

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #37, Lord's Day 29*

## The Value of the Lord's Supper



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

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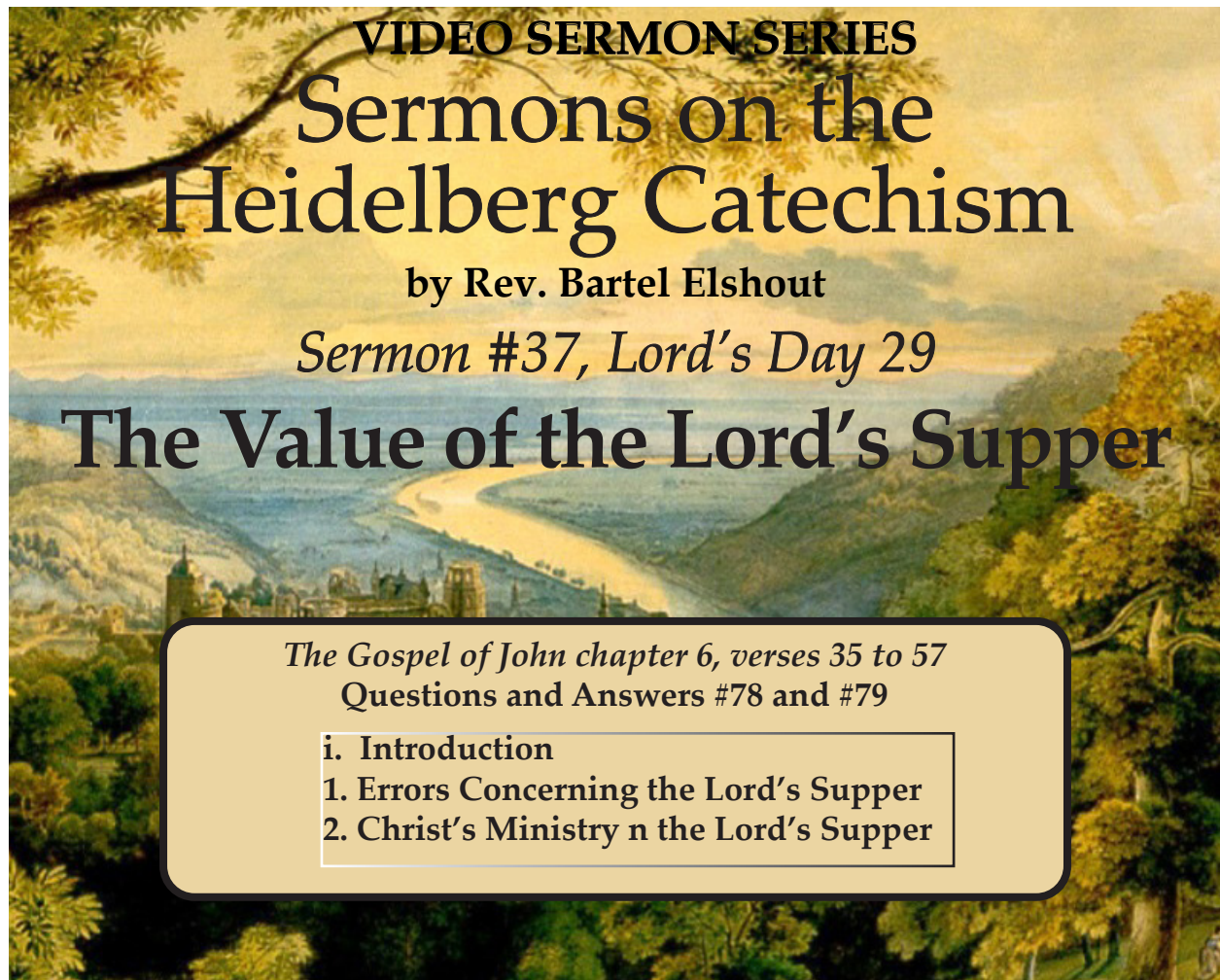
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*Sermon #37, Lord's Day 29*

## The Value of the Lord's Supper

*The Gospel of John chapter 6, verses 35 to 57*  
Questions and Answers #78 and #79

### i. Introduction

1. Errors Concerning the Lord's Supper
2. Christ's Ministry in the Lord's Supper

### Introduction

Boys and girls, do you remember why we use bread at the Lord's Supper? And why wine? Why did the Lord Jesus select those elements? Why do we have broken bread, and why do we have shared wine? Why do we not have waffles, or pancakes, or orange juice? Why bread and wine? And we know that nothing God ever does, nothing that Christ ever did was arbitrary.

First of all, these elements were readily available when he instituted the Lord's Supper, because they were celebrating the Passover, and bread and wine were staple elements of the Passover. He takes those elements, and then brings them into the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It also was very symbolic of a very basic meal of the people of Israel—bread and wine. But there's far greater significance in all of this, because we're going to focus on that tonight. What does it mean? At the Lord's Table, what does it mean to eat that broken bread? What does it mean to drink that shared wine? Then we have to think about what is involved in the making of bread, and what is involved in the making of wine?

As you know that when we eat a slice of bread, many things have happened to provide us with that nourishment. Bread is actually an extraordinary product of God's Providence. That's why Jesus taught us, in the Lord's Prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread." Because so many providential things have to happen, but what's significant is that in order for us to have bread, in order for us to benefit, the wheat has to be ground by millstones, has to be subjected to this process. And then, the

dough has to be subjected to intense heat in order to provide for us bread that is edible.

All of this is symbolic of all that Christ endured on the cross, where he suffered the grinding power of God's wrath descending upon him as our substitute; where he experienced the intense heat of God's wrath burning in his holy soul, in order to become the bread of life for sinners. And also, wine, the fruit of the grape. What has to happen is those grapes have to be crushed in order to yield wine, again symbolic of what Christ endured and suffered on the cross of Calvary, in order to be the Savior of sinners, in order to provide us with spiritual nourishment. And so, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are intended to remind us of that time and time again.

Tonight, we're going to look at Lord's Day 29 of the Heidelberg Catechism, which gives us more instruction about that precious sacrament, the Lord's Supper. And so, let's turn to Lord's Day 29 in the back of our psalter, and let's read Questions and Answers #78 and #79.

Question #78: *Do then the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?*

The Answer is: *Not at all; but as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, neither is the washing away of sin itself, being only the sign and confirmation thereof appointed of God; so the bread in the Lord's Supper is not changed into the very body of Christ, though agreeably to the nature and properties of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ Jesus.*

Question #79: *Why then doth Christ call the bread His body, and the cup His blood, or the new covenant in His blood; and Paul, the "communion of the body and blood of Christ"?*

The Answer: *Christ speaks thus not without great reason, namely, not only thereby to teach us that as bread and wine support this temporal life, so His crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink whereby our souls are fed to eternal life; but more especially by these visible signs and pledges to assure us that we are as really partakers of His true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of Him; and that all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.*

So, this Lord's Day summarizes the teaching of Scripture regarding *The Value of the Lord's Supper*. First of all, we will address *Errors Concerning the Lord's Supper*, because we need to understand that the Heidelberg Catechism is very much an historical document. There is an historical context that prompted them to address this matter in great detail. And yet, by focusing on these errors, there is much instruction for us until this day. And then, secondly, *Christ's Ministry in the Lord's Supper*, what is it that Christ is accomplishing in the believers when we partake of the bread and the wine, when by faith, we eat his body, and by faith, we drink his blood. So, *The Value of the Lord's Supper*; first of all, *Errors Concerning It*, and secondly, *Christ's Ministry in the Lord's Supper*.

## **1. Errors Concerning the Lord's Supper**

So, when the Heidelberg Catechism was composed, there was a great controversy in Heidelberg between the Lutherans<sup>1</sup> and the followers of Calvin<sup>2</sup> regarding the Lord's supper. And it was that controversy, actually, that prompted Frederick the Wise<sup>3</sup> to ask those two young men to compose the Heidelberg Catechism to instruct the young people in Heidelberg, and also the sacraments. That's why so much space is given to the sacraments in the Heidelberg Catechism. And yet, congregation,

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1 Followers of Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German priest, theologian, author, hymn writer, professor, and former Augustinian friar, who was the seminal figure of the Protestant Reformation in Europe.

2 John Calvin, or, Jean Calvin, (1509–1564) – was a well-known French theologian, pastor, writer, and well-known Reformer in Geneva during the Protestant Reformation, after whom many Reformers patterned their teachings.

3 Frederick III (1515–1576), was the elector Palatine of the Rhine from 1559 to 1576, and a leader of the German Protestant princes who worked for a protestant victory in Germany, France, and the Netherlands.

even though it may seem to us that perhaps the amount of space given to the sacraments is somewhat excessive, we need to realize that a proper understanding of the sacraments, until this day, is very, very essential for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, what are the two errors that are basically addressed in this Lord's Day? Well, first of all, we're going to look at what we call the overestimation of the Lord's Supper, and then we will look at the underestimation of the Lord's Supper; and thirdly, at the proper estimation of the Lord's Supper.

First of all, *the overestimation*, and of course, what comes to mind immediately is, of course, the Roman Catholic mass, the Eucharist in Roman Catholicism. Because we know that what is essential to the administration of the Eucharist is the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. Now, that's a big word; that's a mouthful. Boys and girls, let's listen to it. It has the word *substance* in it, and it has the word *trans* in it. So we talk about transformers, which are attached to the power poles, which transform high voltage (electricity) into voltage that is usable for our house. It changes it into something that we can use. So *transubstantiation* means that the Roman Catholic Church, until this day, teaches that when the Eucharist is administered, that there is a real change of substance, that when the priest pronounces the formula, that the bread, in a very real way, becomes the physical body of Christ, and that the wine becomes the blood of Christ.

Now, this didn't happen overnight. In the early Christian church, no such doctrine was taught. But gradually, gradually, as church history progresses, they viewed the Lord's Supper more and more as a mystery, until in the year 1215, in the so-called Lateran Council, this became the official teaching of the church. And so, until this day, when a Roman Catholic priest administers the mass, a Roman Catholic, until this day, really believes that they are eating the real flesh of Christ, that they are drinking the real blood of Christ.

Now, Luther, as the great Reformer, realized that that could not possibly be the case. Because what's so very strange about it, is that a Roman Catholic would admit today that the bread still looks like bread, and feels like bread, and tastes like bread; and that the wine still tastes like wine. And yet they really believe that Christ is being sacrificed, that the real sacrifice of Christ is being repeated. And next week, the Lord willing, we're going to look at that Roman Catholic mass in more detail by way of Lord's Day 30.

So Luther wanted to move away from that, but Luther embraced another error to replace this one. And why? Because one thing that was very precious to Luther, though he rejected the heresy and the error of Roman Catholicism, what was very precious to him is the real presence of Christ. Luther wanted to preserve that Christ is very really present when the Lord's Supper is administered. So he came up with what we call *consubstantiation*. And congregation, it's a very difficult concept to explain. So Luther moves away from this idea that we're actually eating the real flesh of Christ, and that we're actually drinking the real blood. But he said, what happens at the Lord's Supper, is that just like iron begins to glow when you hold it in the fire, without the iron being changed, so somehow, when the Lord Supper is administered, and he used this phrase, that "Christ is really present, in, with, and under the Lord's Supper." So somehow, somehow Luther still taught the idea that Christ's presence is very real and is very tangible, in a very unique and mysterious way that no one has ever been able to explain.

That's why Luther also embraced the error of the fact that when Christ became glorified, and at his ascension, that his physical body became everywhere present. And Luther had to teach that to be able to sustain this doctrine. Luther had to believe that, upon his ascension, that now the physical body of Christ is everywhere present in the world, wherever the Eucharist is administered, wherever the Lord's Supper is administered. And congregation, we know that that is simply not so.

We know that the Bible is crystal clear that Christ's humanity remained a genuine humanity. And that means that in his human nature, he can only be in one place; and that in his human nature, in a very real and visible way, he left this earth and ascended into glory. Because if that were true what Luther believed, that the body of Christ has become everywhere present, then his human nature is no longer a real human nature, and that is such an important part of the doctrine of Christ, that the incarnate Christ, that his human nature is as real as our human nature, and that in Christ, God and man are united. And Christ, now in his humanity, in his glorified humanity, is at the Father's right hand. And that he now ministers to us, not in his physical body, but he ministers to us by means of his Holy Spirit. That's why he said to the disciples, It is profitable for me that I go away, because if I do not go away, the Comforter cannot come (John 16:7). And Christ encouraged his disciples that through his Spirit, he would abide with them and with his people forever. But what we need to understand, and that's where we have to give Luther credit. Luther did not want to let go of the fact that Christ himself is present when the Lord's Supper is administered.

Now, the Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli,<sup>4</sup> he overreacted in an entirely different direction. And Zwingli, again was motivated by the fact that he wanted to rid the church of every form of idolatry. And Zwingli was very concerned about attaching too much value to the bread and to the wine, that idolatry would again find its way into the church. And so, Zwingli said the Lord's Supper is only a memorial, it is only a memorial meal in which we remember the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, his intention was good, because Zwingli, and he expressed it in writing, he revolted at the idea that people were being taught that they were eating the flesh of Christ in a physical way, and that they were drinking the blood of Christ in a physical way, so that actually, the body, the physical body of Christ would make its way through the human digestive system. He revolted at that idea, and so he swung way over to the other side. He said, "Now, what did Christ say at the institution of the Lord's Supper? He said, 'This do in remembrance of me.'"

And of course, those words are very, very meaningful. We repeat them every time when we administer the Lord's Supper. It is, in a very real way, a commemoration of the death of Christ. We are remembering him. Christ is saying, when you partake of this meal, your focus must be on me. But when he says, "Do this in remembrance of me," he obviously means more than that we only remember what he did. What he means by that phrase, "I want your focus to be on me. I want your focus to be on my Person. I want your focus to be on my work." And so, the danger is when we view the Lord's Supper merely as a memorial, that we lose something very, very significant. And that the danger is there that the Lord Supper becomes very man-centered. It's about me. It's about what I remember. It is about what I get out of it.

And what a blessing it is that Calvin, John Calvin, was used by God to bring this to a proper resolution. And you may know, if you know anything about church history, an attempt was made to reconcile Luther and Zwingli. In 1529, October of 1529, a special meeting was convened in Marburg, Germany, and they spent days, and they drafted a set of articles. The whole purpose was to bring the two important camps of the Reformation together, and they could agree to fourteen out of the fifteen, but not on this one. When it came to that issue, Luther absolutely refused to hear it. With chalk, he wrote on the table, "This is my body." And Zwingli desperately tried to convince Luther that this is figurative language, and we all understand that, of course, that was correct. When Jesus said it at the institution of the Lord's Supper, he did not take a piece of his arm and give it to his disciples. When he said, "This is my body," he gave them a piece of bread. And obviously, the meaning is, "This represents my body. This is symbolic of my body." And Luther refused to yield,

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<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Zwingli (aka Huldrych Zwingli) (1484–1531) was a Swiss Christian theologian, musician, and leader of the Reformation in Switzerland.

even going so far that he questioned whether Zwingli and his followers were true believers. And sadly, that whole issue caused the first split in the church of the Reformation. But what did Calvin grasp, what did Calvin understand? He understood that we need to bring both concepts together, that yes, the Lord's Supper is a memorial of the death of Christ. Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 24, he says, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me. This cup is the New Testament in my blood. this do ye as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me." So it is a memorial meal. It is a meal of remembrance.

But Calvin realized that we must also emphasize the presence of Christ, however not physically, but that Christ is spiritually present in a very real sense when the Lord's Supper is administered. That's why, you may have noticed that when we have the administration of the Lord's Supper, I always begin by emphasizing that I opening the Table on behalf of the King of the church, the real host of the Table. And so, Christ is present. It's not just that we remember him, but he is present in a very real way, but he is present by his Holy Spirit. And so, his presence matters. That's expressed also in the language of Lord's Day 29. That's what makes the Lord's Supper so very precious. That when we sit at that Table, it is Christ who nourishes us. It is Christ who gives the bread and the wine. It is Christ, who by his Spirit, enable us to benefit from that very blessed and precious spiritual meal.

So, having said all of this, let us now focus on,

## **2. Christ's Ministry in the Lord's Supper**

*Why then*, it says, *Why then*, if the bread of the Lord's Supper is not changed into the body of Christ, and if the wine is not changed into his blood, *Why then doth Christ call the bread His body, and the cup His blood, or the new covenant in His blood;* why does Paul speak of the "*communion of the body and blood of Christ*"? And the Answer beautifully shows us the nature of sacrament. It's saying, well, first of all, it teaches us something, so we're going to focus briefly on *what does it teach us?* And secondly, *it assures us of something*. Because, remember, that's what a sacrament is. The sacrament of baptism and of the Lord's Supper, they are signs and seals of the covenant of grace. So, by means of the sacraments, Christ, first of all, teaches us something, he exemplifies something. They are, as I have called them, they are the object lessons that Christ has given us. So they are signs. They represent something. But they also seal something. In other words, by means of the sacraments, Christ wants his people to benefit from what he teaches them. He wants them to appropriate for their own soul, that which is set before them by means of the signs of the sacraments, and in this case, by the signs of the broken bread and the shared wine.

So what we have in the Answer to Question #79 is really the exposition of Calvin's biblical resolution of this conflict between Luther and between Zwingli. So what is the lesson that we must learn, every single time when the Lord's Supper is administered? And the lesson is that his crucified body and shed blood are the true nourishment of spiritual life. This is important. In other words, Christ uses those simple means to provide us with spiritual nourishment.

Boys and girls, you understand that you cannot live without eating and drinking. You know that your physical bodies can only be sustained by taking in food and drink on a regular basis. But you see, just like our bodies need to be nourished in order for them to function properly, in order for us to be healthy—of course, that means we have to eat healthy food—so our souls, our souls need to be nourished with spiritual nourishment. And what's so significant is that what Christ is teaching us in the Lord's Supper is that what is represented by the broken bread, what is represented by the poured wine, as they symbolize the breaking of his body, and the shedding of his blood, that that constitutes the real spiritual nourishment of the soul. It is when we grasp that by faith, when we

grasp its spiritual significance, and the Holy Spirit sheds light upon this, that's what gives strength and vigor to our soul.

In other words, by means of the Lord's Supper, we are taught by the Lord Jesus that you can only prosper spiritually when you find your life entirely in what he has accomplished on the cross. And why is it, why is it that that broken body, why does that nourish our souls? Because that broken body reminds us of the fact that Christ was made a curse for us. That broken body reminds us of the fact that through sin, everything has been broken, everything has been ruined. That's why the body of the second Adam had to be broken, in order to deliver us from the curse, and to restore us again into the favor of God. And so, when, at the Lord's Table, when we eat that bread, when by faith we are actually feasting on that broken body of Christ, it is to remind us that Christ has silenced that curse; that he has been made a curse in our place; that there is no condemnation for us precisely because of what he has accomplished. That gives strength to the soul.

And why do we need that kind of strengthening over and over again? It's because also God's children so easily lose sight of Christ, especially when we sin again, and there's new sin in our life. And at times, we can be so deeply discouraged about who we are and who we remain. We need to be redirected to the finished work of Christ. We need to be redirected to what Christ has accomplished on the cross. We need to be reminded again that his broken body is our warranty, and the curse has been removed, that the curse has been silenced, and that Christ, by his sacrifice has accomplished restoration.

And then, his shed blood, his shed blood, that blood which cleanses from all sin. Oh, that precious truth that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin; that that blood infinitely exceeds my sin; that that blood is of infinite value; that God always sees the blood of his Son, and that behind that blood, behind that blood, we are saved; that that blood shed on the cross covers my entire life, all of my sin, all of my failures, all of my shortcomings, all of it is covered, covered by that precious blood. Oh, we need to be redirected to it time and again, that by faith, we may embrace that. As we drink that wine, when realize that that precious blood is the payment for our sins, the removal of our guilt; that the Father has accepted the payment that his Son had made. And we drink that cup, we realize that that cup is filled with love, because our Savior shed his blood in order to empty the cup of God's wrath. He drank the cup of God's wrath on Calvary's cross; he emptied it. And so, when we sit at that Table, and we drink of that cup, Christ wants us to remember what that blood has accomplished; and that by faith we may embrace it; and by faith, we may appropriate it.

Because that's what Christ desires. He does not want his children to live in doubt. That's why he has commanded us, his servants, to say to you, "Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; this is my blood which is shed for you." I've said this before. Yes, God's children struggle with doubt. That's precisely why we, as God's servants, have the sacred responsibility to so preach the gospel to deliver you from that doubt; to speak comfortably to Jerusalem, to speak to the heart of Jerusalem, to declare to her that Christ has done a complete work; that by faith, we may so eat that bread, and by faith, we may feed upon that sacrifice of Christ; and by faith, we may find our security in the shedding of his precious blood. Ah, you see, that gives spiritual strength; that gives spiritual energy to the soul. That's why Paul said to the Corinthians, Ultimately, I only want to preach one message—Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Corinthians 2:2). And we need to be redirected to this over, and over, and over again.

How precious it is that in the Lord's Supper, Christ is present in a very real way; that it is Christ who draws so very near to his people; Christ who understands how weak and how feeble we can be, how weak our faith can be. And he comes so very near to us to nourish our needy souls with

his broken body and with his shared wine. That's why it's said here in the Catechism, it says it so beautifully, *So His crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink whereby our souls are fed to eternal life.* What does that mean again, eternal life?

Boys and girls, do you remember what that means, eternal life? Does that just mean that we will live forever. Yes, that's true, those that believe in Christ, by God's grace, they will live forever. But it means much more than that. What is life? What does it mean to be alive? To be alive means that through Christ, I have a real relationship with God, that I am reconciled with Christ. So that in Christ, I may enjoy union and communion with God. That's what Adam and Eve had in Paradise. They lived in the joy of knowing that God was their heavenly Father. They lived in the joy of daily fellowship and communion with him. When the Holy Spirit makes us alive spiritually, that eternal life begins to function here already. That's why it's called a Communion Table. The whole purpose of feeding upon that sacrifice is that, on the basis of that finished work, we may have communion with God, communion at his Table.

And so, what happens at the Lord's Table is therefore, ultimately, a preview of that which is to come; a preview of that glorious reality that awaits the children of God. And that already begins here. That's already tasted here in this life. That's why it's so important that, at the Lord's Table, we do not focus on ourselves; that we do not focus on our friends; that we do not focus on our feelings, but we focus on him: "This do in remembrance of me." Because if we focus on ourselves, if we focus on how we feel, if we focus on whether we are emotional or not, then we will not receive a blessing. But we must come there, and we must focus on him.

And when we eat that bread, we ought to do so by faith. When we drink the wine, we are to do so by faith. Now, I'm not saying that it always goes without emotion. There can be emotion that comes with it, but ultimately, the true partaking of the Lord's Table is first and foremost, an exercise of faith. That's why, when the Lord's Supper is administered, we always pray for the work and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit who, alone can enable us to embrace this; who alone can enable us to understand this; who alone can enable us to embrace this. But that's precisely his desire. Oh, the desire of the Holy Spirit is to give God's children, not only a clear understanding of who Christ is and what he has accomplished, but his work is to take out of him and to show it unto us; his work is to glorify him; his work, as the Spirit of adoption is to so enable us to understand the gospel that we will say, "Abba, Father." That's his desire. That's his goal.

And that's why, secondly, not only are we taught something, the Catechism says that *more especially by these visible signs and pledges to assure us that we are as really partakers of His true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of Him.* So, when we partake of the Lord's Table, we are doing something with our physical mouth. We are ingesting real bread; we are ingesting real wine. But the point is this, that spiritually we partake of this with the mouth of faith. Faith is the mouth by which we partake of the bread and the wine, of the body and of the blood of Christ.

And so, the Catechism is saying that Christ wants to assure us that, as you partake of this bread and wine—that's the object lesson—that as really as that bread and wine nourish your physical body, he wants you to grasp, dear believer, he wants you to understand that so really does his broken body and his shed blood nourish your soul. Oh, Christ wants you to understand that what he has done for you is real. He wants you to understand, he wants to seal this to you.

You see, the true biblical gospel is too good to be true. The biblical gospel is ultimately counterintuitive. It runs directly contrary to our natural way of thinking. That's why we have to be taught over and over again. That's why Jesus said to the men of Emmaus, "O slow to believe all that the prophets have written" (Luke 24:25). As I've said here more often, God's people are all

learning-disabled students in the school of Christ. All students that need to learn the same lesson over and over again. But the point the Catechism is making is that Christ desires to assure his people that they are the personal beneficiaries of what he has accomplished.

The whole idea that that assurance is almost unattainable is not only contrary to the Word of God, it is so offensive when we think of who Christ is and what he has accomplished; with the Christ who gave himself as a sacrifice for sin of his people; who was wounded for their transgressions, and who was bruised for their iniquities; would that Christ be satisfied if his children primarily lived in doubt their whole life as to whether what he has accomplished is also for them? No, he does a complete work. He wants his children to experience the joy of that salvation by resting time and again in his finished and accomplished work.

That's why it says here, *That all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.* That's a remarkable statement, congregation. It reminds us of Lord's Day 23. Let's turn there for a moment. Lord's Day 23, that beautiful language, that remarkable Lord's Day about justification, where we have very similar language. Question #60, let's read it again: *How art thou righteous before God?—Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me—and it always does—that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin; yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me, inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.* That's what the Catechism here is reaffirming once again. And all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours.

And dear believer, God views you always in light of his Son. Even if you cannot always grasp it, God always views you in Christ. He views you as if you had obeyed the law perfectly. He views you as if you had made satisfaction for sin. He views you as if you were his Son, as if you had made perfect personal satisfaction for your sins.

And that's the lesson that God wanted to teach Israel as well. That was the whole purpose of the morning and evening sacrifice. We read in Exodus 29, if you read those final verses, it's remarkable how the Lord emphasizes that the purpose of those sacrifices was to assure his people that he was their God, "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God" (verse 46). They shall know it. That's God's desire. God's desire is that we know it. God wants his children to be assured of their salvation. The Holy Spirit, his desire as the Spirit of Christ, as the great applier of all that Christ has accomplished, his goal, his work is to lead God's people to an assured knowledge that they are partakers of all that Christ has accomplished. "He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and he will shew it unto you" (John 16:14).

Oh, what a blessed sacrament is the Lord's Supper. That's why it is to our benefit that it addresses this in such detail, lest we take it for granted; lest that blessed sacrament would become commonplace. And so, it would be to our benefit, before we take the Lord's Supper, is to read these Lord's Days again. Read them for yourself, as a way of preparing yourself for that blessed sacrament.

And so, we pray that God will bless this instruction, so that we come to a biblical understanding of the sacraments; a biblical understanding of who Christ is and what he has accomplished; a biblical understanding of what it is that Christ seeks to accomplish by means of that blessed sacrament which he instituted, of all times, on the eve of his crucifixion, when he knew what was coming. He was concerned about those disciples, but not only about them. We know from his High

Priestly Prayer in John 17, that he had not only them on his mind, but all throughout the ages that would believe on him through their words. Oh, by instituting that blessed sacrament, Christ gave the church a sacrament, by which his people would be nourished, and fed, and strengthened until the day of his return.

And let me be perfectly clear that just because you partake physically, or just because you sit there, does not mean you are a partaker of it. Just being there will not gain you anything. Only by faith, by true faith, can we benefit from the Lord's Supper. It is only a true believer who benefits from that sacrament. Attendance at the Lord's Table will not save you, will not qualify you in the day of days. That's why we always have a preparatory message, so that we engage in self-examination.

My friend, if you have never partaken of it, let me emphasize again how serious that is. Because if you are not a partaker of Christ and what he has accomplished, then the wrath of God still abides on you. To be not prepared for the Lord's Table is to be unprepared to meet God. Because when you meet God, when I meet God, we will be judged by our relationship to his Son. And with perfect judgment, he knows who they are—who are in his Son, and who are not. And what a fearful thing it will be to fall into the hands of the living God, especially if you have lived under the preaching of the gospel. If Christ has been preached to us, if Christ has been offered to us freely in the gospel, and then to perish, God forbid that that would be true of any of us.

And so, I ask you at the conclusion, oh, my dear friend, my dear congregation, what do you think of this Christ? What does this Christ mean to you? Do you belong to those that hunger and thirst after him and his righteousness? Do you belong to those who cannot be satisfied except with Christ. Do you understand in some measure what that means, "Give me Jesus or else I die"? Because to them that believe, Christ is precious. And a true believer needs a Savior whose body was broken and whose blood was shed. A true believer understands that because they are sinners, they are guilty and undone, they need a crucified Christ, not a Jesus who is your friend, or who is your problem solver, but a Christ who came to seek and to save that which was lost; a Christ who came to save sinners. That's why, when we preached on John 16, we emphasized that the Spirit who comes into the world convicts of sin. Why?—to make room for the righteousness of Christ, so that we understand that, as a sinner, my only hope is in that Christ, in his finished work. And so, may God grant that we may be found in Christ, because Christ said, "If you don't eat my body, if you don't drink my blood; if you do not feast upon my sacrifice, it's because there is no life in you" (John 6:53). So, the mark of spiritual life, the life wrought by the Holy Spirit, is that that life is always drawn always and again to that sacrifice. The nature of that life is that it feasts upon that sacrifice. That's the evidence of spiritual life. And it is this Christ who promises—that's how we began when we read John 6—it is Christ who said, "I am the bread of life. He that cometh unto me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (verse 35). Amen.

### **Let's pray.**

Gracious Father in heaven, wilt thou be the applier of thy own Word. We have set before the congregation the essential teaching of thy Word regarding the Lord's Supper articulated by the Heidelberg Catechism. And Lord, wilt thou bless this instruction that this will help thy children to gain a better understanding of what this sacrament means, what it is that thou art communicating by means of it, what thou art teaching us, but also the wonderful truth that by means of that sacrament, it is thy desire, thy loving desire and purpose to seal to our hearts and souls that what he has accomplished is also for us. And so, Lord, we pray that thou would use the ministry of Word and sacrament also in our midst, that we may truly grow in the grace and knowledge of the

Lord Jesus Christ. And Lord, we pray for those who do not yet know this Christ personally and experientially. Oh, awaken them to the great danger in which they are, that they would yet seek this Christ who draws near to us in the gospel; this Christ who stretches forth his hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people; this Christ who is the willing and able Savior of sinners, who has promised that he that comes to him shall in no wise be cast out. And so, Lord, bless thy very own Word, may we carry it with us into this new week. Bless us in our daily calling. Give us grace to walk in thy ways, that if we profess the name of Christ, that we would honor him by honoring his Word in every aspect of our lives. Keep us from harm and danger. And hear us only for the sake of this Christ. Amen.