

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 28: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA'S 75-77

Question 75: HOW IS IT SIGNIFIED AND SEALED TO YOU [*the believer*] IN THE HOLY SUPPER THAT YOU PARTAKE OF [*benefit from*] THE ONE SACRIFICE OF CHRIST ON THE CROSS AND ALL HIS BENEFITS? **Thus: that Christ has commanded me and all believers to eat of this broken bread and to drink of this cup in remembrance of Him, and has joined therewith these promises: first, that His body was offered and broken on the cross for me and His blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes the bread of the Lord broken for me and the cup communicated to me; and further, that with His crucified body and shed blood He Himself feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, as certainly as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, which are given me as certain tokens [symbols] of the body and blood of Christ.**

Having learned that baptism is the sign and seal of the *beginning* of our salvation in forgiveness and regeneration (the Lord has once for all received us believers into His covenant of grace), we will now learn that the Lord's Supper is the sign and seal of the *continual growth* of our salvation in communion with Christ (the Lord will preserve us in this covenant of fellowship with Him and all believers).

The Lord Jesus Christ instituted the Lord's Supper during His last Passover supper with His disciples, the night before His crucifixion, the same night in which He was betrayed. "The Passover was the solemn eating of a lamb, which God enjoined upon the Israelites in order, that this rite...might be a memorial to them of their deliverance from Egypt, and that it might especially declare to the faithful their spiritual deliverance from sin and death by Christ, who was to be slain upon the cross, and to be eaten by faith" (Ursinus, 437). The Lord's Supper teaches that this is already accomplished. "Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

Jesus took the bread and wine of the Passover supper and gave them their true significance as symbols of His crucified body and shed blood (His suffering and death) on the cross for all who believe in Him. The Lord commanded us believers to eat and drink symbols of His sacrifice for our sins as a visual symbolic reminder of the truth that He suffered and died for us to unite us to His glorified body in heaven, so that we might receive all the benefits of His crucified body and shed blood (John 15:1-5). For the sake of His sacrifice, we are not only forgiven and regenerated (which is symbolized in our baptism); we have eternal life, a life of communion (fellowship) with Christ (though the Word and prayer) in the bond of the Holy Spirit so that we are sanctified and transformed more and more into His image (John 17:3; 1 Cor. 6:17; 12:13; Eph. 5:30; 1 John 1:3).

The bread is not only broken, to *symbolize* that "He was *bruised* for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5); the wine is not only poured into a cup, to *symbolize* that "He *poured out His soul* unto death" (Isaiah 53:12); the bread and wine are given to us to *eat* and *drink* to *symbolize* our *communion* with Christ – that He lives *in us* to nourish our souls every day and forever! As certainly as we swallow the bread and wine and they nourish our body (think of the physical benefits of bread and wine), that is how close Jesus is by His Spirit to *strengthen* and *gladden* our soul. In this way Christ strengthens our faith. The bread and wine remind us of the benefits He has already bestowed upon us, which causes us to give Him thanks – that's communion!

Question 76: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO EAT THE CRUCIFIED BODY AND DRINK THE SHED BLOOD OF CHRIST? **It means not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the forgiveness of sins and life eternal, but moreover, also, to be so united more and more to His sacred body by the Holy Spirit, who dwells both in Christ and in us, that, although He is in heaven and we are on earth, we are nevertheless *flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone*, and live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are governed by one soul.**

Over a year *before* Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He spoke of eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:41-63). The Jews thought He *was* speaking *literally*, "How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?" (John 6:52). But if we compare John 6:47, "he who *believes* in Me has *everlasting life*," with verse 54, "Whoever *eats* My flesh and *drinks* My blood has *eternal life*," we see that the same effect of eternal life is attributed *both* to the *eating* of Him, and to *believing* in Him. Jesus clearly said His words have a *spiritual* meaning. "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are *spirit*" (John 6:63). To *spiritually* eat and drink Christ's crucified body and shed blood is to embrace His sacrifice on the cross with a believing heart, believing Christ *suffered* and *died* in our place to save us from our sins, and asking God to forgive our sins for the sake of Christ's sacrifice (1 John 1:9).

This is how we obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life – a life of union and communion with our risen and glorified Savior. Just as we continually need food and drink for our *physical* life, so (through the Word and prayer) we *continually spiritually feed* on Christ for our *spiritual* life, trusting in His sacrifice alone for our salvation, and hungering and thirsting to please Him out of thankfulness for our salvation (John 14:21-23; 15:5; Eph. 3:16-19; 4:12-15). "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood *abides in Me*, and I *in him*" (John 6:56). The daily communion we enjoy in our private lives (*without* the symbols) is enjoyed together publicly with the symbols (1 Cor. 10:16-17). We have communion with Christ in a spiritual yet real way; and together we are spiritually nourished and strengthened. "Christ teaches this eating of His flesh in the sixth chapter of John, and confirms it in the supper by external signs" (Ursinus, 382).

Question 77: WHERE HAS CHRIST PROMISED THAT HE WILL THUS FEED AND NOURISH BELIEVERS WITH HIS BODY AND BLOOD AS CERTAINLY AS THEY EAT OF THIS BROKEN BREAD AND DRINK OF THIS CUP? **In the institution of the Supper, which says: "The Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner, He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" [1 Cor. 11:23-26]. And this promise is also repeated by the Apostle Paul, where He says, "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? Because there is one bread, so we being many are one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread" [1 Cor. 10:16-17].**

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