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by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #50

Means of Grace:
The Lord's Supper
Catechism Question 96



The John Knox Institute
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Lecture #50

Means of Grace: The Lord's Supper

Question 96: *What is the Lord's Supper?*

Answer: *The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace.*

We now turn our attention to the other sacrament of the New Testament, the Lord's Supper. We have two lessons dedicated to this great privilege and means of grace, but first, this lesson looks at what the Lord's Supper is. The next lesson, we'll look at how we're to partake of the Lord's Supper, and to do so rightly.

Well, for this lesson, we'll look at Question #96: "What is the Lord's Supper?"—the Answer: "The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ's appointment, his death is shewed forth; and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace."

There is a lot in this Answer, and it is our hope that this lesson will encourage you to continue studying, because there's many that we won't be able to go too in depth in. But to help you, you go to the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all of which record the institution of the Lord's Supper, and you'll see rich things there that Christ says regarding the Lord's Supper. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, as we'll see, Paul spends time teaching on the same topic.

In the Answer itself, notice the words "corporal" and "carnal." Both of these words have to do with something physical: corporal—our body; and carnal—our flesh. And so it says that "the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood." They're saying that there's not a physical eating of his body and blood, and so on. We'll talk more about that later on.

But for our lesson itself, we want to look at three main points. Since the Lord's Supper is a New Testament sacrament, like baptism is a New Testament sacrament, two of our points are similar to our lesson on baptism. For instance, our first point is that the Lord's Supper is an instituted sign. You'll remember, baptism is an instituted sign. And our second point is that there's a spiritual

message to the Lord's Supper. And you'll remember that baptism has a spiritual message. But for our third point, we remember that the Lord's Supper gives us a spiritual meal. And so, our three points: *An Instituted Sign*; *A Spiritual Message*; and *A Spiritual Meal*.

Well, firstly then, *An Instituted Sign*. Again, as a sacrament, the Lord's Supper was immediately instituted by Christ. It was not established by his apostles, or the church in general. Rather, the Lord's Supper was given by Christ himself. In other words, it was established by the only Head and King of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ. And this is clear in the Gospel accounts. It's likewise clear by Paul's words in 1 Corinthians, chapter 11, when he speaks of that which he received of the Lord, he has delivered unto them (verse 23). And so it's important to see this. Just as with baptism, the Lord's Supper is Christ's instituted sacrament. And as he's the one who instituted both baptism and the Lord's Supper, then we have no right to modify or change them at all, unless he has told us to do so.

Well, looking more particularly at the Lord's Supper as a sign, it uses outward and physical things, namely bread and wine. Well, some have tried to make much of the fact that at the passover, the bread used was unleavened. This, of course, was because of the nature of the passover and unleavened bread. We don't deny that unleavened bread was used. However, when the bread is spoken of in the institution by Christ, and elsewhere in the New Testament, instead of using a word for "unleavened bread"—which there is one in the Greek—the word that is used is always the word for "common bread," which would include unleavened or leavened bread. And this point informs us that the bread that's to be used as a sign is simply common bread. At Jesus' time at the passover, the common bread that was there was unleavened bread, whereas in your region, or in my region, the common bread may be leavened bread. And so, it's common bread that is needed. This is helpful, because bread, of course, is a basic provision for health. While there is a rare disease by which some cannot digest aspects of bread rightly, the majority of mankind depend on various types of bread, and this even in their normal day-to-day meals. Now this is important for understanding the sign. We say that bread is a staple food, that is, it is standard, and it's part of the daily diet of mankind. Well, by using bread as the outward sign, Christ is telling us of the necessity of his death and believing his death, as we'll see.

Similarly, the wine used was common wine. We should remember that non-alcoholic, or more technically, unfermented grape juice, as we know it, did not exist in Jesus' day. The passover itself made use of wine. That is, we could say, grape juice that he become fermented, so as to have alcohol. The simplest evidence of this is in the New Testament itself. When Paul was correcting abuses in Corinth, he reproved them in the following terms—1 Corinthians 11, verses 20 and 21: "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken." That word "drunken" means to be drunk, to be overtaken by the effects of the abuse of alcohol. The Corinthians, in other words, had begun treating the Lord's Supper as if it were a common banquet, or a festival, or a common feast. They had misunderstood its purpose and nature. Because of this, they gorged themselves selfishly upon the bread, and upon the wine, so much so that some had become drunk, or intoxicated. Well, however much grape juice we drink, we will not become intoxicated. In order to become "drunken" or intoxicated, there must be alcohol involved.

The point is, in the Lord's Supper, Christ established wine to be used. There's a reason for this—many reasons. One is, when we think about the purpose of wine. Psalm 104, verse 15, reminds us that wine gladdens the heart of man. It is shameful that in our day, as in previous days, people abuse this good gift of the Lord. They make an idol of earthly pleasure, and their gods

are their bellies and their appetites, and they abuse the gift of God to their own shame, and they become drunken. And everywhere it's mentioned, drunkenness is shown to be and is condemned as sin. In no way does the Bible condone or permit drunkenness. However, though many abuse alcohol and wine, this does not mean we should not rightly use it to God's glory, especially in the Lord's Supper. Wine used as Christ directed points us to the gladness that he brings, and Christ was wise to institute this, and we should not seek to be wiser than he is.

Well, before moving on to consider more fully what these signs mean, notice that it's not simply bread and wine that stands as the signs. The *Catechism* rightly indicates that this common bread and this common wine have actions done to them. Notice, "by giving and receiving bread and wine according to Christ's appointment." It's this then that holds for the message. The bread and wine are not to be paraded around and looked upon. They're certainly not to be worshipped or revered. They're not merely to be thought upon in deep meditation. They are to be given by the minister in accordance with Christ's appointment, and received by the people. These words "according to Christ's appointment" are tremendously important. We referenced earlier, Paul mentioning this, 1 Corinthians 11, verse 23: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:" and so on. Notice that, though an apostle, Paul was very careful to observe the Lord's Supper in the same way that Christ established it. And so we need to use the bread and the wine as Christ established it. We need to be able to say, "As we're received, so have we delivered," as ministers of the gospel in our day.

Well, there's several parts to the giving and receiving of bread and wine as Christ did. First, as you look at the Gospel accounts, and as Paul himself states, he took it into his hands. So he took the bread, as the Gospels tell us, and he gave thanks—he blessed it. So the first thing he did was he took it into his hands. Second, he gives thanks and blesses it. But then third, he breaks the bread. And then fourth, he pronounces the meaning of the broken bread, "This is my body which is broken for you." And then fifth, he passed the bread and told them to eat it in remembrance of him. So we can summarize by saying there are five things surrounding Christ's giving of the bread.

Similarly with the cup. First, he took the cup of wine in his hands. Second, he gave thanks and blessed it. Third, he explained the meaning of the wine. And fourth, he passed the same cup to the disciples at the table, that they would drink it. "This cup is the new testament in my blood," he said as holding the cup. "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me."

So these actions are full of meaning, as we'll see. Mark them down well in your mind. There are five basic actions regarding the Lord's Supper with reference to the bread; and there are four basic actions regarding the Lord's Supper with reference to the wine. For the bread, it's taken, it's blessed, it's broken, it's explained, it's shared. Similarly, for the cup, there are four actions. It's taken, it's blessed, it's explained, and then it's shared with the communicants. Remember these actions well. Bread and wine are the elements—the things used. But then there are actions with the bread and wine that make up the outward sign of the Lord's Supper.

Well, second then, *A Spiritual Message*. Having considered the outward part of the sign—the bread and wine, with actions performed to them—now consider what these mean. The *Catechism* says simply and yet elegantly that by this giving and receiving according to Christ's appointment, the bread and the wine, "his death is shewed forth." This is the main message of the Lord's Supper. Just as baptism's message is the message of the gospel—cleansing us from our sins, receiving us into fellowship with God through Christ, and causing us, as it were, to be in fellowship so that we walk with him—so the message of the Lord's Supper is the gospel—Jesus Christ died for sinners,

and he gives himself to us. It tells us that Jesus died. “This is my body,” Christ says, “which is broken for you... This cup is the new testament in my blood;” elsewhere, “which is shed... for the remission of sins.”

So Christ explains the broken bread by saying, It’s my body broken for you. Now we should be very clear—the bread is not physically his body. It doesn’t change into being his body. At the first Lord’s Supper, his body was intact, he stood before his disciples. He’s pointing out that this is a sign. It’s point out my body. But as my body is to be broken, so this bread is broken. It’s a visible picture of what would happen to him; and from our perspective, what did happen to him. He takes the bread in his hands, and he tears it apart. This reminds us that Christ’s body was torn.

But there’s much more in this. Why was it broken? Why did Christ die? Christ tells us, “This is my body broken for you.” The believers there assembled at the table are reminded that his death was not merely an example, or a lesson in self-denial—surely, it does teach us that. It was preeminently a substitution—Christ in the place of his people, bearing the wrath of God, and Christ assuring them that “I have paid it,” because, just as the bread is broken, so my body was broken for you. Whereas you deserve to die, he’s saying, “I have died in your place.” Whereas you deserve damnation, “I experienced death for you on the cross.” He did it in their place.

The message continues, for he not only displays the broken bread, he then passes it to them, and they take the broken bread and they eat it. It’s a sensible—remember, a sacrament is a sensible sign that appeals to our senses. We can see the bread broken, we can even smell it, and then we can taste it, and so on. It’s a tangible sign to those believers at the table. Christ’s death was for you, and they take it to themselves. What a precious, precious gift it is that Christ gives us. An overwhelming intimacy is here, that Christ is not only speaking to his people in the Lord’s Supper, but he’s giving them these blessed signs, and is showing them his love.

Remember those five actions accompanying the bread, and each one touches on this message. Christ took bread. Remember, the bread is said to represent his body. The Son of God took unto himself our nature. He didn’t take to himself the nature of angels, but rather, human nature. And as he takes the bread, what then does he do? He blessed it, and so he was blessed by God for the purpose of saving sinners. And third, what happens? He explains the meaning, “This is my body which is broken for you,” and the whole Bible, particularly the Gospels, explain that Christ came to save sinners by his death. Fourth, he breaks the bread, and so Christ was broken on the cross to save sinners. Fifth, he shares the bread, and so Christ offers himself to his people to be received by faith. What a wonderful message of salvation. It is the gospel divinely ordained in picture form for us, and more than a picture. The Lord’s Supper tells us of the Son of God incarnate dying for sinners to save them, and saying, “Take it, it’s for you.”

Well, the same could be said of the cup of wine. Remember the four steps? First, he takes the cup. The cup is said to be his blood of the new testament. Well, blood is that vital fluid in our bodies that’s coursing through our veins. And so it’s telling us he took up his life. Second, he blessed it, so God blessed the life and death of Jesus Christ to save sinners. But third, he explained it. And notice his words, “This is my blood of the new testament”—or the new covenant—“which is shed for many.” The blood does not represent his blood while he was whole and living, but when he died, when he shed it. Additionally, it’s called “the blood of the new testament.” A testament is an agreement that certain blessings will be given upon the death of the one who makes the agreement. So sometimes our parents will make a last will and testament, that upon their death, these possessions of theirs will be given to us. Well, Christ says that this is “the blood of the new testament.” You can read of the new testament in Ezekiel 36; I challenge you to do that. And what

you'll see, and what Christ is saying, is that all of those promises, and elsewhere found as well—Jeremiah 31 and elsewhere—the promises of the new covenant are now opened unto you because I who made the promise, I have died. And in taking this cup, you're taking, as it were, that which authorizes you to enjoy all of the benefits of the new testament. This tells us that all of the promises of the new testament are now handed over to us, because he who gave the promise has died. And so all of those promises are secured to us. Well, fourth, it's shared with the believers at the table. This means that the benefits of his death are now shared with all who receive him—the *Catechism* is well ordered—who by faith receive. You see, it's by faith.

Well, third, and finally, *A Spiritual Meal*. What a glorious message this sacrament declares. Were all that were in the Lord's Supper provided to us, it would indeed be overwhelming for us to take in. If only what we just talked about was all that there was for us, we would be privileged. However, this message holds forth more in it to us. The *Catechism* says, "the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment, and growth in grace." Well this tells us that there is actual spiritual health given to us. There is a real communion, a sharing in the benefits of Christ by means of the Lord's Supper received by faith.

Notice that it is not by the mere act of eating or drinking. The Lord's Supper is not automatic. It's not mechanical. This is why the *Catechism* says, "not after a corporal"—that is, bodily—or "carnal"—that is, physical—"manner." The blessings of the sacrament are not enjoyed just by eating and drinking. Rather, they come to us by faith, just as the gospel. As we believe the promise given. And what's the sacrament? It's a visible promise held forth to us. Think of it this way: no one is blessed simply by hearing the gospel preached. They're blessed when, by God's grace, they embrace that preached gospel by faith. They must trust the message of the gospel. Well, so it is at the Lord's table. No one is blessed just by eating and drinking. They're blessed when, by God's grace, they eat and drink and believe the message that is being displayed to them. In other words, while the Lord's Supper is a sign, and carries a message to us, it's also a means of grace, and conveys rich spiritual blessings to the soul who believes and receives Christ by faith. This is why Paul is able to write, in 1 Corinthians 10, and verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" The word "communion" means "to share in," to "fellowship with." So it is that while believers eat with faith the bread given in accordance to Christ's institution, and as they drink with faith the cup given in the Lord's Supper, they enjoy the benefits of Christ in salvation. Well, why is that? It's because they are embracing Jesus Christ, who is freely offering himself to them. It's the gospel ordained by God in picture form, tangible form, so that it's not just the outward actions that are needed at the Lord's table. It is that eating and drinking with faith. This is why Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 11, that we must discern the Lord's body—not just the sign, but what the sign is pointing to. And so we have to have faith. Not just, "I'm going to eat this bread, and drink this wine," but "I'm going to trust in Jesus Christ and believe upon him. And as we do that, we receive blessings.

And what are those blessings? The *Catechism* says that they are "made partakers of his body and blood with all his benefits." This is why the broken bread and the cup of wine is shared them. The bread and wine are signs pointing to Christ's death on the cross. But they're not just held forth to the communicants at the table, they're shared with them. And the believers take the bread and eat it; they take the cup and drink it. And as they do this in faith, they're taking the Lord Jesus Christ to themselves. And they're particularly brought to share in the benefits of his death. All that

his death accomplished is being applied to them. This provides them “spiritual nourishment and growth in grace,” as the *Catechism* says.

Well, surely you’ve been hungry before physically, and when you are, your body is telling you that you need food. Your body needs nourishment, health, and strength, so that you can continue walking, and living, and running, and playing, and growing. Well, to gain that, you eat the food. Food provides you what your body needs. Similarly, our souls need nourishment, but bread and water, or for that matter, bread and wine, they alone cannot give nourishment to our souls. Our spiritual hunger is for spiritual nourishment, and this is given to us in Christ, who then supplies us righteousness, and forgiveness, and wisdom, and holiness, in the shedding of the love of God abroad in our hearts, and strength to resist sin and temptation. And, praise God, all of this is provided us in Jesus Christ. Christ gives us himself. And in doing so, he gives us forgiveness, he gives us God’s love, he assures us of God’s love, he strengthens our souls to resist sin, and to flee temptation, and to resist Satan, and to stand strong in faith. Christ brings us into the fellowship of God. It is this which is our spiritual nourishment, as we feed upon Christ by faith, he nourishes our souls. Christ is held forth to believers in the Lord’s Supper, to be received, and just as believers receive bread and wine, they are to receive Christ by faith, freely offered to them, and doing so to their soul’s nourishment. All of this is in accordance to his promises. So as they look upon the bread and the cup; as they eat the bread and drink the wine, their souls are lifted up to Christ, and they’re feeding upon him through his promises.

Well, as we close, one thing that stands out to us is how caring Christ is for his people. It would have been most gracious for him simply to give us his Word, but he accompanies his Word with his sign and seal. And so, as the believer comes to the table and looks and understands the meaning of the signs, and then he eats in understanding and faith, and as he drinks in understanding and faith, he’s freshly assured of the love of God in Christ; and his soul, being brought to feed upon Christ, is nourished. Oh, what a blessing God gives us!

Well, if you have not yet professed faith, you’re not to come to the Lord’s table yet, because the Lord’s table is for those who trust in Christ, who understand, and can explain to some extent what the bread means, and what the wine means, and what the actions are, and how they hold forth Christ. But preeminently, they must be those who are trusting in Christ, and this is the great need. You might be young, and say, “I’d like to come to the Lord’s table.” Well, your need is first and foremost to come to the Lord. And then, when coming to the Lord in faith, you talk with your elders, talk with your parents, and Lord willing, in due time, you too can come to the Lord’s table and enjoy his fellowship to your soul’s strengthening, as you feed upon him by faith. May the Lord bless it now and forever.