord's Supper as a Sign and Seal

Like every other sacrament, the Lord's Supper is first of all a sign. The sign includes not only the visible elements of bread and wine, but also their eating and drinking. It is a symbolical representation of the Lord's death, 1 Cor. 11:26, and symbolizes the believer's participation in the crucified Christ and in the life and strength of the risen Lord. In addition to this it is also an act of profession on the part of those who partake of it. They profess faith in Christ as their Savior, and allegiance to Him as their King. But the Lord's Supper is more than a sign; it is also a seal, which is attached to the thing signified and is a pledge of its realization. It gives believing partakers the assurance that they are the objects of the great love of Christ revealed in His self-surrender to a bitter and shameful death; that all the promises of the covenant and all the riches of the gospel are theirs; and even that the blessings of salvation are theirs in actual possession.

2. The Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper

The question as to the nature of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper is one that has long been debated, and one on which there is still considerable difference of opinion. Four views come into consideration here.

a. The view of Rome. The Church of Rome conceives of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper in a *physical sense*. On the ground of Jesus' statement, "this is my body," it holds that bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ, though they

continue to look and taste like bread and wine. This view is open to several objections: (1) Jesus, standing before the disciples in the flesh, could not very well say that He had His body in His hand; (2) Scripture speaks of the bread as bread even after the supposed change has taken place, 1 Cor. 10:17; 11:26-28; and (3) It is contrary to common sense to believe that what looks and smells and tastes like bread and wine is indeed flesh and blood.

b. The Lutheran view. Lutherans maintain that, while bread and wine remain what they are, the whole person of Christ, body and blood, is present *in, under, and along with*, the elements. When Christ had the bread in His hand, He held His body along with it, and therefore could say, "this is my body." Every one who receives the bread also receives the body, whether he be a believer or not. This is no great improvement on the Roman Catholic doctrine. It ascribes to Jesus' words the unnatural meaning "this accompanies my body." Moreover, it is burdened with the impossible notion that the body of Christ is omnipresent.

c. The Zwinglian view. Zwingli denied the bodily presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper, while admitting that He is spiritually present in the faith of believers. For him the Lord's Supper was mainly a mere sign or symbol, a memorial of the death of Christ, and an act of profession on the part of believers. Some of his statements, however, seem to indicate that he also regarded it as a seal or pledge of what God does for the believer in Christ.

d. Calvin's view. Calvin took an intermediate position. Instead of the physical and local, he taught the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper. In distinction from Zwingli he stressed the deeper significance of the sacrament. He saw in it a seal and pledge of what God does for believers rather than a pledge of their consecration to God. The virtues and effects of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross are present and actually conveyed to believers by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Persons for Whom the Lord's Supper is Instituted

The Lord's Supper was not instituted for all indiscriminately, but only for believers, who understand its spiritual significance. Children, who have not yet come to years of

discretion, are not fit to partake of it. Even true believers may be in such a spiritual condition that they cannot worthily take their place at the table of the Lord, and should therefore examine themselves carefully, 1 Cor. 11:28-32. Unbelievers are naturally excluded from the Lord's Supper. The grace that is received in the sacrament does not differ in kind from that which is received through the instrumentality of the Word. The sacrament merely adds to the effectiveness of the Word and to the measure of the grace received. The enjoyment of its spiritual benefits depends on the faith of the participant.

To Memorize. Passages bearing on:

a. The institution of the Lord's Supper:

1 Cor. 11:23-27. "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."

b. The Lord's Supper as a sign and seal:

Matt. 26:26-27. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it; and He gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many unto remission of sins."

1 Cor. 10:16. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?"

c. The Lord's Supper as an act of profession:

1 Cor. 11:26. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."

d. Worthy participation and self-examination:

1 Cor. 11:27-29. "Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body."

For Further Study:

a. Do the words of Jesus in John 6:48-58 have reference to the Lord's Supper?

b. Does the expression 'breaking bread' necessarily refer to the Lord's Supper? Cf. Acts 2:42; 20:7, 11; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16.

c. Can you mention other cases in which the verb 'to be' cannot be taken literally? John 10:7; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1.

Questions for Review:

1. What belongs to the sign in the Lord's Supper?

2. What does the sacrament signify and what does it seal?

3. What is the Roman Catholic view of the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper?

4. How do the Lutherans conceive of it?

5. What objections are there to these views?

6. What is the Zwinglian conception of the Lord's Supper?

7. How does Calvin's conception differ from it?

8. How does Calvin conceive of the Lord's presence in it?

9. How does the grace received in the sacrament differ from that received through the Word?

10. For whom was the Lord's Supper instituted?

11. Who should be excluded from the table of the Lord?