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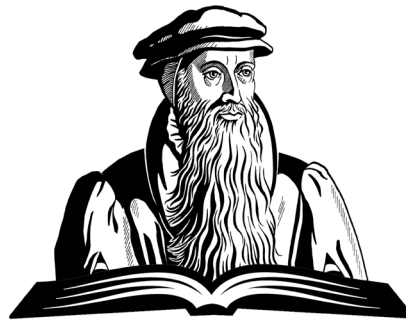
*Shorter*  
**CATECHISM**

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

*by Rev. Jonathan Mattull*

Lecture #51

**Means of Grace:**  
**Receiving the Lord's Supper**  
*Catechism Question 97*



**The John Knox Institute**  
of Higher Education

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*Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide*

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# *The Shorter CATECHISM*

## VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

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### Lecture #51

## Means of Grace: Receiving the Lord's Supper

**Question 97:** *What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?*

**Answer:** *It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.*

In the previous lesson, we looked at the meaning of the Lord's Supper—what it is. In this lesson, we look at how it is we should receive the Lord's Supper. We need to remember that Christianity is not magic. Although there are deep mysteries, the Lord has given us his Word, in order to instruct us that we may grow in our understanding. And this is not only to grow in our understanding of him, but of the means of grace—his Word, the sacraments, and prayer. And so we learn more about his promises, his commandments, and all of his ordinances. And so, when we think about attending the Lord's Supper and partaking of the bread and the wine in accordance to Christ's Word, we need to draw near with an understanding of what the Lord is doing, and how we may derive benefit from him by the means of the Lord's Supper.

Well, as we saw in the last lesson, the Lord's Supper is full of much that goes beyond our fullest understanding. However, this does not mean that we should simply approach the Lord's table carelessly, or simply thinking that the benefits of the Lord's Supper will automatically be given to us. In fact, as we'll see, the Lord warns us in order to prevent danger to our souls. And he instructs us to approach with understanding, and with a cultivation of grace, and with our faith fixed upon Christ, that by him, through this means, our souls will be strengthened.

Well, our Question today helps us see what is needed for us to receive the Lord's Supper rightly, that we may come for a blessing from the Lord Jesus Christ. So Question #97 of the *Shorter Catechism*: “What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper?”—“It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's Supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgment to themselves.”

The word “partake” refers to coming to the Lord Supper, and eating and drinking the bread and the wine. This is to participate in the Lord's Supper; to share in what's taking place.

The word “worthily” is not speaking of a work that we have earned or merited, it’s speaking of the way that we participate in the Lord’s Supper. Are we doing this in a way that is worthy of, or appropriate to, the Lord’s Supper. Is it fitting? Is it the way that Christ has said we should. In other words, it’s saying what is required for us rightly to partake of the Lord’s Supper.

At the end of the Answer, you’ll see the opposite word—“unworthily.” This refers to someone who comes in a way that is not appropriate to the Lord’s Supper. Well, no one is strictly in himself worthy to come. But there is a right way of coming. There’s also a wrong way of coming, and this is what our lesson focuses on today.

This Question helps us to see how a believer comes to the Lord’s Supper rightly, in order to enjoy the benefits that Christ Jesus holds out to him. An important passage to help us understand this is 1 Corinthians 11, verses 26 through 32. Paul saw the church of Corinth abusing the Lord’s Supper, so he sought to correct and reform it according to the way Christ intended. So notice these verses, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”

There’s a lot in this passage, but you’ll notice the main parts of the Question and Answer before us. So there were those eating and drinking unworthily. We see as well that they needed to discern the Lord’s body. They also needed to examine themselves. And there was the warning that if they persisted in their eating and drinking unworthily, they risks judgment. The word here, “damnation,” is a word that means to be judged, and the severity of judgment, even of death and illness, as Paul mentions. So we see the idea of the answer represented by the text. In fact, it’s better to say the *Catechism* is faithfully representing the teaching of the Scripture.

So for our lesson, we have three points. Firstly, *An Important Distinction*; secondly, *A Required Examination*; and thirdly, *A Real Danger*.

But remember that all of this is given to us, though soberly, it’s given to help us to come that we may enjoy the benefits of the Lord’s Supper. So we think about the warning that God gives. Remember, the warning is to keep us from the agony of enduring that judgment, and to encourage us that we may rightly enjoy the blessing.

Well first then, *An Important Distinction*. The distinction that we’re considering addresses the different ways one can approach the Lord’s Supper. Ultimately, there are two ways to come to the Lord’s Supper. There’s a right way to come, and there’s a wrong way to come. Not all come in the same way. Everyone will have different circumstances and experiences, but all who come to the table will either be coming in the way that the Lord instructs us to come, or they’ll be coming in a way contrary to that which Christ has given us.

So we know that there is a way of approaching the Lord’s Supper rightly. This is what the *Catechism* means when it says, “worthily partake”—to partake in a way that is according to the intention of God’s words, when Christ says, “This is my body which is broken for you,” “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” and then he gives these to be eaten and likewise to drink. There’s a way that we are to come rightly, not only to receive, not only the outward elements—the broken bread and the cup of wine—but by them, looking to Christ, to receive Christ himself. And this helps us see that there’s a right way of coming to seek Christ.

Well, this is the way of coming to the Lord's Supper as Christ intended. He provided this sacrament, the Lord's Supper, for our spiritual good. And so we're to come in order to seek that. But we do so, not looking to the broken bread and to the wine, as we considered in last lesson, but preeminently looking to Christ. And so this shapes our desires for him. And this helps us come in a way that is both humble—having seen our own unworthiness in ourselves—but also hopeful, because we see the provision of Christ for us.

Well, there's a way of approaching the Lord's Supper wrongly. And there are many ways to do this, but fundamentally, it's by abusing the Lord's Supper for what it was supposed to be. And so, in Corinth—if you read 1 Corinthians 11—you'll see that they had turned it into just a common feast. And so there were some gorging themselves upon the food, the bread, and others who were drinking themselves drunken by the wine. And others had nothing left to eat or to drink. And so they had used the Lord's Supper wrongly, thereby abusing it. They turned it into a carnal meal, instead of a meal of spiritual fellowship. There are other ways we can come wrongly, and yet all of them will come back to this—it is to miss the message, the purpose, of the Lord's Supper, which holds forth Christ to us, as we who are needy, and yet as he who is full of grace and truth to satisfy us. If we understand that, it will help us to avoid approaching wrongly, and to approach rightly.

Well, for our second point, *A Required Examination*. Now, to examine is to test something. And so, if we are in a class, and we've been learning some truth, whether it is with mathematics or history, and the teacher will give us a test to examine, do we really understand what we've been learning. It's easy, isn't it, to sit in a class, and say, "I understand. Yes, I'm following." But it's a different thing to be given a question that then shows us and our teacher whether or not we really understand the thing that's been taught. Well, how can we know if we were to approach the Lord's Supper rightly? The Bible tells us we need to examine ourselves. We need to put ourselves to the test. To examine is not just to take a very superficial question and give a very superficial answer—it's to think seriously upon the topic before us. And here's the topic before us: ourselves. And so notice, the *Catechism* refers to the examining, and it points out several things to examine.

One thing we examine is our spiritual understanding regarding the Lord's Supper, namely, "to discern the Lord's body." So what we're examining in this is asking ourselves the question, "Do I understand how the bread broken, in accordance to Christ's institution, and the cup of wine held forth, according to Christ's institution—do I understand the message that they're holding forth? That it's not superstitious; it's not magical, but it is a sign and seal, and it's directing me to Jesus Christ. And that Christ is holding forth himself, saying, 'I am the Savior that you in need.' And that I am coming to embrace the Savior, to enjoy his fellowship. Can I discern that? Can I think of that? Do I understand that? Moreover, do I understand that when I sit at the table, and the bread then comes, and I take the bread, and I eat it, in accordance to Christ's commandment, that I am, by grace, being led to feed upon Christ by faith." We'll get to that more in a moment.

The point is, "Do I understand the relationship between the sign—the broken bread and the cup of wine—and the thing signified—the crucified body of Jesus Christ, his death upon the cross?" This is why it's important that we understand the difference between the biblical notion of the Lord's Supper and all false views of it as well. That we, by the Bible, would reject anyone who says that Christ is dying again. It's not a new sacrifice of Christ. It's a sign pointing to the old sacrifice, the only sacrifice of Christ. And yet, I come, and I discern that what he did on the cross is still powerful and able to speak peace to me today. I'm able to think as well, that in discerning the Lord's body, I'm asking the question, "Why is it that he gave himself, but because of God's great love?" And this speaks of the great grace, and so on. So these are the kinds of things I'm



examining. Am I able to understand how the sacrament relates to the Lord Jesus himself, and particularly, his work upon the cross? But that's only one part of what we're examining.

We're also examining our faith—notice, “to feed upon him.” Now all of us understand what it is to feed, to eat food, and to drink something. But here, it's a spiritual feeding. We're feeding upon him. Many have mentioned and spoken of the two mouths present at the Lord's table. There's our physical mouth, whereby we eat the bread and drink the wine. But there's also our spiritual mouth, whereby, by faith, we're actually receiving Jesus Christ—not newly crucified, but rather as he's once again offered to us. It's not, in other words, as if we were physically eating the flesh and blood of Christ. We talked about this in the Lord's Supper lesson, that there's a difference between the sign and the thing signified. But we remember that this, as a sacrament, is directing us to Christ. Therefore, faith receives him and feeds upon him. As our hands take the bread, we freshly take Christ. As our hands take the cup, we freshly take Christ. And we rejoice to do so, because he has instituted this Lord's Supper for our good. So our soul stands in need of Christ and of his grace, and spiritual health. And faith comes trusting that Christ is given to us as he has promised, in accordance to his Word, and as the sacrament is displaying in accordance to that Word. So we're examining our understanding. We're examining our faith—do I have it? To what degree is it, strong or weak?

We also examine our obedience. There are three words that are linked together—“repentance, love, and new obedience.” All of this is under the general idea of obedience. Repentance, of course, is the turning from our sin unto God. And we can ask ourselves, have we done that at all? Has there been a real turning from our sin unto God? You'll remember the *Catechism* question #87, as it raises the fact that this is motivated both by “a true sense of our sin,” as well as an “apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ.” And so, we're asking, has this happened? But we're not just asking, has it happened? We're also asking, because some will have come to the Lord's table rightly for twenty years or thirty years, and they're still examining their repentance. And they're asking, To what degree has our repentance grown? What are the sins in our lives that repentance needs to be strengthened against? Where do we have need for help? And all of these kinds of questions. So we're examining, not only, is there repentance? But also, to what degree is repentance active? Is it healthy? Is it unhealthy? Is it weak? Is it strong? And so, we're examining these things. Have I been quick to repent, when sin has been discovered, or have I been slow to repent?

We examine our love—another aspect of obedience. Do we love God? And we can think of, remember, the ten commandments. The first four of those, particularly focused upon the love of God. So we can go through each of those ten commandments. And I encourage you, every time that your congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper, have time on your own with the ten commandments in front of you, and ask, “Is this being realized in my life?” Because what you're doing is you're examining, not only your obedience, but your love. Because, remember, when we love God, we'll keep his commandments. We can ask as well, do we love our neighbor? And so, commandments #5 through #10. We can ask, Where is there need for me to grow? While I've been doing some of this, by God's grace, I see so many failures as well. You could ask as well, What growth has there been? And many times, we can think back to the last time we sat at the Lord's table, and say, Has there been growth between these comings to the Lord's Supper?

So another aspect of examining, we examine our new obedience. Not only are we to examine whether we obey outwardly, but rather, we ask the question, is our obedience from a new principle, a new motive? Is it motivated by the love of God to us? We love God, the Bible says, “because he first loved us” (1 John 4). Is our new obedience from relying upon Christ? Is faith going to Christ,

and saying, “Give me that which you’ve promised. I need your grace in me.” Is it coming out of a communion with Christ? And is all to the glory of God? Or is our obedience merely outward, and to impress others? You see, so there is much that needs to be examined.

But the purpose of all of this examining is to see both the evidence of grace, as well as the need still of more grace. And so, the Lord’s Supper is for believers, so there has to be some evidence of grace. But it’s also for believers in this life, believers who still struggle with sin and temptation. So there is the need still of more grace, and it is to the end then that we would come with a spiritual hunger for Christ. And so in our examining, we’re actually cultivating an appetite for spiritual feasting upon and with the Lord Jesus Christ, to our soul’s good.

Well, third, *A Real Danger*. We saw in the last lesson that the Lord’s Supper is a great blessing to the believer. In the Lord’s Supper, our Savior reminds us of his love, his death, his provision, his help, and his many blessings. It’s a sacrament of the greatest intimacy in this life. And the believer comes to the table with his brothers and sisters there together. They, with delight, are together in the presence of Christ with great intimacy. However, the Bible also reminds us that with this great blessing, there’s a real danger. The danger is that if we come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper, we may incur significant judgment. Remember the distinction mentioned earlier—there are those who come rightly to the Lord’s table, and there are those who come wrongly. This is why the *Catechism* mentions those who come unworthily. In the Bible, 1 Corinthians 11, as we read earlier, gives us a clear warning against this. But how is it that someone may come unworthily?

Well, first, they may come without any grace at all. This would mean that they are not trusting in Jesus Christ personally. They do not care about real new obedience and repentance, and ultimately, do not love God. They may be members of the church, baptized; they may even have been approved by the elders. But we need to remember that membership in the church is not the same as conversion. Additionally, elders are limited to what they can know about people. They cannot see into the heart. They cannot go and see whether there is, with certainty, grace. They must be content with the answers provided, and their own observing of that one’s walk. And they’re bound to judge in charity those who make application to come to the Lord’s table. Elders are not able to give a perfect assessment. This means that unconverted sinners in the church might be at the Lord’s table. This would be to come unworthily.

But second, it’s possible for a believer to come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper. It is not saving faith alone that is required to come to the Lord’s Supper. As we saw earlier, one who would come rightly to the table needs to be able to understand how the Lord’s Supper relates to the person and work of Jesus Christ. They also need to be able to examine themselves, with faith, and repentance, and love, and then new obedience. This means they must have the ability to understand what the Scriptures mean about these things, and they must be able to compare themselves with the teaching of the Scriptures. This is not an easy thing to do. It’s something that children can’t do. Someone may be a true believer, yet they may not yet understand how Christ and the Lord’s Supper relates. It would be wrong for them to come to the Lord’s Supper, because to benefit from it, they have to understand something of it, so that their faith can then receive what Christ holds forth. They may not understand how to examine themselves. They may not yet be able to do so. The point is, it is wrong to come to the table without this.

But third, there’s another way a believer may come wrongly to the Lord’s Supper, and that is if they’ve backslidden into sin, and they care not to repent and seek Christ for grace. If someone comes as one who is unconverted, or if a believer comes who has not yet able to perform the required spiritual exercise, or if a believer comes without truly seeking Christ, this opens them to

the risk of judgment, as we saw in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. It is a fearful thing to come casually to the Lord's Supper. There is a great intimacy and delight, but a proper serenity and reverence that is married together at the Lord's table. Remember that Paul indicated that the judgment was already being carried out against some in Corinth—some were sick, and some had even died. Obviously, the danger is real and very sobering.

However, the right use of the warning is not that all would stay back perpetually out of fear. Rather, the danger is meant to lead us to observe the warning and embrace the right way. Certainly, if we're unconverted, we should not come to the Lord's table. The Lord's Supper holds forth Christ to the assurance, the help, the spiritual nourishment and blessing of the believer. Instead of going to the Lord's table, the unbeliever needs to go to Christ himself. He needs first to flee to Christ, before going to the Lord's table.

If the believer is not yet able to explain or understand the Lord's Supper, the believer should study the Scripture, and ask for help from the elders, or from other Christians, that they might grow in their understanding, in order to enjoy this great blessing. If they don't know how to examine themselves, they first need to learn this, and seek help again from the elders and other Christians. It may certainly be that a child is a true believer, yet the child first needs to grow for a number of years before he or she is able to perform the spiritual exercise. This doesn't need to discourage the child. This doesn't need to discourage the child's parents. Instead, it's an opportunity for the child to grow and mature, which should be an encouragement.

If the believer who is able to understand the Lord's Supper, and able to examine himself, and he has fallen into sin, his great need is to flee freshly to Christ, to seek grace to overcome, to repent, and then to come to the Lord's table, to find help from Christ, and strength to put away all of his sin. You see, we don't just say, "Well, I'm going to go to the Lord's table." We first, as it were, come to Christ, and in having Christ, and with the guidance and help of our elders, we're able to come rightly to enjoy the benefits.

Well, we need to close. If you're very young and growing, I hope you see how great a privilege the Lord's Supper is. My greatest desire is for you to come first to the Lord Jesus Christ. To do that is to enjoy the greatest blessing ever. But if you do, or if you already have come to Christ, you may yet have a few more years before you are able to go to the Lord's table. But don't let that discourage you. Instead, trust the Lord who saved you, and take advantage of the opportunity to grow in your understanding of the Bible in general, of the Lord Jesus, and of the Lord's Supper. And as you are in discussion with your elders, and parents perhaps, or other Christians. Seek the Lord, in his grace, to nurture you and mature you, that when you're able to come to the table, you will come with great delight and benefit. And so, may it be that all who would come to the table would come looking to Christ, and feeding upon him in faith, and growing in that grace to honor him, that day forward and forever.