



The Lord's Supper: Feast of Christ's love

The Lord's Supper is a blessed institution established by Christ for the benefit and wellbeing of his church. At the Lord's Supper we partake of a wonderful spiritual feast! We celebrate the communion we have with the Lord and the unity which binds believers together. When we eat the bread and drink the wine we partake of the body and blood of Christ with the mouth of faith. Christ is our true food and drink unto life eternal. He feeds our hungry and thirsty souls. Every Lord's Supper celebration confirms Christ's immeasurable love for us sinners. He gave his life to give us life.

The institution and the Passover

In order to appreciate the significance of the celebration of Lord's Supper we should take into consideration when its institution took place. Christ instituted the Supper during the celebration of the Passover. The Passover was the Old Testament feast which was held annually in commemoration of the exodus out of Egypt. The angel of death passed over those houses that had the blood of an offered lamb smeared upon the doorposts.

The Passover consisted of various elements: a lamb which lay roasted on the table, unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and a kind of stewed fruit and wine. The lamb would be eaten first. Afterwards, as part of a thanksgiving meal, the bread and several cups of wine were served. The final cup at the table was called the cup of blessing. It was served at the end of the Passover as a climax to the celebration. The wine in the cup symbolized the blood which was shed and the new life which came forth from it. Today this cup of blessing, for which we give thanks, is the communion in the blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb (1 Corinthians 5:7). In other words, through his shed blood we share in his life.

Our Lord Jesus Christ takes the elements of the Old Testament sacrament and uses them to institute the sacrament of the New Testament. Notice, not the lamb, but the bread and wine are in the foreground. The symbols of bread and wine are taken from the congregational life of the Old Testament church. We read in Exodus 12 that once the Passover lamb had been eaten, Israel as a congregation, as a holy assembly, had to keep the feast of unleavened bread. If anyone did not keep the Passover, they would be punished with death! When the Lord called them to come and celebrate they had no reason to say, "I do not feel worthy enough to go!"

By celebrating the Passover, Israel would remember how the Lord God had led them out of the house of bondage and placed them in the freedom of his service (Exodus 12:14). Not only were they to remember how they had escaped the misery of Egypt but more importantly how they had been freed from an old lifestyle. The Lord had delivered them from the despotism of Pharaoh but especially from the tyranny of sin and idolatry. Every year Israel was reminded of the freedom they received because of God's mighty acts of deliverance.

In Matthew 26, the Lord Jesus Christ celebrates the Passover. But He adds a new element. He does not say, "Take, eat, remember and believe the events which took place in Egypt so that you can thank the Lord for this." He says, "*Do this in remembrance of me!*" Jesus sits at this table as the Passover lamb whose blood will be shed on the cross at Golgotha. Thus the exodus out of Egypt reaches its culmination on Calvary's cross. The blood of the true Lamb is shed. Behold the Lamb of God! At the cross, God brings his people out of the house of bondage and frees them through the blood of the Lamb. Our Christian freedom is received through the shedding of blood.

The Old Testament sacrament of Passover looked ahead to the redemption God would grant through the Messiah and we, through the celebration of the Lord's Supper look back to what has been accomplished. We may celebrate the Lord's Supper knowing that through the shedding of his blood Christ not only grants us forgiveness of sins but He also fulfils the righteousness and the holiness which was required of us in our priestly service before God.

Proclaiming the Lord's death

At the Lord's Supper Christ calls us to remember and believe! To remember is more than to contemplate on something. Remembering is to recall what the Lord has done in the past and to let that determine how you live in the present. Looking back at what Christ accomplished for us we put to death what is earthly and walk in the new obedience – a life that seeks everything in Christ. Thus through the process of remembering we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes (1 Corinthians 11:26). We herald the all-sufficient merit of his perfect sacrifice.

Believers not only attend the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of their faith. By partaking in this celebration they proclaim the good news of Christ's love. John Calvin correctly warns us not to let ourselves get caught in petty disputes about things that are indifferent (*Institutes* IV.17.43). Our time is better spent proclaiming, preaching and confessing the good news of the Lord's death. This is what the Lord, our children and the world should hear from those who have celebrated the Lord's Supper; this is the conversation we should expect to hear from each other (C. Trimp, *Woord, water en wijn*, p. 80).

Knowing the character of the Lord's Supper will help us in our celebration. We remember Christ's death but it does not stop there. Thinking results in thanking. The Lord's Supper is a festival of praise. All too often we overlook this aspect of the Lord's Supper. Why do we remember Christ's death? To celebrate and give thanks to the Lord for all that He has done for us. With joy we take the cup of salvation (Psalm 116:13). The more we know our own sinful nature, and how we continue to fall short of what the Lord requires of us, the more we see that there is great reason for celebration. A broken spirit is combined with songs of praise! Thus the Lord's Supper is not a funeral service but a festival.

At the Lord's Supper festival we have a full program. We are kept busy observing the riches we share in Christ. Our Lord invites and proclaims,

“As certainly as you receive the bread and the cup so certainly I will nourish you, I will feed you to eternal life. Are you lonely? Come! Are you wavering? Come! Are you struggling with daily sins of weakness? Come! Do you live with doubts? Come to the festival where you can see before your eyes my love in action.”

A meal of communion

Believers celebrate the Lord's Supper as communicant members – rejoicing in the communion they have with Christ and one another. Communion is to share a common life and a common goal. We are united together by one Lord and one faith. At the Lord's Supper we celebrate the rich bond we have with God and with one another. We do not celebrate as separate individuals but as a communion of saints, which means that we as members of Christ, have communion with Him and share in all his treasures and gifts (Heidelberg Catechism A. 55). This bond of communion must grow stronger all the time because Christ is united to us in the same intimacy present in a perfect marriage relationship.

The Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 28 A. 76) uses the language of the song Adam sang when the Lord created Eve to be his wife, to highlight how Christ and his church are one. Adam sang of the intimate communion which is found in marriage between husband and wife. The woman God created was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh. This intimacy is also part of the relationship between Christ and his people. For the church is married to Christ. The church is one flesh with Christ her Saviour. That is why He died for her. His death speaks of his inexpressible love for

sinners. Although Christ is in heaven and we are on earth there is an intimate bond between Christ and his people.

Living in communion with Christ we have to separate ourselves from sin. Paul warns the church at Corinth that they cannot partake of the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. They cannot have communion with the Lord and at the same time hang on to sin and to friends who live in sin. They must shun the worship of idols (1 Corinthians 10:21). The Corinthians, as sensible people, must judge for themselves that they cannot have communion with the realm of the devil and at the same time consider themselves to be Christian. For the participation at the Lord's Supper pulls you away from the realm of darkness.

Communion with one another

The communion we have with Christ at the Lord's Supper determines the communion we have with others. More and more we become one with those who share the same faith. We overlook their quirks and weak points just as they will have to overlook ours. A common faith in Christ binds us together as members of the same body.

"Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of one loaf."

(1 Corinthians 10:17)

John Calvin wrote these meaningful words in his Institutes:

The Lord has intended the Supper to be a kind of exhortation for us, which can more forcefully than any other means quicken and inspire us both to purity and holiness of life, and to love, peace and concord...

We shall benefit very much from the Sacrament if this thought is impressed and engraved upon our minds: that none of the brethren can be injured, despised, rejected, abused, or in any way offended by us, without at the same time injuring, despising, and abusing Christ by the wrongs we do; that we cannot disagree with our brethren without at the same time disagreeing with Christ; that we cannot love Christ without loving Him in the brethren; that we ought to take the same care of our brethren's bodies as we take of our own; for they are members of our body; and that as no part of our body is touched by any feeling of pain which is not spread among all the rest, so we ought not to allow a brother to be affected by any evil, without being touched with compassion for him

(Institutes IV.17.38)

A divine command

Jesus Christ governs us by his Word and Spirit and keeps us in the redemption obtained for us. As our King He rules our lives and calls us to obey his commandments. This too is made visible at the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It is not our choice whether we wish to join the feast of communion. Christ commands me and all believers to bend under his authority and to eat of this broken bread and to drink this cup in remembrance of Him. It is Christ who makes it possible for us to celebrate and who requires that we celebrate. Those who neglect to come to the Lord's table, neglect the communion of the church.

Christ does not give the command to celebrate to chastise us but in order that we take with us the guarantee that in Him we are able to struggle against sin. He wants us to confess that we are weak but He is strong. Therefore, let us never devalue what goes on at the table of our Lord. The celebration of the Lord's Supper is a feast of Christ's love. In the communion of saints we share in the riches of his grace. Let us, therefore, remember, believe and proclaim his death until He comes again and invites us to the marriage feast of the Lamb.

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