

# CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Heidelberg Catechism</b>		Pastor/Teacher
<b>Number:</b>	<b>54</b>		Gary L.W. Johnson
<b>Text:</b>	<b>I Corinthians 11:27-29</b>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>October 18, 2015 a.m.</b>		

## The Lord's Supper (Part III)

### 28. Lord's Day

**Question 77.** Where has Christ promised that he will as certainly feed and nourish believers with his body and blood, as they eat of this broken bread, and drink of this cup?

**Answer:** In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed: (a) "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: this cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." 1 Cor. 11:23-26. This promise is repeated by the holy apostle Paul, where he says "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Cor. 10:16, 17.

(a) 1 Cor. 11:23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: 1 Cor. 11:24 And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. 1 Cor. 11:25 After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. Matt. 26:26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. Matt. 26:27 And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; Matt. 26:28 For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Mark 14:22 And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. Mark 14:23 And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. Mark 14:24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Luke 22:19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Luke 22:20 Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you. 1 Cor. 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 1 Cor. 10:17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.

That which is designed to be a *blessing* can actually become a *curse*. This is what the Lord's Supper becomes when taken in an unworthy manner. This is a *judging* function of the sacrament. I

Corinthians 11:27-29 confronts us with the question about the relationship between the Lord's Supper and those who fail to participate in a worthy manner. One cannot escape the very serious mood that surrounds this passage. The significance of the Lord's Supper forces us to exclude any superficiality or flippancy when partaking. The seriousness with which Paul penned these words regarding unworthiness and nondiscernment (and the judgment that results) becomes all the more evident in verses 30 and 31. "*That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves we would not come under judgment.*" There is a need to reflect on the meaning of Paul's language. What is meant by *unworthy*? I am afraid that a great many people read these words nonchalantly and fail to consider the matter one way or the other. Others, with perhaps a greater sensitivity or timid nature, are deeply disturbed over their own personal sense of unworthiness, and this feeling becomes an impediment to the confident use of the sacrament.<sup>1</sup> How should we understand this text? Was the Apostle only dealing with some particular problem that was restricted to the Corinthian Church, or is this something that should concern us as well? Calvin, in his treatment of this passage, says, "Some people make it apply only to the Corinthians and to the corruption which had taken such a hold in their midst. But my own view is that Paul, as he usually does, moves from that particular suggestion to general teaching, or from one example to a whole class. The Corinthians had one particular fault. Paul takes advantage of this to speak of every kind of fault to be found in the administration or receiving of the Supper."<sup>2</sup>

## I. THE NATURE OF THE SIN

We need to be clear about the specifics here. "The judgment," writes Berkouwer, "is not based on the fact that the unworthy communicant himself has eaten the 'body' and 'blood' of the Lord, but on the fact that he has desecrated the sacrament of Christ's body and blood by not discerning the body of the Lord."<sup>3</sup> Notice the particular aggravation: *whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty*. "The Apostle was not so witless as to have termed them bread and cup, had the doctrine of transubstantiation been known in his days."<sup>4</sup>

### A. Unworthy

This does not refer to the person taking the sacrament, but to a particular action.<sup>5</sup> The sin has to do with a deficiency, a lack of an evangelical frame and disposition. The call to examination or preparation in coming to the Lord's Table has reference to *how* we receive the sacrament. Charles Hodge has perceptively written, "To eat or drink unworthily is in general to come to the Lord's Table in a careless, irreverent spirit, without the intention or desire to commemorate the death of Christ as the sacrifice for our sins, and without the purpose of complying with the engagements which we thereby assume. The way in which the Corinthians ate unworthily was that they treated the Lord's Table as though it were their own; making no distinction between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal; coming together to satisfy their hunger, and not to feed on the body and blood of Christ; and refusing to commune with their poorer brethren. This, though one, is not the only way in which men may eat and drink unworthily. All that is necessary to observe is that the warning is directly against the careless and profane, and not against the timid and the doubting."<sup>6</sup>

**NOTE:** Should children take the Lord's Supper? The classic Reformed position has always restricted communion to those capable of following Paul's admonition to self-examination. The Westminster Larger Catechism declares, "only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves." (Question 177)

## II. THE DANGERS INCURRED

Verse 29 declares that a person who partakes in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment on himself. What does this mean?

A. Failure to discern.

Note the call to self-examination in verse 28. The Apostle demands that *every* Christian follow this course of action. The Lord's Supper is a solemn rite with deep significance, and as such, nobody should take Holy Communion as a matter of course without *realizing* the need for genuine reverence.<sup>7</sup>

B. Resulting Guilt.

To eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner incurs the manifestation of God's displeasure. Note that the *eating* and *drinking* are directly linked to the guilt that exposes the person to judgment. Paul's language tells us that spiritual guilt results in physical punishment. We are not to conclude that *all* sickness is due to divine judgment because the Lord's Supper has been abused – but the Apostle is clearly stating that God does bring such things into the life of a church. The church is a covenant community and the Lord's Supper is celebrated by the church and not by simply a gathering of individuals.

CONCLUSION: The Lord's Table is not intended to be something we dread to approach. It is not surrounded with gloom. This is a sacrament of blessing, provided we do not partake in a careless or profane fashion. Once again, listen to the words of Charnock: "Should not all of us that have at any time of our lives been partakers of this ordinance, reflect upon ourselves, yea, the best of us? Can any of us say that we never contracted the guilt of the body and blood of Christ; that we always had some worthy dispositions for him; that our minds were never wavering, our hearts never cold, our affections never languishing, our spirits, that should have been in heaven, never sunk to the earth? Is there not then a partial guilt? Yet God hath admitted us again and again, spread his table, filled his cup, put manna into our mouths, and his cup into our hands. Wonderful patience in God, to bear with a wonderful sin in us!"<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John Murray has made this observation: "believers become so introspective, that preoccupation with themselves excludes preoccupation with Christ." *Collected Writings of John Murray II* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 378.

<sup>2</sup> *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries IX* (Eerdmans, 1960), p. 251.

<sup>3</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: The Sacraments* (Eerdmans, 1969), p. 252.

<sup>4</sup> *The Works of Stephen Charnock IV* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1985), p. 473.

<sup>5</sup> Gordon Fee points out that the KJV rendering "unworthily" seems more applicable to the person doing the eating than to the manner in which it is being done, and as a result, people considered themselves "unworthy" if they had sin in their lives. This in turn resulted in reading verse 28 personally and introspectively, so that the purpose of one's self-examination was to become worthy of the Table, lest one come under judgment. The tragedy of such an interpretation for countless thousands, both in terms of a foreboding of the Table and guilt for perhaps having partaken unworthily, is incalculable. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1987), p. 560.

<sup>6</sup> C. Hodge, *I & II Corinthians* (rpt. Banner of Truth, 1974), p. 231.

<sup>7</sup> John Calvin clearly stated the primary argument for the traditional Reformed position of what we might call "credo-communion." According to Calvin, the Lord's Supper is only for those who are old enough to examine themselves and discern the body and blood of the Lord. According to proponents of credo-communion, this passage clearly teaches that the ability to examine oneself is a requirement for communion. Since infants are not yet able to examine themselves, they are not to partake of the Lord's Supper. Proponents of credo-communion also argue that there are some significant differences between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These differences explain why one sacrament is given to young children, while the other is withheld from them. One of the main differences between the two sacraments, according to the proponents of credo-communion, is that baptism is a *passive* sacrament, while the Lord's Supper is an *active* sacrament. In other words, baptism does not require the one being baptized to do anything, and is, therefore, appropriate for infants. The Lord's Supper, on the other hand, requires that the communicant "take," "eat," "drink," and "do this." Since infants are not capable of this kind of active participation, they are not to partake of the Lord's Supper. For extended discussion, see K.A. Mathison's, *Given For You: Reclaiming Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002) pp. 316-324.

<sup>8</sup> Charnock, op. cit. p. 481.