

CHRIST AT THE TABLE WITH BREAD AND WINE

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Luke 22:1-2, 14-23

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Introduction

In our special biblical-theological-topical sermon on the Sacraments being signs and seals we learned of how God shows his love and validates and confirms His love through water, bread and wine. God not only tell us He loves us through His Word- -he also *shows His love to us.*

But throughout Church History, the primary question regarding the Sacraments has been concerning the Lord's Supper: "How is Christ Himself *present to believers in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper?*" The question attempts to feebly get at how Christ is **with** the believer in bread and wine. Most people understand and agree that Christ is the host of the Sacred Supper in some way, and that is good; but many disagree with how Christ as host of the meal is present, or how he is actually communing with them.

Today's sermon will focus primarily are the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and how Christ is present in bread and wine to the believer. Jesus himself taught clearly: "This *is my body... This is my blood...*" Jesus taught clearly that a true believer is one who eats and drinks His flesh. But what does this mean?

That has been one of the great controversial questions of Church History. This question is important for us to understand with regard to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper and thus the reason why we are considering it today.

When Jesus was going to be with his father, he told his disciples that it was better for them that he go (see John 14:1 ff). The disciples were not to get too used to his being with them in "flesh" presence (see Luke 24:1 ff). He did also tell them that he would be with them until the end of the time- -until his return.

This presence of Christ with His people would be through the Holy Spirit- -yet this would be no less real than his physical presence. Through the power of the Holy Spirit Christ would be with His people. Christ's people would be united to Christ by faith and experience Christ's presence in this way. Which in many ways is much better, a more closer union of Christ and His disciples (I lisp when I try to explain that with finite understanding but with Biblical implication).

As John Calvin wrote in his Commentary on the Gospel of John: "For faith does not look at Christ only as at a distance, but embraces him, that he may become ours and may dwell in us. It causes us to be incorporated with him, to have life in common with him, and, in short,

to become one with him (John 17:21).

Even though Christ is risen, ascended, enthroned and exalted at God's right hand in glorified flesh *for us*, there is no real distance between us. What is far in the sense of being far from our finite perspective (we on earth and he in heaven), the bond of the Spirit makes us very close.

Calvin again: "For us the manner [of Christ's presence] is spiritual because the secret power of the Spirit is the bond of our union with Christ."

An understanding of how Christ is present to the believer in the Lord's Supper begins with a proper understanding of our union with Jesus Christ by His Holy Spirit.

This is how we experience Christ's presence. This is important for saying that this is how the Christian life should be understood, and this helps get at what is happening when Christ takes the special time apart from our weekly routine schedule to call us to his table as host to feed and nourish our hungry and thirsty souls with bread and wine.

Christ is not absent from us spiritually in the Christian life; Christ is not present with us physically either. Yet Christ is truly and really, but *spiritually* present and close: "I am with you always..." is the promise and the advantage for God's people until He returns.

In the Lord's Supper, Christ calls his people specially to a covenantal meal where he sups with us spiritually, yet really and truly. He is present physically in heaven before God's throne for us, so he is not present physically in the Lord's Supper. But as the host of the meal, he is present and we must understand that this is God's means of grace to make his people more like Jesus who loves them.

I. THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER- IN BIBLICAL CONTEXT.

In the Gospel accounts, our Lord gives instructions to His disciples concerning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In the Gospel record, as well as recorded in Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, the Lord Jesus participates in his last Passover meal with his disciples. The Passover meal during the Feast of Unleavened Bread is the Biblical context for our Lord's institution of the Lord's Supper.

^{ESV} Luke 22:13-15: And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. ¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for¹ you. Do this in remembrance of me."²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in

remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Gospel writers specifically tell us the time of the institution of the Lord's Supper was during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, or the Passover (22:1, 7).

The Passover was the memorial meal and celebration that was a reminder of God's salvation mercy in the Exodus (Exodus 12). The Passover was a time when the people of God celebrated God's passing over his people when he saw the blood on the doorposts in the time of the Exodus.

The *Feast of Unleavened Bread* was the term used for the whole period of festivity that revolved around the Passover. By the time of Jesus, the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were celebrated together (see also Lev. 23:4-8). The reason it was also called the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* was that all the yeast (leaven) that was used in the house had to be removed from the house before the Passover lamb was killed (Deut. 16:4):

^{ESV} Deuteronomy 16:4 No leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory for seven days, nor shall any of the flesh that you sacrifice on the evening of the first day remain all night until morning.

After the leaven was removed from the house, unleavened bread was then eaten for seven days:

^{ESV} Exodus 12:17-20: And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. ¹⁸ In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. ¹⁹ For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. ²⁰ You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread."

^{ESV} Numbers 28:16 "On the fourteenth day of the first month is the LORD's Passover, ¹⁷ and on the fifteenth day of this month is a feast. Seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten.

The unleavened bread and the removal of leaven from the home was a typological picture of the affliction of persecution and slavery in Egypt ("bread of affliction") as well as of the removal of sin. Leaven is primarily used as a picture of sin in the Bible. You may remember Jesus' earlier saying in the Gospel of Luke: "Beware the leaven of the Pharisees... (12:1; cf. Matt. 16:6, 11-12; 1 Cor. 5:6).

^{ESV} 1 Corinthians 5:6-8: Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? ⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

It is interesting to note that for the Apostle Paul the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread has become in fulfillment the Christian life, the life that one lives in celebration because of their union with Jesus Christ (v. 8). This is how the Apostle Paul interprets the way this celebration and memorial day is to be kept throughout all generations in Christ (see Exodus 12:17).

Passover was one of the three great pilgrim feasts of Israel (with the Feasts of Weeks or Pentecost, and Booths) where many people came up to Jerusalem to celebrate. Passover was in the spring on the 14th day of Nisan (the 7th month in the Jewish calendar).

During the Passover celebration, all Israelite males were to appear before the Lord God with offerings as representative and substitutionary sacrifices for their sins. The lamb was slain on the 14th of the month of Nisan between 3:00 and 5:00 P.M. At 6 PM (when a new day would begin for the Jews according to the way their calendars worked) on Nisan 15th, the Passover Meal was eaten, and this began the full week of the celebration of the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Nisan 15-21).

It is significant to note theologically that the first aspect of the entire celebration of God's grace was focused on the substitutionary sacrificed lamb, with the second aspect of the celebration being focused on the unleavened bread that symbolized the removal sin and a holy-consecrated life. The priority was placed on the grace of God shown to His people through substitutionary blood; the people responded to this grace through obedience.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolized the heart of and the summary of the Christian life in typological fashion.

II. THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER- IN REDEMPTIVE-HISTORY

As the New Covenant replaces the Old Covenant (Heb. 8:13- "...*What is becoming obsolete and growing old...*"), so the Lord's Supper replaces through realization and fulfillment the Passover Meal (as well as all of the ceremonial feasts of the Old Covenant). What the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolized typologically in the Old Covenant Epoch has been realized and fulfilled in Christ. The salvation-redemption and New Exodus that Israel had hoped for – had finally come in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now a greater Exodus in Jesus Christ can be realized by faith and this includes for believers not only the forgiveness of sins, but like the unleavened bread, the removal of sins altogether, and a perfect righteousness for sinners that can only be received by faith alone in Christ alone! In other words, the Feast of Unleavened Bread symbolized not only the Christian life but the heart of the Gospel: Justification by faith alone.

What do we specifically see realized from Passover to Lord's Supper?

- a. From the Old Covenant Passover Lamb to the New Covenant Passover Lamb (cf. 1 Cor. 5:7). All of the Passover lambs of the Old Covenant could never

permanently remove sins; only in Jesus do we have the final Passover Lamb and the sins that take away the sins permanently of all who believe:

Hebrews 9:28-10:4,10: ...So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. ² Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? ³ But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin every year. ⁴ For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins....

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

- b. From the Old Covenant celebration of being spared God's wrath on Egypt, to the New Covenant celebration of being spared God's wrath on the world because of the cross of Christ.

John 3:17-18, 36: For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God..... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

- c. From the Old Covenant ceremonial Feast of Unleavened Bread to the taking away or removal of sin in Jesus Christ! On the one hand the unleavened bread represented the bread of affliction in Egypt (Deut. 16:3), on the other hand the unleavened bread represented the removal of sin. It is interesting how both of these aspects come together for us in Christ:

From God's perspective, the bread is the bread of affliction because Jesus experiences God's wrath and affliction on the cross for us; from our perspective, the bread is the unleavened bread of the removal of sin because of Jesus' affliction for us on the cross. God's people in Christ are those who have been made unleavened by faith in Jesus (1 Cor. 5:7).

Bread/Body: In the Passover, the host would say with regard to the unleavened bread: "This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate when they came out of the land of Egypt." Jesus takes the bread as the host and says "...This is my body." ("I AM the Bread of Life"- John 6)

Many Passovers had been celebrated throughout the many years since the Exodus. Many hosts had sat at the head of the table, but no host until Jesus said that the bread represented his own body! And His body was laid down for us!

The bread (22:19): *“This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...”* Jesus’ body has become the “bread of affliction” (or what it represented); Jesus’ body given for His people will be afflicted and his body will bear the sins of God’s people. What was symbolized in the Feast of Unleavened Bread every year became realized in Jesus Christ as Isaiah wrote:

ESV Isaiah 53:6-10: All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. ⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. ⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? ⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. ¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; ¹ when his soul makes ² an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Wine/Blood: Jews understood the wine of Passover to represent the blood of the paschal lamb (Mishnaic Tractate Pesahim 10:6). The cup that Jesus held as host represented his precious blood and so it was the fulfillment and realization of the cup of the Passover: *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant which is given for you in my blood”* (22:20).

The cup (22:17-18): *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood...”* (22:20).

ESV Leviticus 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

All that was greatly anticipated in the Old Covenant shadows and types has been realized-fulfilled in the coming of Christ and His blood that was shed to inaugurate and ratify the New Covenant, and that we commemorate when we feed on Christ by faith.

As the host of the Passover Meal would interpret each part of the meal as it was eaten, so Jesus very specifically interprets the Lord’s Supper for His people. But not all of what Jesus said in the institution of the Lord’s Supper has been understood by His people.

III. THE CHRIST OF THE LORD’S SUPPER- *HOW IS CHRIST PRESENT?* BIBLICAL TRUTH AND A HISTORICAL SKETCH OF CHURCH’S UNDERSTANDING

Now we need to look at the “is-ness” of *“This is my body...this is my blood.”* *How is the bread and the wine Jesus’ body and blood? How is Jesus present when His people when He serves in the Tabernacle not made with hands as our Great High Priest (cf. Hebrews 8:1-13)?*

Jesus teaches in John chapter 6 that it is those who feed on his body and blood who have eternal life. Some in Church History have interpreted this to mean that when one goes through the motions in the Church of partaking in the bread and wine that grace is automatically communicated to them.

We should think through this before proceeding to answer HOW specifically we believe that Christ present in the Lord's Supper?:

ESV John 6:35-37, 47-58: Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out....

⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." ⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "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. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."

Notice two important aspects of our Lord's teaching in John 6: (1) Believing in the completed work of Jesus Christ (evidenced by coming to Him, which is an evidence that the Father has graciously drawn that person); (2) Feeding on Christ. Feeding on Christ is an act of faith that takes bread and wine as signs of God's nourishment for hungry souls; this is the act of a believer.

In the larger context of John 6 (as well as other Scriptures), we learn that the only way any human being can accept any of Jesus' teachings and instruction is IF the Father who sent Jesus *draws him to Himself* (John 6:37-44). Otherwise, Jesus' words cannot be heard, and Jesus will not be seen. He is heard and seen with ears that can hear and eyes of faith as he is held out to our faith in the Word of God and in the Lord's Supper (Romans 10:17; 1 Cor. 11:22ff).

This supernatural "faith-gift" (Eph. 2:8-10) is a necessity for the Lord's Supper to have any grace-power or efficacious good for the individual. One must be united by faith because of the work of the Holy Spirit for grace to be communicated to the person partaking of the bread and blood of Jesus. You can't have the signs of bread and wine

and not have the thing signified which is Christ's work (as we learned in last week's sermon).

What does the "is" mean as in "This is my body"? The verb *is* indicates representation not identification (Bock, Vol. II, pg. 1724). More on this in a few moments when we consider Christ's presence.

As we learned last week the signs of bread and wine points to the reality of Christ's body and blood being laid down and sacrificed for all who believe. You cannot merely place your trust in the signs of bread and wine, if you have no faith in what they represent.

But if you have Christ, if you have been united to Him by faith, then you really and truly feed on Christ and drink His blood by faith. Yet it is a *spiritually* true and real feeding and drinking as Christ by His Spirit closes the geographical-spatial distance so that Christ is truly and really, yet spiritually present to you by faith.

The Lord's Supper represents in picture form, and as a symbol what it means to be united to Jesus Christ by faith and to feed upon him daily as His people. It is not a mere representation, but also a means whereby spiritually Jesus communicates more of his life to those united to him by faith.

How is the grace communicated through the Lord's Supper? The means of grace in the sacrament- -is simply feeding on Jesus *by faith!* When Jesus says that his body is "real food" and his blood "real drink" he was talking about how we feed upon him by faith.

Westminster Confession of Faith, chapter 29 section 7 says: "Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements, in this sacrament, do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally but spiritually, receive, and feed upon, Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses."

Calvin comments on how Jesus' flesh communicates God's glorious grace in his wonderful exegesis of this passage from John 6 (read slowly and carefully his words):

"...As the Word of God is the fountain of life, (John 1:4), so his flesh, as a channel, conveys to us that life which dwells intrinsically, as we say, in his Divinity. And in this sense it is called life-giving, because it conveys to us that life which it borrows for us from another quarter.

This will not be difficult for us to understand, if we consider what is the cause of life, namely, righteousness. And though righteousness flows from God alone, still we shall not attain the full manifestation of it anywhere else than in the flesh of Christ; for in it was accomplished the redemption of man, in it a sacrifice was offered to atone for sins, and an obedience yielded to God, to reconcile him to us; it was also filled with the sanctification of the Spirit, and at length, having vanquished death, it was received into the heavenly glory.

It follows, therefore, that all the parts of life have been placed in it, that no man may have reason to complain that he is deprived of life, as if it were placed in concealment, or at a distance."

How is Christ NOT present with Christ's people?

The Lord's Supper is not "Transubstantiated"...

Our Roman Catholic friends falsely teach that Jesus is corporally, that is physically present with the bread and wine. Roman Catholics teach that the bread and wine is "**transubstantiated**" in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or what they call "The Mass" (and Roman Catholics have falsely taught this historically, particularly since Lombard in the 9th century and clearly defined by Aquinas in the 13th century).

Transubstantiation means that when the priest blesses the bread and wine, although it doesn't outwardly change in appearance (or "accidents"). It really and truly has changed in substance (or "essence"). This means that every time the Mass, or the Lord's Supper is offered to the people, Jesus is sacrificed and the bread and wine actually *become* the body and blood of the Lord.

The most recently published Roman Catholic *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches this erroneous doctrine in Part 2, Section 2, Chapter 1, Article V:

"**1376** The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."

When the "Mass" or the Lord's Supper is received by the people, Roman Catholics believe that the elements actually have power in and of themselves, regardless of the condition of the person receiving them, as long as the person is not rejecting the teaching of the Church. In other words, the receiving is automatic (a phrase in Latin is used: "ex opere operato" which means from the work, that is the sacrifice of the Mass, it works!). This is contrary to Scripture, and a misunderstanding of Christ's once and for all sacrifice as Hebrews 7:25-28 teaches:

Hebrews 7:25-28: Consequently, [Jesus] is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.²⁶ For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself.²⁸ For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.

Jesus *has been sacrificed once and for all for sin* and his people are called to partake in his body and blood really and truly, yet *spiritually -- by faith*, discerning the body and blood of the LORD (1 Cor. 11:18ff). Even when our Roman Catholic friends argue that

this "sacrifice of the Mass" was the teaching of the early church, we only need to turn to Augustine in the 5th century to see that the Mass was a later perversion of the Roman Catholic Church in the medieval period.

The word the early Church Father's used was "sacrifice", referring to the Lord's Supper, but the "sacrifice" was intended to explain what the Lord's Supper pointed back to as in "Do this in remembrance of me." Listen to Augustine himself on this:

"The Hebrews in the animal victims which they offered to God celebrated a prophecy of the future victim which Christ offered; the Christians, by the most holy offering and partaking of the body of Christ, celebrate the remembrance of a sacrifice already made" ('Against Faustus, XX.18). In many passages, Augustine interprets the Lord's Supper NOT as a sacrifice, but as a sacrifice of praise and celebration of Christians. Here is more from Augustine, proving that for Augustine (as well as other teachers in the early church), the Lord's Supper was not a sacrifice:

"In a sacrifice four things are to be considered- - to whom offered, by whom, what is offered, and for whom. Accordingly, that same one true Mediator, reconciling us to God through the sacrifice of peace, remains one with him to whom he has offered; has made those for whom he offered one in himself; is himself, both he who has offered and what he has offered, one." ('On the Trinity', Book 4, Chapter 24).

The early Church did not teach that the Lord's Supper was a sacrifice, neither does the Bible teach this, and so this kind of understanding of Jesus as the "Bread of Life" and what it means to "feed upon Jesus and drink his blood" must be avoided by all who call themselves 'Christian'. (Read more on this from Calvin's "Institutes of the Christian Religion", Book IV, Chapter 18).

Jesus is not present "in, with and under" the bread and wine

The Lord's Supper is not "In, With, and Under"...

Some in the history of the Church have thought that the presence of the Lord is "in, with and under" the bread and wine in the supper. Martin Luther taught this during the Reformation and is still held by some of our Lutheran friends today (this was the only doctrine that prevented unity between the Lutherans and the Reformed folks in the Reformation of the 16th century). This sad moment of disappointing disunity between Lutherans and Reformed folks happened at the Colloquy of Marburg' in 1529.

Martin Luther taught that Jesus was present "in, with and under" the bread and wine because of a "communication of attributes". He taught that Jesus was in a glorified body at the right hand of the Father, but that spiritually, his human body could be in more than one place ("Doctrine of Ubiquity") -- it could be omnipresent through a communication of his divine attributes.

However, John Calvin taught, and I think rightly, that Jesus' human body was a real and true glorified human body, and therefore it had locality.

Jesus' glorified human body was locally present at the Father's right hand, and therefore in order to be a true and real human body, it could not by nature be omniscient.

Jesus is absent in the Supper

The Lord's Supper is not a "Mere Memorial"...

The Lord's Supper is a memorial, but *not merely a memorial*. When Jesus says: "This is my Body... and Blood", he means it, but he means that spiritually it is his body and blood. We are to remember Christ's death until he comes (Luke 22 and 1 Corinthians 11:22ff), but it is a spiritual "eating" or "feast" whereby Christ communicates his life and grace to his people.

This is why the Apostle Paul teaches that there is blessing, or life given to those who worthily receive it by faith, and a blessing, or death-curse for those who unworthily receive it- *apart from faith*.

1 Corinthians 11:23-30: For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

As the verbal Word cannot go forth and return void but accomplish God's will either as a blessing or a curse; so the visible Word of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper cannot go forth and return void but accomplish God's will either as a blessing or a curse because of the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit.

If the Lord's Supper was a mere memorial, then there would be no life or death communicated, and therefore would be a bare ceremony of remembrance, rather than a spiritual event whereby Christ's people are fed and nourished by faith in the spiritual food.

Jesus has given me other ways of our experiencing Him

"The Lord's Supper is Unimportant!"

A final group of well-meaning people today, who even call themselves 'Christians' think that the Lord's Supper is unimportant. Now they may not come out and say it this way, but in their attempt to become more like Christ, or more "spiritual", they seek every other means *BUT THE MEANS*, that Christ has provided for his people.

There are some Christians today who think that having daily devotions, reading the latest spiritual book, feeling a certain way in worship and prayer, or other such means "of grace" are much more important than the two main means (Word and Sacraments) that Jesus has given to his people.

Some people today don't "feel" as much in the Lord's Supper, but they "feel more spiritual" when singing praise songs, hymns, or spiritual songs, or in their daily devotions, or in a small group Bible study.

IN fact, in many churches because of an unhealthy and imbalanced understanding of the priority of evangelism there is a tendency to downplay the Lord's Supper, not even practicing the Holy Supper regularly because it might seem strange or unwelcoming to the so-called seekers. The Holy Supper of the LORD distinguishes between the Church and the world- -and it is for the Church.

All of these other things listed above can be good in and of themselves, especially devotion to God's Word, study, and evangelism, but they should never be a replacement for the preaching of the Word of God and the Lord's Supper (We should also remember never to place a priority on our feelings, or "what we feel", but rather what we THINK and KNOW and UNDERSTAND- - *God says my people perish for lack of knowledge, not lack of feeling!* -Hosea 4:6; Romans 10:1-6).

We need to appreciate the Lord's Supper as an extremely large part of how we are conformed into Christ's image. In a day where the Lord's Supper is at best a mere memorial, or worst a forgotten and "out-dated" spiritual exercise for modern people, we need to remind ourselves as well as Christians all around us of this great privilege we have!

The Lord's Supper IS Really and Truly, Yet a Spiritual Partaking of Jesus' Body and Blood by Faith.

We all want experiences in the Christian life, but we tend to seek all the wrong experiences (even in our worship; I think of Aaron, Gideon, and many others throughout Church History). I believe that it is important to say up front that at a foundational and basic level, Jesus has given his people the Sacrament of the Holy Supper to experience Him in a way that will increase, strengthen and build up our faith in Him and His grace toward us.

There is nothing wrong with experiences with God in the Christian life. We must experience God rightly in the way he has ordained for us to experience him. Some seek experiences in other places, but it is through water, bread and wine that God invites us to experience more fully our union with Jesus Christ.

Calvin spoke this way of our experiencing of Christ in the Lord's Supper: "Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess that it is a

secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare it. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it.

Therefore, I here embrace without controversy the truth of God in which I safely rest. Christ declares his flesh the food of my soul, his blood its drink (John 6:53ff). I offer my soul to him to be fed with such food. In his Sacred Supper he bids me take, eat, and drink his body and blood under the sign or symbols of bread and wine. I do not doubt that Christ Himself truly presents them, and that I receive them” (*Institutes*, 4.17.32).

Both the Roman Catholics and Martin Luther thought that the only way we could experience Christ, or feed upon Christ and drink his blood, was if Christ's presence was actually physically somehow in the bread and the wine. John Calvin masterfully reminds us according to Scripture that the Holy Spirit unites us spiritually, yet really and truly to Jesus and so is present to our faith in this way (John 15:1ff- "I AM the Vine, you are the branches...if you remain in me and I in you...").

Therefore, the presence of Christ can be really and truly, yet spiritually in the bread and wine, and Jesus Christ, the glorified man can stay at God's right hand as our Mediator before God in heaven. The Holy Spirit will take his people up to Him by faith, rather than our attempt at bringing him down (cf. Romans 10:7-17 concerning the Word of God as well).

John Calvin taught this concerning how Jesus is present in the Lord's Supper and received *by us, by faith alone*:

"...Greatly mistaken are those who conceive no presence of flesh in the Supper unless it lies in the bread. For thus they leave nothing to the secret working of the Spirit, which unites Christ himself to us. To them Christ does not seem present unless he comes down to us. As though, if he should lift us to himself, we should not just as much enjoy his presence!

The question is therefore only of the manner, for they place Christ in the bread, while we do not think it lawful for us to drag him from heaven. Let our readers decide which is more correct. Only away with that foolishness that Christ is removed from his Supper unless he lies hidden under the covering of the bread! For since this mystery is heavenly, there is no need to draw Christ to earth that he may be joined to us" [my emphasis, 'Institutes of the Christian Religion', Book IV.Chapter 18, section 31).

IV. APPLICATION TO THE CHURCH

Sign and Thing Signified: Not virtually equivalent (Roman Catholicism); Not bare empty signs with no spiritual reality (Memorialism/Evangelicalism); but signs that represent Holy-Spiritually what they signify. They *are* spiritually what they truly represent.

Not a sacrifice (Hebrews 9:24-28) of Christ, but a sacrificial meal *with Christ* where grace is given to the repentant believer by faith.

Application: Importance of examining oneself before coming to the Lord's table:

Westminster Larger Catechism 171: How are they that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper to prepare themselves before they come unto it? A. They that receive the sacrament of the Lord's supper are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves (1) of their being in Christ, (2) of their sins and wants; (3) of the truth and measure of their knowledge, (4) faith, (5) repentance; (6) love to God and the brethren, (7) charity to all men, (8) forgiving those that have done them wrong; (9) of their desires after Christ, (10) and of their new obedience, (11) and by renewing the exercise of these graces, (12) by serious meditation, (13) and fervent prayer. (14) / (1) 1 Cor. 11:28 (2) 2 Cor. 13:5 (3) 1 Cor. 5:7 compared with Exod. 12:15 (4) 1 Cor. 11:29 (5) 1 Cor. 13:5; Matt. 26:28 (6) Zech. 12:10; 1 Cor. 11:31 (7) 1 Cor. 10:16,17; Acts 2:46,47 (8) 1 Cor. 5:8; 1 Cor. 11:18,20 (9) Matt. 5:23,24 (10) Isa. 55:1; John 7:37 (11) 1 Cor. 5:7,8 (12) 1 Cor. 11:25,26,28; Heb. 10:21,22,24; Ps. 26:6 (13) 1 Cor. 11:24,25 (14) 2 Chron. 30:18,19; Matt.

We must remember as Christ's people that we are united to Jesus by faith- -and to each other. We are in union together by God's Spirit because of His grace. Let us live a life of grace toward one another. As God has shown us mercy, let us show mercy.

The Perpetual Blessing and Covenant Renewal in the Lord's Supper

- Compared to Baptism, it is perpetual. Baptism is initiatory.
- Word and Sacrament should be together. No sacrament without word (Roman Catholicism); No word without sacrament (Evangelicalism); but Word *and* Sacrament: Word is verbal; sacraments are visual. Word declares verbally; sacraments proclaim the Lord's death visually.
- Another aspect of being "ashamed of the gospel" in evangelical church-Growth churches? Cannot present sinners in the hands of an angry God, with the grace of Christ, then inviting so-called "seekers" to the table of the LORD. Not a seeker-sensitive thing to do!
- A blessing of all five of our senses!
- "...Until you eat with me in the Kingdom of Heaven"
- Psalm 37 says: "Taste and see that the LORD is good"
- Psalm 78 asked the question: "Can God prepare a table in the wilderness?" The answer is a resounding and thankful "Yes"!

*Welcome to a communal memorial meal for the covenant family of God.
Jesus is present and holds out bread and wine for his weary people.*

Luke 14:11-15 ¹¹ For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just." ¹⁵ When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

Revelation 3:20 ²⁰ Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Our great hope for the future as the people of God *until he comes* (1 Cor. 11:26):

Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; ⁸ it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure"- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. ⁹ And the angel said¹ to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God."

Thanks be to God for His Word! Thanks be to God for His Christ!

CRB

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Scripture Lesson

^{ESV} **Matthew 26:26-30:** Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the¹ covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 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." ³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

^{ESV} **John 6:35-37, 47-58:** Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out....

⁴⁷ Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰ This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." ⁵² The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" ⁵³ So Jesus said to them, "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. ⁵⁷ As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever feeds on me, he also will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever."