

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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

Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	55		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Matthew 26:26-28		
Date:	October 25, 2015 a.m.		

The Lord's Supper (Part III)

29. Lord's Day

Question 78. Do then the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?

Answer: Not at all: (a) but as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, neither is the washing away of sin itself, being only the sign and confirmation thereof appointed of God; (b) so the bread in the Lord's supper is not changed into the very body of Christ; (c) though agreeably to the nature and properties of sacraments, (d) it is called the body of Christ Jesus.

(a) Matt. 26:29 But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. (b) Eph. 5:26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, Tit. 3:5 Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (c) Mark 14:24 And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. 1 Cor. 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? I Cor. 10:17 For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. 1 Cor. 11:26 For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. 1 Cor. 11:27 Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Cor. 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. (d) Gen. 17:10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. Gen. 17:11 And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt me and you. Gen. 17:14 And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant. Gen. 17:19 And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him. Exod. 12:11 And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand: and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover. Exod. 12:13 And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt. Exod. 12:27 That ye shall say, It is the sacrifice of the LORD'S passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he smote the Egyptians, and delivered our houses. And the people bowed the head and worshipped. Exod. 12:43 And the LORD said unto Moses and Aaron, This is the ordinance of the passover: There shall no stranger eat thereof: Exod. 12:48 And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof. Exod. 13:9 And it shall be a sign unto thee upon thine hand, and for a memorial between thine eyes, that the LORD'S law may be in thy mouth: for with a strong hand hath the LORD brought thee out of Egypt. 1 Pet. 3:21 The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the

putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: 1 Cor. 10:1 Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 1 Cor. 10:2 And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 1 Cor. 10:3 And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 1 Cor. 10:4 And did all drink the same spiritual drink; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

In every country in the world, there are monuments and memorials. They serve to commemorate the deeds and contributions of individuals who left their mark in time. Sometimes the individuals themselves do them in an attempt to keep some vestige of their meager greatness alive in the public eye long after they are gone. In some notable cases (Lenin and Stalin quickly come to mind), the people they ruled despised them, and when the opportunity presented itself, they demolished their statues and monuments. When we turn our attention to the Lord's Supper, we discover that one of the purposes for its institution was that it might serve as a *remembrance*.¹ But, the Lord's Supper is more than simply a memorial. In the words of W.R. Godfrey, "It is not just a time when we sit and think good thoughts."² John Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper differs at important points with both Luther and Zwingli. Ronald Wallace, in what is generally considered to be the best treatment on Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper, summarizes some of the main points of Calvin's doctrine of the sacramental union between the signs and the things signified. *First*, "the union formed between the divine and human activity in the event of God's action in the sacrament is so close as, practically speaking, to become one of identity." As Calvin expresses it, "The name of the thing, therefore, is transferred here to the sign – not as if it were strictly applicable, but figuratively on the ground of that connection which I have mentioned." *Second*, this sacramental union is "so transcendent and freely personal that the thing signified must be regarded as distinct from the sign." If the sign actually becomes the thing it signifies, it necessarily ceases to be a sign, and if this happens, it ceases to be a sacrament. *Third*, there is "no natural analogy for this union." It is a unique mystery with no parallel in the natural realm. The only possible analogy for the sacramental union is the mystery of the Incarnation. *Fourth*, observes Wallace, "There is no doubt that Calvin sees an analogy which at least serves to regulate his thinking on this mystery of sacramental union, in the mystery of the union between God and man in Jesus Christ."³

In Calvin's understanding, the Holy Spirit plays an essential role in the ministry of the sacraments. In order that "the Word may not beat your ears in vain, and that the sacraments may not strike your eyes in vain, the Spirit shows us that in them it is God speaking to us, softening the stubbornness of our heart, and composing it to that obedience which it owes the Word of the Lord." Apart from the Spirit's work, the sacraments profit nothing. When the Spirit does work, he "transmits those outward words and sacraments from our ears to our soul." Although the sacraments are used in this way by God, we are not to place our confidence directly in them. They are instruments, and so they have value only insofar as God uses them as his instruments. As Calvin puts it, "God uses means and instruments which he himself sees to be expedient, that all things may serve his glory, since he is Lord and Judge of all." And just as we are not to put our confidence in any of God's other creatures that have been designed for our use, "neither ought our confidence to inhere in the sacraments, nor the glory of God be transferred to them." In the use of the sacraments, as in the use of all things, God is to be given all the glory. Furthermore, the sacraments do not, in and of themselves, impart grace. Instead, like the word of God, they present Christ to us. Calvin strongly criticized the Roman Catholics for saying that "the sacraments of the new law (those now used in the Christian church) justify and confer grace, provided we do not set up a barrier of mortal sin." According to Calvin, any view such as this, which promises righteousness apart from faith, "hurls souls headlong to destruction." Citing Augustine again, he argues that "there can be invisible sanctification without a visible sign, and on the other hand, a visible sign without true sanctification." The Augustinian distinction between a sacrament and the matter of a sacrament is very important in Calvin's thought. He explains, "The distinction signifies not only that the figure and the truth are contained in the sacrament, but that they are not so linked that they cannot be separated; and that even in the union itself the matter must always be distinguished from the sign, that we may not transfer to the one what belongs to the other." He quotes Augustine, who wrote, "In the elect alone the sacrament effect what they represent." But, what is the matter or substance of the sacraments? Calvin answers, "Christ is the matter, or (if you prefer) the substance of all the sacraments; for in him they have all their firmness, and they do not promise anything apart from him." He explains further how the sacraments are effective: "The sacraments have

effectiveness among us in proportion as we are helped by their ministry sometimes to foster, confirm, and increase the true knowledge of Christ in ourselves; at other times, to possess him more fully and enjoy his riches. But that happens when we receive in true faith what is offered there.” In response to those who might argue that this view implies that the wicked who receive the sacraments render them null and void, Calvin offers the following: “What I have said is not to be understood as if the force and truth of the sacrament depended upon the condition or choice of him who receives it. For what God has ordained remains firm and keeps its own nature, however men may vary. For since it is one thing to offer, and another to receive, nothing prevents the symbol, consecrated by the Lord’s Word, from being actually what it is called, and from keeping its own force. Yet this does not benefit a wicked or impious man. But, Augustine has well solved this question in a few words, ‘If you receive carnally, it does not cease to be spiritual, but it not so for you.’” We see this careful distinction between the sign and the thing signified emphasized repeatedly throughout Calvin’s writings on the sacraments. As we will see, it is an especially crucial element of his eucharistic doctrine. We have already noted Calvin’s assertion that apart from the work of the Spirit, the sacraments profit nothing. At this point in his discussion, he elaborates further on what this means. He says of the sacraments, “They do not bestow any grace of themselves, but announce and tell us, and (as they are guarantees and tokens) ratify among us, those things given us by divine bounty. The Holy Spirit...is he who brings the graces of God with him, gives a place for the sacraments among us, and makes them bear fruit.”⁴ When our Lord Jesus Christ met with His disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover and to inaugurate the Lord’s Supper, He established a memorial, and in doing so, He placed Himself in a four-fold relationship: to *God*, to *Himself*, to the *World*, and to the *Church*.

I. CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO GOD

It is in the Upper Room that our Lord declares, “I and the Father are one” (John 17:22). “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). It is important to remember that over and over again in the Old Testament, God continually seeks to cause His name to be remembered (Exodus 3:15; 30:16; Leviticus 6:15; Numbers 31:54; Zechariah 6:14).⁵ By the tabernacle and temple, God designs to establish a memorial to His name – and for Christ to seek to do the same is blasphemy and idolatry, *unless* He is God. He is acting here in the full awareness of His eternal relationship to the Father. By establishing a memorial in His own name, He is creating a memorial unto the name of God. He is the true Temple (John 2:21).

II. CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIMSELF

The Passover lamb is at the center of the Passover. Up to and until this moment in the Upper Room, God’s people had always looked back to the Passover lamb. It served as a symbol and type of the One who was to come. Now He is here. Attention is now focused on Him. That very day, hundreds of lambs had been slain by priests in the Temple. There in the Upper Room, the Great High Priest points to the bread and the wine. His body will be broken; His blood will be shed. The one true Lamb of God will do once and for all what the blood of bulls and goats could never do – take away sin (Hebrews 10:4).

III. CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE WORLD

The Lord’s Supper is not a sacrifice (contrary to Roman Catholicism). It is not an esoteric, mystical mystery ritual like that practiced by many religions in the ancient world.⁶ We are specifically told that the observance of the Lord’s Supper is in fact a proclamation of the gospel (I Corinthians 11:26). Christ is here asserting His Kingship and the symbols of that Kingship are broken bread and poured wine. The Lord’s Supper has an evangelistic significance. The church, by her continual observance, is to faithfully preach to the world the message contained in the bread and the wine.

IV. CHRIST IN RELATIONSHIP TO THE CHURCH

The Lord’s Supper is rightly referred to as communion. By our participation, we are confessing Christ. The Lord’s Supper does point to our incorporation into Christ and into His sufferings. In the Old Testament, God created a memorial for His name in the tabernacle and the temple. No

longer. Now, He has established one in His church – not simply in one location, but wherever two or three are gathered in His name, around His table. The act of remembrance on our part is more than simply engaging our memories. It is an act of sharing as well. By our participation, we are sharing in Christ’s sufferings and death. Our remembrance serves as an important aspect of our covenantal faithfulness. We are here renewing vows of loyalty to Christ.

CONCLUSION: The great Dutch theologian Klaas Schilder, in his classic Lenten trilogy, recounted grippingly the events that transpired in the Upper Room the night the Lord’s Supper was instituted. “Rely upon it,” he wrote. “Christ’s human soul felt crucial pain as He weighed the bread in His hands and poured the wine into cups. In doing so, He saw Himself before His eyes, Himself crucified. Only a few moments later Satan will dangle that placard before His eyes, ‘Christ being crucified,’ and that taunt will drive the sweat of anxiety, the sweat of blood, out of His pores. Here in this hall of the Passover, however, in this meeting-place for the first Holy Supper, Christ courageously and firmly depicts Himself before His eyes, Himself crucified. Although His soul trembles in longing for God, His hand does not betray a quiver. His eye is not darkened, although He offers Himself up to the inertness of death. A secret light glimmers in His eyes and plays upon His face, even while He is depicting Himself, and stamping Himself as a seal upon the heart of His own, the glimmer of light is there, even when He gives Himself away as one broken, when He pushes the *sign* of His death as close to the *moment* of that death as is possible. His doing that must cause Him unspeakable anguish, for the closer a thing approaches the thing symbolized, so much more eloquently does its form address, startle, or comfort the human soul. Yet, so profoundly did Christ love His own, that although the sign and the event signified almost touched each other, He could, nevertheless, prophesy of the meaning of these sacrednesses, could command them, as a King, that they could do this until the end, and, as a Priest, could pray for the Spirit, to enjoin Himself with the sign.”⁷

¹ In addition to this it also functions as a *sealing* ordinance. God promises us forgiveness by the blood of Christ and the Lord’s Supper serves as a seal or earnest to remind us of God’s faithfulness. It also serves to show that there is a mutual *communion* between believers. For expanded discussion on these three, cf. W. à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service II* (rpt. Soli Deo Gloria, 1993), pp. 533-35.

² W. R. Godfrey, “Calvin on the Eucharist,” *Modern Reformation* (May/June 1997), p. 49.

³ R.S. Wallace, *Calvin’s Doctrine of Word and Sacrament* (Oliver and Boyd, 1953), p. 167.

⁴ Citations by Calvin are in Keith A. Mathison’s excellent work, *Given for You: Reclaiming Calvin’s Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper* (Presbyterian and Reformed, 2002), pp. 10-13.

⁵ The Hebrew word translated “memorial” is ‘AZKĀRĀH, a sacrificial term which is intended to bring remembrance before God, cf. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia III*, ed. J. Orr (rpt. Eerdmans, 1974), p. 2030.

⁶ There arose in the early church a pernicious heresy known as Gnosticism (it is still alive and well today!). “A characteristic of many Gnostic sects was to treat the sacraments either as magic or as mere symbols for a subjective psychological state within the individual believer. Bishops, priests, and deacons were held in scorn by them; but they allowed positions of leadership and liturgical presidency to women, as orthodox communities did not. The closer the Gnostics stood to orthodoxy, the more likely they were to wish to infiltrate the catholic community; this was especially the case among the Manichees, but they could be detected by their refusal to drink of the eucharistic cup (since they regarded wine as an invention of the devil).” *The Oxford Illustrated History of Christianity*, ed. J. McManners (Oxford, 1990), p. 28.

⁷ K. Schilder, *Christ in His Sufferings* (rpt. Klock & Klock, 1978), p. 244.