

**REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE : SUNDAY 4 September 2011
EVENING SERVICE**

Sing before: 89:17 (p.448)

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen

Psalm of praise: Psalm Versification 2-2:1 3(p. 523)

Prayer:

Doxology

Worship

Confession of sins

Forgiveness

Gratitude

Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises

General prayer

Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.

Amen

Psalm 106:2:12 (p.523)

Scripture reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-22; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 29:79

Scripture text: 1 Corinthians 10:16

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? (KJV)

79. Q. Why then does Christ call the bread His body and the cup His blood, or the new covenant in His blood, and why does Paul speak of a participation in the body and blood of Christ?

A. Christ speaks in this way for a good reason: He wants to teach us by His supper that as bread and wine sustain us in this temporal life, so His crucified body and shed blood are true food and drink for our souls to eternal life.^[1] But, even more important, He wants to assure us by this visible sign and pledge, first, that through the working of the Holy Spirit we share in His true body and blood as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy signs in remembrance of Him,^[2] and, second, that all His suffering and obedience are as certainly ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.^[3]

Theme: The Lord's Supper assures us that we share in the suffering and obedience of Christ

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, during the church reformation the great conflict existed around the false doctrines surrounding the sacraments. This is apparent in the lengthy answers given with each of the sacraments. From the Roman Catholic Church there were a myriad of false doctrines concerning the baptism and the Lord's Supper, therefore it was necessary for the Reformers to go into detail when explaining what the Lord reveals in His sacraments. Today there are still false doctrines concerning the baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the recent past attention was paid to the modern day misconceptions concerning the baptism. When it comes to the Lord's Supper we hear nonsense like: children's communion and of a Holy Supper where anyone is allowed. It is in lieu of these happenings that we realize that we cannot stop enriching ourselves of the true doctrine concerning the sacraments.

The people of the 16th century had many superstitions concerning the sacraments. The Roman church argued that the sacrament, work faith, amongst other things, in those who receive it. This is the reason why it happened that the Roman church baptized many natives of Africa, but never taught them the truth of God's Word. They water from the baptism would have washed away the sins and therefore, in time, faith would come. Unfortunately, this did not happen.

Superstitions surrounding the Holy Supper were prevalent. The Roman church claims that the bread and wine actually turns into the body and blood of Christ as soon as the words – this is my body, and this is my blood- are said. They maintain that the bread and wine still tastes like bread and wine but that, in essence, it has changed. This is why we call the doctrine of the Roman Church the trans-substantial lore. We have two questions and answers in the catechisms that denounce this teaching: Questions and answer 78 and 80.

We, however, cannot merely denounce these misconceptions and think that we are done. Our Lord Jesus Himself calls the bread his body and the cup His blood or the new Testament in His blood, Paul also speaks about the communion with the body and blood of Christ. It is as if the following is asked from us: If the bread and wine does not actually change into the body and blood of Christ, why then does Christ say that it is His body and blood? To come to a clearer understanding of these words we first have to pause at the answer to this question. Then we will turn to two places in 1st Corinthians 10 to see how the Lord Himself sheds light on this matter. As extension of our Catechism answer the Holy Spirit will also show us the importance of faith during the Lord's Supper as well as the effect that the Lord's Supper has on our everyday life.

Brothers, sisters and children, there **are serious reasons why Christ says these things**. In our Catechisms we confess two reasons why Christ says these things. The first reason is: ***He wants to teach us by His supper that as bread and wine sustain us in this temporal life, so His crucified body and shed blood are true food and drink for our souls to eternal life.***

We need food and water to live. Bread and wine was the most basic food in the time of the new- testament, even for the poor. That is why we say that a person needs bread and wine for you temporary life here on earth. But, our souls are not the same as our bodies, and therefore we need different food for our souls.

Christ provides us with this food. He feeds our souls with His crucified body and spilled blood, to enable us to live in an eternal relationship with Him and our heavenly father.

In short we can say that Christ teaches us, with these words, what His promise for us holds.

The second reason which we confess is: But, even more important, He wants to assure us by this visible sign and pledge, first, that through the working of the Holy Spirit we share in His true

body and blood as surely as we receive with our mouth these holy signs in remembrance of Him.

With our human mouth we eat and drink the heavenly signs of bread and wine which symbolize Christ's body and blood. While we eat and drink the signs, Christ assures us through these signs and seals that we will just as surely, through the work of the Holy Spirit, have a part in His true body and blood.

In short, Christ assures us of His promise with His supper. But, what is this promise that is made by Christ and which He assures us of? Listen, this is how we put His promise into words: ***that all His suffering and obedience are as certainly ours as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.***

The Holy Spirit comes to us with God's promise of forgiveness of all our sins through the blood of Christ. When we faithfully celebrate the Lord's supper, may we be assured that Christ's suffering and obedience is our own as if we have paid the debt for our sins, due to God, ourselves. It is because of this promise that the bread and wine is called the body and blood of Christ, as sure as we accept these signs with a believing heart and eat and drink, in the same way we are assured that we share in the body and blood of Christ.

We can have more clarity with the following image. When a cheque is made out for a R100, we call it R100, although the cheque is only a piece of paper with the letters R100 written on it. But it IS R100, because the cheque is a promise that I will be given R100 when I cash it in at the bank. Just as the cheque is a guarantee for the R100, in the same way the bread and wine at the Holy Supper is my guarantee that I have a share in Christ's body and blood. The bread and wine at the Holy Supper guarantees my share in the Lamb of God, it is called the body and blood of Christ. It is characteristics of the sacraments, that it bears the name of the matter it refers to and of what it assures us.

Loved ones, the answer that we confess, takes us back to 1st Corinthians 10. In this passage there is two things which the Lord brings into the clear for us. The first thing is this: the suffering and obedience of Christ does not automatically become ours because we celebrate the Lord's Supper. It becomes ours through the working of the Holy Spirit. In other words: the Holy Spirit works faith in our hearts with the Word of God. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we must believe in the promise of the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ, or else we will not have part in the body and blood of Christ.

Through Paul, the history of Israel is called to mind. Neither does Israel, nor do we, stand apart from the Corinthians. In this part it speaks about our ancestors because we and the Corinthians, just like Israel of old, deal with the same God, the Lord of heaven and earth. This connection to God, ties us together.

The Israelites received many blessings from God. He protected, lead, cared for and forgave them. They trekked through the Red Sea, which is symbolic of the baptism. They received Manna from heaven and water from the rock, and this Paul calls spiritual food and drink. It was indeed food to keep their bodies alive, but it was also food and water to feed and sustain their relationship with God. They had to trust in the Lord completely and remain true to Him.

Although all the Israelites enjoyed the spiritual food and drink, **many died in the desert because God was not pleased with them.** The Lord's promise that they would arrive in the promised land, never became a reality for them. Of the generation that left Egypt, only Joshua and Kaleb entered the promised land. The rest all died in the desert.

The reason for this is shown very clearly. They took part in idol offerings and gave themselves over to lavish customs. They provoked the Lord and they were bitten by snakes. They rebelled against the Lord and were killed by the angel of death.

The consumption of the spiritual food did not give the right to the promise of the Lord, to our ancestors, even if this is what they thought. Some Corinthians had a haughty and presumptuous attitude in their relationship with the Lord, and consequently they also thought that their participation in the sacraments, and their spiritual experience, would protect them. This is why Paul sends this urgent warning to them. When you start losing yourself to all manner of sins, you must not think that your participation in the Lord's Supper or your spiritual experience will save you. You must believe in the promise that is symbolized by the Lord's Supper. When you place your trust in Christ, then the promise becomes true. Then you truly share in the body and blood of Christ and through this salvation we become righteous before God, through the body of Christ.

For the Israelites, who did not trust in the Lord, and who thought that participation in the sinful practices of the world was not that bad, the Manna and water stayed manna and water. They did not receive from it the assurance of the promise, because they did not believe. For someone, who does not believe God's firm promise, that he or she will receive forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, the bread and wine will remain bread and wine. For those people these signs cannot be a guarantee that his sins are truly forgiven. Someone, who thinks he can foolishly lead his life like one who does not believe, must not think that participation in the Lord's Supper, will set him free from the Lord's strict judgment. The Lord does not allow anyone to make fun of Him. Therefore, let us mind this serious warning.

Beloved, we have come to the second part of our chapter. From verse 14 it becomes clear to us what impact the Lord's Supper has on our daily lives. When a person with a believing heart celebrates the Lord's Supper, you have communion with the body of Jesus Christ and with the blood of Christ. Through faith we receive the body and blood of Christ in our souls. Christ enters our body and we become united with His blessed body, or more plainly said, we become as one.

In the city of Corinth, the member also became one with Christ when they celebrated the Lord's Supper. In this city there were also many who practiced idolatry. The unbelievers were family and friends of the Christians. They were people, who did business with the Christians, and with whom the Christians did business. Now, in Corinth, there were some Christians, who thought that they were one with Christ to such an extent that they could do anything. This is why they had a foolish attitude towards the feasts of idol sacrifice.

They thought that, to take part in these festivities would do them no harm. They only ate of the meat and drank of the wine. They saw it as mere food, as something like idols did not exist. They are things thought up by man.

Paul gives them the benefit of the doubt; they are correct in believing that the idol sacrifices has no meaning. Think a bit, to whom are these sacrifices made, if there are no such things as idols? They are bring offerings to the devils. That is why those feasts and sacrifices cannot be seen as 'merely being social and having fun'. The people who participate in those festivities have part in the cup and table of the devils. They become united with the devils.

To the Christians in Corinth, Paul says: Take a good look. When they participate in sacrificing to idols an unholy communion occurs. A communion takes place between you, the unbelievers and the devils.

Brothers, sister and children, when we invite someone over for a meal or we go out with someone for a meal, we say to each other that we accept one another. I associate myself with you. You and I are in communion with each other. Today are not confronted with idol offerings as the Corinthians were, but we still have to deal with those clever devils. These devils have camouflaged themselves in another disguise.

Some of us have already come across these devils. You are invited to a social gathering at work or where you exercise. Once there, you realize it isn't just a social gathering. Things are done there that a child of God cannot associate with. With the power of the Holy Spirit put distance between you and what was going on. This disassociation may have cost you a promotion or your place in a team. Whatever the cost you must rejoice in it.

To the Corinthians and to us, God says, when you participate in things where unbelievers serve their devils, you open yourself to the influence of the devils. The partnership between the believers and unbelievers as well as the devils, infuriates the Lord. He is infuriated to the point that He will, in order to save you, unleash the unyielding and destructive power of the devils over you.

Beloved, our God is a jealous God. Through Christ's sacrifices He made us His children. With every communion He, through the Holy Spirit, unifies us even more with Christ. The Lord will not share those who belong to Him with anyone. He wants to keep us for Himself, because He gave Himself to us completely.

Our celebration of the Lord's Supper, last Sunday, wasn't just a reminder of what happened long ago. At that communion the Holy Spirit unified us even more with Christ. Through faith we shared in His body and blood. We associated with Christ. That means that you and I, will take note to be vigilant in our every-day lives, not to associate with the devil or his people. Let us not tempt the Lord. We are not stronger than He is!

When we remember the love with which Christ received us at His table, in order for us to have communion with Him, why would we scorn His love for us and seek communion with the unholy and the devils?

Amen!

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: Ps 119:12, 13 (p. 589)

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

Amen

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Date: 4 September 2011

Scripture Modern King James Version