

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—  
*Lesson 52—What is the Lord’s Supper? Q. 96*

**The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament**

- I. This means several things (cf. Qs. 85, 88, 91, 92):
  - A. It’s been instituted by Christ for the church’s perpetual use in worship, Mt 26.26-28; 1Cor 11.23-26.
    - 1. The *frequency* of the Supper has always been a subject of debate, but if we adopt the clear principle of Scripture, “as often as you do this,” it seems to teach us that the Lord is content and pleased to meet us at the Table as often as we draw near to it.
  - B. It’s a means of grace, and not an empty sign, 1Cor 10.16; 11.24-25.
  - C. It’s required by God that we diligently/believingly receive it and improve upon it, 1Cor 11.20, 26.
  - D. It’s used by the Holy Spirit to unite a visible, sensible sign with the thing signified, 1Cor 10.16.
  - E. It’s a sign and seal of our communion with Christ’s atoning and redeeming work, 1Cor 10.16-22.
  - F. It’s for believers, who by faith can lay hold of the thing signified and who by faith can enter upon the obligations to which it binds them, Mt 26.26-28; 1Cor 11.26.
    - 1. It’s impossible to commune with Christ in the ordinance without faith, since communion is based on union. This reminds us that the Supper is *not* a *converting* ordinance. It’s a *communing* ordinance.
- II. The uniqueness of the Supper
  - A. Watson, “The Lord’s Supper is the most spiritual and sweetest ordinance that ever was instituted. Here we have to do more immediately with the person of Christ. In prayer, we draw nigh to God; in the sacrament, we become one with Him. In prayer we look up to Christ; in the sacrament, by faith, we touch Him. In the Word preached, we hear Christ’s voice; in the sacrament, we feed on Him.”

**The Sign and the thing Signified**

- I. *The visible, sensible sign* used in the Lord’s supper is “giving and receiving bread and wine, according to Christ’s appointment.”
  - A. There’s arguably a preference for unleavened bread and wine since this is what Christ used.
  - B. As the sacraments are the visible part of the ministry of the Word, so they’re only properly administered by ministers of the gospel. Elders assist in the distribution as the church’s shepherds, but the minister acts and speaks for Christ.
  - C. The elements are to be set apart by prayer for a holy, sacramental use.
  - D. The elements are given to the church so each one can by faith engage himself in the Supper. The elements are taken together as one Body in fellowship with Christ by a common bond.
- II. *The thing signified* is “His death is showed 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.”
  - A. On *God’s* part:
    - 1. The bread and wine together signify the body and blood of our Lord, a whole Christ given for us, a whole Christ as the price of our redemption, Eph 1.7; 1Jn 1.7.
      - a) Christ’s body was broken in death as our atoning sacrifice and His blood was shed under the curse of our sins, thus He bore our guilt in death and made our payment in dying, Rom 4.25.
      - b) Christ died under the wrath of God and the curse of the Law in order to pacify the wrath and remove the curse that were due to us, Gal 3.10-13.
      - c) Christ died as an offering to God for our freedom and redemption, Eph 5.2; Rom 3.23-25.
      - d) Christ propitiated or satisfied the wrath of God, thereby completely removing the condemnation that was against us, 1Jn 2.1-2; Rom 8.1-4.
    - 2. By the meal, God is *representing, sealing and applying* to believers, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant in His atoning blood.

a) By the conjunction of Christ's blessing, the work of the Spirit, and faith in the recipient, Christ's atoning work is being *signified*, God's promise that all who rest on that work will be saved is being *sealed*, and the Christ and redemption we seek in Him by faith are being *applied* or *conferred*.

3. The meal is a *remembrancer* of the death of Christ until He comes, 1Cor 11.26. It's a *badge and confirmation* of our union and communion with Christ in His atoning death for our sins, 1Cor 10.16. And it is a *spiritual feast*, a *means of grace*, for our spiritual nourishment and growth in grace, Jn 6.54-55.
4. The meal is a public testimony to the unity of the Body of Christ and the duties we owe to one another, 1Cor 10.17.

B. On *our* part:

1. We partake in faith. Our eating and drinking the sign is natural and normal, but by faith we look beyond the sign to the things signified and partake of Christ and His redeeming work. As faith comes by hearing so it is confirmed by seeing Christ crucified.
2. We partake *mournfully* in view of our sin, *thankfully* in view of Christ's loving sacrifice, *joyfully* in view of Christ's cross, *boldly* in view of Christ's finished work, and *resolutely against sin* in view of Christ's agony.
3. We go to the Supper to be nourished in faith and in all the graces of hope, zeal, and holiness. The preached Word *begets* grace and the Supper *nourishes* it. Bernard about the Supper, "When my spiritual strength begins to fail, I know a remedy. I will go to the table of the Lord, and there I will drink and recover my decayed strength."
4. By receiving the elements, we signify our voluntary acceptance of Christ's salvation by faith, the confession of our need of it, the profession of our entire dependence on Christ alone for pardon, spiritual life and growth, and we pledge to live by Him and for Him.

III. What about the participation of the unbelieving or impenitent?

- A. The *unbelieving* (of age or infancy) cannot receive that which confirms their faith because they have no faith and are therefore kept from the Table.
- B. The *impenitent* is barred by virtue of his spiritual adultery with sin, the very thing for which Christ died. Christ is being offered to the one who is looking to Him by faith as a Saviour from sin, but the impenitent isn't seeking salvation from sin but rather hoping that Christ will turn a blind eye to his affair with sin.

**Inferences**

- I. See the wonderful goodness in our Lord to give us this meal. What a kind condescension to our weak faith. What does it say to Christ when we neglect it or come carelessly to it? 1Cor 11.17-22.
- II. Learn how precious this sacrament should be to us. It's a sealed deed to make over all the blessings of the new covenant to us. These common, small elements are the seal of our eternal inheritance. Every visit to the table of our Lord should give us great joy and peace and should stir up our love for such a Saviour, Gal 2.20.
- III. See what a comfort this meal is to the distressed soul. Christ poured out His blood for you. God is fully satisfied. There is in the death of Christ enough to answer all doubts. If your sin is poison, the death of Christ is the antidote. If your sin is red as scarlet, His blood can wash it away. If Satan wounds you, here is balm for your healing. If God is feeding you the bread of affliction and you feel your soul languishing, then come regularly to the bread of life in the Supper and be refreshed. Watson, "Christ received aright sacramentally is a universal medicine for healing and a universal cordial for cheering our distressed souls." Therefore, see that you take and eat; and take and drink.