

Chapter 50: The Lord's Supper
What is the meaning of the Lord's Supper?
How should it be observed?

A. Background in the History of Redemption

- (1) Jesus' Institution of the Lord's Supper (Matt 26:26-29)
- (2) Additional details from the tradition Paul received (1 Cor 11:25)
- (3) OT Background: Instances of eating and drinking in the old covenant (Ex 24:9-11; Deut 14:23, 26)
Also: Adam and Eve ate before God in the Garden of Eden
- (4) The Lord's Supper looks forward to a greater feast (Matt 26:29, Rev 19:9)
→ From Genesis to Revelation, God's aim has been to bring his people into fellowship with himself, and one of the great joys of experiencing that fellowship is the fact that we can eat and drink in the presence of the Lord.

B. The Meaning of the Lord's Supper

- (1) Christ's death (1 Cor 11:26)
- (2) Our participation in the benefits of Christ's death (Matt. 26:26)
- (3) Spiritual nourishment (John 6:53-57)
- (4) The unity of believers (1 Cor 10:17)
- (5) Christ affirms his love for me
- (6) Christ affirms that all the blessings of salvation are reserved for me
- (7) I affirm my faith in Christ

C. How is Christ Present in the Lord's Supper?

(1) The Roman Catholic View: Transubstantiation

Definition: The bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. This happens at the moment the priest says, "This is my body" during the celebration of the mass.

- a. Grace is imparted to those who partake, in proportion to their subjective disposition
- b. Only the priest can administer the body and blood
- c. Every time the mass is celebrated, the sacrifice of Christ is repeated.
- d. Because the elements of bread and wine literally became the body and blood of Christ, for many centuries laypeople were not allowed to drink from the cup of the Lord's Supper for fear that the blood of Christ would be spilled

(1a) Response to the Roman Catholic View

- a. It fails to recognize the symbolic character of Jesus' statements when he declared, "This is my body." (i.e., John 6:41, 10:9, 15:1)
- b. It fails to recognize the dear New Testament teaching on the finality and completeness of Christ's sacrifice once for all time for our sins. (Heb 9:25-28; John 19:30)
→ For Protestants the idea that the mass is a repetition of the death of Christ seems to mark a return to the repeated sacrifices of the old covenant.
→ The idea that mass is a repeated sacrifice gives a constant reminder of sins and remaining guilt to be atoned for week after week.
- c. The New Testament gives no instructions to place restrictions on who can preside at Communion.
- d. Any restriction that will not allow laypersons to drink of the cup of the Lord's Supper would be arguing from caution and tradition to justify disobedience to Jesus' direct commands. (Mt 26:27)

(2) The Lutheran View: "In, With, and Under"

Definition: The bread does not become the body of Christ, but the physical body of Christ is present "in, with, and under" the bread of the Lord's Supper.

- To support this, Luther taught the ubiquity of Christ's human nature after his ascension.

(2a) Response to the Lutheran View

- a. The Lutheran view fails to realize that Jesus is using a physical object to convey a spiritual reality. We should take "This is my body" no more literally than the corresponding sentence, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:20).
- b. Also, Luther makes the words of Jesus mean, "This accompanies my body."

(3) The Rest of Protestantism: A Symbolic and Spiritual Presence of Christ

Definition: The bread and wine symbolize the body and blood of Christ, and they give a visible sign of the fact that Christ himself is spiritually present in a special way.

- If he is especially present when Christians gather to worship, then we would expect that he will be present in a special way in the Lord's Supper. (Mt 18:20)
- Christ only meets and blesses us there in accordance with our faith in him.
- Certainly there is a symbolic presence of Christ, but also a genuine spiritual presence and blessing in this ceremony.

D. Who Should Participate in the Lord's Supper?

- (1) Only those who believe in Christ
- (2) Some say: Only those who have been baptized.
However: → If someone is a genuine believer but not yet baptized, forbidding him or her to participate in communion can symbolize that he or she is not a member of the body of Christ. Therefore it seems better to allow non-baptized believers to participate but to urge them to be baptized as soon as possible.
- (3) Only those who participate in self-examination (1 Cor 11:27-30)

Question: What does it mean to eat or drink "in an unworthy manner"?

→ When Paul explains that unworthy participation involves "not discerning the body," he indicates that we are to take thought for all of our relationships within the body of Christ.

- Are we acting in ways that portray unity or disunity?
- Are we conducting ourselves in ways that proclaim the self-giving sacrifice of our Lord or enmity and selfishness?

E. Other Questions

- (1) Who should administer the Lord's Supper?
- (2) How often should the Lord's Supper be celebrated?

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