

Lesson 26 THE LORD'S SUPPER**26.1 The Meaning of the Lord's Supper**

Our Saviour instituted the Lord's Supper as a sacrament in the Church in order to strengthen our faith, and seal and confirm God's promises to His people. The signs or tokens are bread and wine: we may see these tokens with our eyes and taste them with our mouths. In them, Christ's death is portrayed to us, and the blessings that flow from it are communicated to us through faith. As surely as we see and participate in the actions around the table, so surely we may know that Christ gives His blessings to us. These blessings are:

1. Forgiveness of Sins

The breaking of the bread typifies the forgiveness of sins. Christ Himself says that He is the bread of life, John 6:35; He becomes the bread of life through the sacrifice of His flesh, John 6:51. Christ gave His body and blood as a sacrifice for sins; thus, His was a complete sacrifice, Leviticus 17:11.

2. Renewal of our Lives

Through participation in the Lord's Supper our souls are also nourished to eternal life. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the bread and wine form spiritual food for us, strengthening us to eternal life, John 6:54f. It is a holy feast, by which we are confirmed in God's salvation.

3. Union with Christ

The holy sacrament also seals and confirms to us our complete union with Christ, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 17. By faith we are united with Him in His death and resurrection, partakers of all His blessings and gifts. Having union with Him, we must also practice true communion with each other, Philippians 2:2f.

26.2 The Foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper

The holy communion or Lord's Supper was foreshadowed or prefigured in the Old Testament in the feast of **Passover**, Exodus 12:1-13. During this feast, unleavened bread and herbs were used. Passover, however, also involved the shedding of blood: a lamb was slain. The feast of the Lord's Supper is a bloodless feast, since Christ's blood has been shed once for all, Hebrews 10:12-14.

The manna in the wilderness and the bread of presence also foreshadow the meaning of the Lord's Supper, Exodus 16:13f; Exodus 25:30.

26.3 Errors Regarding the Lord's Supper

1. The Romanist theory

Rome teaches that the bread and wine becomes the real body and blood of Christ at the moment of consecration. This is called the doctrine of **transubstantiation**. The mass is then seen as a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, and is called a bloodless offering. Note that in this approach the words of consecration are taken literally. Through the action and words of the priest, Christ is said to be physically present in the bread and wine.

2. The Lutheran theory

While Luther rejected transubstantiation, he nonetheless held that Christ was bodily present at the Lord's Supper. Luther maintained that the exalted Christ was bodily present everywhere, thus also at the communion table. Luther's formulation was that Christ is present "in, with, and under" the bread and wine, and in these signs gives us His true body and blood. Hence this view is called **consubstantiation**.

Luther's view was connected with his idea that the exalted Christ still appears in hidden and humble forms in this world. Although risen in power, He is still present in weakness. This is the primary rule of what Luther called the "theology of the cross".

3. The Zwinglian view

The Swiss Reformer Zwingli held that the Lord's Supper was only a memorial meal and nothing more. One could not speak of Christ's presence at all, and also could not make any inferences regarding the union with Christ. It was only an instrument by which the memory of Christ's work is better retained.

4. The Anabaptists

The Anabaptists rejected the Lord's Supper as a tool of the Spirit, and held that all outward rituals had but little or no importance. The only thing that mattered in their view was the inner working of the Spirit. Bible and sacrament were all but disregarded.

In opposition to these views, the Reformed doctrine maintains a **real** presence of Christ, but then a **spiritual** presence effected through Word and Spirit. We communicate with the mouth of faith.

On this basis, we may also speak of a real and living communion with Christ our Head.

26.4 The Recipients of the Lord's Supper

Participation in the mystery of the Lord's Supper requires spiritual understanding and discernment, 1 Corinthians 11:27f. One must know and understand the implications of partaking in this feast. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is not open to children. They only participate by sight.

The table of the Lord is open to all believers of the flock who maintain sound doctrine and conduct. All professing Christians who live in sin and rebellion are to be excluded, 1 Corinthians 5:1f; otherwise the table would be profaned, 1 Corinthians 11:30. A worthy participation in the Lord's Supper requires self-examination, which has three parts:

1. Confession of sins and accursedness before God.
2. Confession of faith in the complete and gracious sacrifice of Christ.
3. Resolution to fight against sin, and live in obedience to God's law, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Hypocrites and unbelievers who partake of the Lord's table receive the sacrament, but not its efficacy or efficacious working. In other words, they share the sacrament without its real meaning. In fact, they receive the very opposite of what the sacrament is meant to give. Paul says that they eat and drink judgment to themselves, 1

Corinthians 11:29. Article 34 of the Belgic Confession gives Judas as an example of a person choosing this misdeed.

26.5 The Administration of the Lord's Supper

The celebration of the Lord's Supper originally took place at a love feast (the *agape* meal) in which the members of the congregation shared the blessings with each other. After a meal of sharing, the Lord's Supper was celebrated. The love feasts were also maintained to help the poor. However, the celebration of the Lord's Supper soon acquired a more official place in worship, 1 Corinthians 11:21f; 1 Corinthians 10:16f. Today's practice emphasizes a simple liturgy, with a solemn, orderly participation in the holy sacrament. The focus of attention must be on the Word which explains the sacrament, and on Christ, who is in heaven, and from there administers His blessings.

Exercises Lesson 26

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review: Belgic Confession, Article 35.
Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 28-31.
Canons of Dort, III/IV. 17; V. 14.

II. Review Questions

1. When was the Lord's Supper instituted? How does it differ in this respect from Holy Baptism?
2. What is signified and sealed to us in the Lord's Supper?
3. Why is self-examination required before we attend the Lord's Supper? What is involved in this self-examination?
4. For whom was the Lord's Supper instituted? Who are considered by the Lord as worthy partakers?
5. Who may not attend the Lord's Supper?
6. What happens to those who attend, but secretly do not accept the blessings of the Lord's Supper?

III. Extra Questions

1. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Romanist mass? What is the Romanist theory called?

2. Explain the difference between Calvin's, Luther's, and Zwingli's views on the Lord's Supper. Which of these do we follow and why?

3. What is the difference between the practice of the Lord's Supper as found in 1 Corinthians 11, and our customs today? Can you explain this difference?