

Not Physically But Spiritually

1 Corinthians 10:1–21

Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 78–80

Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #36

© 2017 Daniel R. Hyde

HERE in 1 Corinthians the second sacrament is called “the Lord’s Supper” (11:20), “the Lord’s Table” (10:21), and “participation” or “communion” (10:16). Communion is close, intimate, and personal fellowship. By faith we have communion with Jesus. Paul also says that our forefathers ate **spiritual food** and drank **spiritual drink** (vv. 3, 4), which assumes there is earthly food and drink. God has also created us physical and spiritual beings who need to feed in a spiritual manner. To assure us that we are communing with Jesus God uses the earthly elements of bread and wine. This is why it has been called “the innermost Most Holy Place of the Christian temple” and “the central ordinance in the whole circle of church life, around which all the other ministries of the Church revolve.”¹

Paul’s Exhortation

Paul bases his exhortation in demonstration of gospel realities under the Old Covenant in verses 1–5. Isn’t it amazing that he speaks to first

¹ Archibald Alexander Hodge, *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 390.

century Corinthians as being in unity with fifteenth century BC Jews? **Our fathers.** By faith we are united to Jesus Christ just as they were in the Messiah to come. So **our fathers were all under the cloud** (v. 1) that led Israel out of Egypt as pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night. **Our fathers...all passed through the Red sea** (v. 1). **Our fathers...all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea** (v. 2). Not only does he speak of the Corinthians being united backwards to the Israelites, but the Israelites anticipated us by being baptized. **Our fathers...all ate the same spiritual food**, alluding to the manna and quail (v. 3); **our fathers...all drank the same spiritual drink** by drinking from the **spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ** (v. 4). Then he begins his transition: **nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness** (v. 5).

Paul then makes several exhortations based on the examples of the fathers in verses 6–14. Look at his series of parallels: **these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did** (v. 6). He then gives specifics:

- **Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.”** (v. 7)

- **We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. (v. 8)**
- **We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents (v. 9).**
- **...nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer (v. 10).**

He reiterates his exhortation from verse 6 in verse 11: **now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come (v. 11).**

Finally, Paul makes specific exhortation in verses 14–22: **therefore...flee from idolatry (v. 14).** In that context he says, **the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation (“communion”) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation (“communion”) in the body of Christ? (v. 16)** And **because there is one bread that we commune in together, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread (v. 17).** Then he takes us back to the Old Testament to shed light on what he’s saying: **consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar? (v. 18)** Remember not only did the priests eat some of the offered meat but so did the people. To eat this food was to be united to what was offered on the altar. There’s a close communion. Then Paul asks: **What do I imply then?**

That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.

Then here's the punch line: **I do not want you to be participants with demons** (vv. 19–20). We are not to participate in pagan sacrifices. **You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons** (v. 21).

Instruction for Us

Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians leads to *instruction for us*.

First, remember that God gives us earthly food to assure to us that we have union and communion with him spiritually. This means that when we celebrate this sacrament our communion is *not physically* with Jesus; we don't feed on Christ as if the bread were flesh and wine were blood. The bread and wine remain bread and wine contrary to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church. **The bread that we break...there is one bread...we all partake of the one bread** (vv. 16, 17). As well, Lutheranism says that Christ's body and blood are "in, with, and under" the bread and wine. They say this because they don't believe in Rome's transformation of the elements, but that after his resurrection, Jesus' human nature partakes of divine omnipresence. But note that Paul does not say the Corinthians were

to **flee from idolatry** (v. 14) because the food offered to idols was the idol—as Rome says—or that the deity the idol represented was in, with, or under the food—as Lutherans say. He tells them to **flee** because the food was devoted as a sacramental sign of the idol. Throughout Scripture the sign is often substituted for the reality. The rainbow was not transformed into the Lord nor was he in it in physically. The reality was God’s faithfulness. There’s another subtle thing here that leads us to say we do not eat physically. We have **communion** in the body and blood of Christ (v. 16). Rome and Lutherans say, “You see, we participate in the actual, literal, physical body and blood of Christ.” But in verse 18 he equates eating the sacrifices to participating in the altar. To feed upon bread and to drink wine is to participate in Christ. We are not speaking physically or else we say that to eat the sacrifices at the Israelite temple was to eat the altar on which they were offered! “This is my body” is to say “This is a participation.” This is sacramental language to assure us of spiritual reality by means of elements.

The second point of instruction is that what we commune *spiritually*.

To eat and drink spiritually is as real and true as the elements we hold are real and true. Paul speaks of the **cup** and **bread** and then the **blood** and **body of Christ** with equally real terms (v. 16).

To eat and drink spiritually is by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have to be reminded that the apostle Paul was not afraid of saying the Israelites ate **spiritual food** and drank **spiritual drink** (vv. 3, 4). When we partake we experience the Holy Spirit. He fills us. He empowers us. He leads us.

To eat and drink spiritually is to experience Christ and all he is for us by faith rather than understanding. We are dealing with eternal realities that cannot be quantified in earthly elements such as bread and wine. This is why we say, “Lift up your hearts! We lift them up to the Lord.” This is why Paul says the issue of sacrificed food was not about the food or idol—they’re nothing—but about the reality of what food is offered to: demons or God.

Let’s conclude by reciting together our Catechism on this subject:

Q. 78. Do the bread and wine become the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No. Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ’s blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply a divine sign and assurance of these things, so too the holy bread of the Lord’s Supper does not become the body of Christ itself, even though it is called the body of Christ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments.

Q. 79. Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood, and Paul use the words, a participation in Christ’s body and blood?

A. Christ has good reason for these words. He wants to teach us that just as bread and wine nourish the temporal life, so too his

crucified body and poured-out blood are the true food and drink of our souls for eternal life. But more important, he wants to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge, that we, through the Holy Spirit's work, share in his true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in his remembrance, and that all of his suffering and obedience are as definitely ours as if we personally had suffered and made satisfaction for our sins.

Q. 80. How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper declares to us that all our sins are completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself accomplished on the cross once for all. It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ, who with his true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father where he wants us to worship him. But the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present under the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshiped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.