

## **“THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**July 27, 2014, 6:00PM**

**Belgic Confession, Article 35**

**Scripture Text: I Corinthians 10:16-18**

### **Introduction**

Just about everything that we do that’s important in this life includes a meal. Birthday celebrations, graduation parties, weddings, anniversary dinners, retirement celebrations, memorial banquets. The same is true at church, we recognize our missionaries with a mission’s dinner, we honor our seniors with a special dinner, we just had our annual church picnic, and soon we will have an ice cream social and a harvest dinner yet to come.

God created us not just to eat and drink but to enjoy eating and drinking. Food is one of His gifts and being able to enjoy food is another one of His gifts. It is in keeping with the nature of God to establish a meal for us in which we commemorate something He never wants us to forget, the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of all our sins. This supper reminds us that God’s righteous wrath against the world has been appeased, atoned for, paid in full.

But just how big a deal is this sacrament to us today?

There was a time in history when what people thought about the Lord’s Supper was a matter of life and death. In England from 1555 to 1558 during the reign of the bloody Queen Mary 288 Protestant Reformers were martyred by being burned at the stake. Why? In large part because of their views on the Lord’s Supper.

There was a time in history when the meaning of the Lord’s Supper was so important and highly regarded that some thought it was worth dying for and others thought it was worth killing for.

I hope we will not think of the Lord’s Supper as no big deal, something we can take or leave, something people shouldn’t fight over.

We come this evening to the longest article of the Belgic Confession, a very carefully worded and extensive treatment of this very important sacrament.

We do well to heed the warnings and take to heart this excellent instruction concerning this gift given to us by Jesus through which we participate and share in the body and blood of Jesus.

But how can we do that if what article 35 says is true, that these things are beyond our understanding and incomprehensible to us?

## **A real participation in the body and blood of Christ.**

I Corinthians 10 is an important and helpful text for us. The Holy Spirit has given Paul very clear insight into what happens at the Lord's Table. We should take these words at face value and in the strongest literal sense.

**I Corinthians 10:16-17** The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18 Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?

Did you hear that? What does verse 18 say? "Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?"

What does that mean? It means that the people of Israel shared in the benefits of what happened on the altar. They were partakers and participants in the whole transaction. What happened on the altar happened to them. To be a sharer in the altar was to share in what God was doing at the altar.

The sacrament is called a means of grace because it is a real participation, a real partaking of the body and blood of Jesus by faith in our souls.

Our mouths eat the outward signs, the bread and the wine.  
Our souls by faith eat the inward signs, the body and blood of Christ.

What we eat and drink becomes part of us, they are assimilated into us. Sometimes we say you are what you eat. When we receive the consecrated elements, they become part of us and we become part of them, we become part of the one bread, the body of Christ, a literal participation in and with Him, though not through literal physical flesh and blood. This meal is a supper not a sacrifice.

Jesus said it this way in John 6:

**John 6:53-56** "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. 55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. 56 Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.

As Article 35 says, "What is eaten and drunk by us is the true and natural body and the true blood of Christ."

Yet they remain bread and wine. It isn't our mouth that changes the elements, it's our faith. We receive Christ not by mouth but by faith, but we really receive Him when we receive Him by faith.

“The manner of our partaking is not by the mouth, but by the Spirit through faith.”

**John 16:14** He [Holy Spirit] will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

The benefits are communicated to our souls by the Holy Spirit just as if Christ Himself were present with us.

Faith is the hand and mouth of the soul. The appointed means of receiving God’s grace for your life is by faith through the actions of receiving, taking, chewing and swallowing.

That it happens is told us in Scripture. How this happens the Belgic Confession rightly says is beyond our understanding and incomprehensible to us.

### **The Purpose and Benefits of the Sacrament.**

Since Christ is really present at the table, one would expect there to be inexhaustible benefits and blessings for all who meet Him there and all who are in Him.

As the article says, at the table “Christ communicates all his benefits to us.”

We receive the nourishing and strengthening and comforting of our spiritual life and our souls.

We keep alive in us the remembrance of Christ death and to inflame in us a greater love for God and for each other.

Being the Son of God He has made us to be sons of God; by His coming to earth, He has made us able to come to heaven; by taking on our mortality, He has given us His immortality; by taking our weakness He has given us His power; by taking our poverty He has transferred to us His riches and wealth; by taking all the weight of all our iniquity He has clothed us with His righteousness and glory (see Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.2).

Christ’s gift to us in the Lord’s Supper is that He nourishes, strengthens, sustains, and increases our faith. Our faith waxes and wanes, it runs into obstacles. We find ourselves wrestling with fears, doubts, anxieties. We have frequent infirmities, lapses, and weaknesses. He confirms and assures us of His communion with us, of His presence with us and in us.

Each experience of the Lord’s Supper helps us make up ground that we have lost and helps us make progress in faith and in the gospel. All of this suggests to me that our communion with Christ at His table should as frequent as we are able.

When Christ grafts us into His body by His body and blood, He is in us and we are in Him. Because we share the same bread and the same cup we are made one body with Christ, flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone. Just as Eve was taken from Adam, so we are taken from Christ, He is the source of our very life.

The reality of receiving all His benefits is as real as the taste of the bread and the wine in our mouths. What the soul receives is as real and present as what the stomach receives.

### **Who can come and how should they come?**

Believers. Believers are the only ones who benefit from and receive the benefits of the table.

What kind of believers?

Baptized, confessing, members of a Christian church who are truly repentant and actively seeking reconciliation with God and their neighbor. Those who truly desire to walk in newness of life depending on the grace of God through the power of the Holy Spirit and the nourishing of their faith and souls through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

This is the meaning of the parable of the wedding feast where there was one present at the feast who was not properly dressed for the meal. We must be clothed in the righteousness of Christ, having our old garments replaced by His blood washed new garments.

The sacrament is of no benefit unless the Holy Spirit opens our minds and hearts by repentance and faith. Faith is the mouth of the soul, by which it receives the spiritual foods of Christ.

We should receive these gifts humbly, reverently, prayerfully, thoughtfully, thinking on the things of the Lord, and with a heart desiring the things of the Lord, and thankfully, deeply grateful for the benefits and blessings that are ours because of Christ.

Because the sacrament is a real communion with the body and blood of Christ it is holy and therefore must be approached reverently and with prayer and confession, with a clear acknowledgment of our sin and our need, and that Christ is our Savior who has appeased the righteous and just wrath of the Father and taken away our sin.

The ungodly and unrepentant and unbelieving not only receive no benefit, but they actually receive condemnation.

The sacraments are for the whole body, they are corporate, not private. This is why I don't do a first communion for couples who ask for it at their weddings, it's all or none, and it isn't advisable for all at weddings because there are often many non-Christians there.

The meal was given by Jesus to His followers. He meant for all to partake, not just the pastor, not just the elders, not just the righteous, but all repentant sinners who desire His forgiveness and grace.

Heaven is for repentant sinners who are not relying on themselves and their own righteousness, but are relying solely on Jesus for their forgiveness and life. And this table is for repentant sinners.

We don't come to this table based on our merits, we come based on His grace.

### **Application and conclusion.**

This meal commemorates the death of Jesus. As often as we eat this and drink this we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. This table is all about the cross. But if Jesus never rose from the dead then this death wouldn't be worth remembering. When we celebrate this supper we are proclaiming the death of someone who rose from the dead and is coming again.

This is a table of affliction and a table of thanksgiving. This is a table that shows us what God does with affliction and what He is and will do with our affliction. This is a table of hope.

**Psalm 34:8** Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!

Blessed is the man who takes refuge [trusts] in him!

This is a first taste, a taste that is letting us know what's coming, the full meal, the banquet feast of the Lamb of God.

Why is there so little, why just a taste? To humble us and remind us that His little is greater than all the greatness of this world, than all this world's power and all this world's wealth. To have this is enough. His grace is sufficient for now. For whatever you are in need of, this is enough.

God had a plan from before the foundations of the earth to populate heaven with myriads of forgiven sinners. This table is the foundation of that forgiveness.

One of Jesus' last words to His bride,

**Matthew 26:29** "I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

This table is a taste of that great feast, that great celebration of life and the food that sustains life, Jesus Himself.

### **Prayer for the Lord's Supper from The Valley of Vision, p. 197:**

God of all good, we bless you for this means of grace; teach us to see in this meal your loving purposes and the joy and strength for our souls.

You have prepared a feast; and though we are unworthy to sit down as guest, we wholly rest on the merits of Jesus, and hide our self beneath his righteousness.

When we hear his tender invitation and see his wondrous grace, we cannot hesitate, but must come to you in love. ...

As the outward elements nourish our body, so may your indwelling Spirit invigorate our souls, until that day when we hunger and thirst no more, and sit with Jesus at his heavenly feast.