

The Lord's Supper (3rd)

(Our study today involves a further study of the distinction of the Lord's Supper between the Protestants and the Baptists. Is it a mystery linked with various emotions or is it revealing the death of Christ in a memorial service?)

Previously we reviewed the basic meaning of a sacrament as is generally believed by the Protestants by quoting somewhat from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Also, we noted the difference between the Protestant *Westminster Confession* and the Baptist *London Confession of Faith of 1689* in that the *Westminster Confession* affirms that the Lord's Supper is to be observed in the "Church" (with a capital "C") but the *London Confession* states that it is "to be observed in" Christ "churches" or congregations. It was further shown that the Protestant confession maintains that the Lord's Supper is a bond and pledge of true believers' communion with Christ and each other "as members of His mystical body." The expression "mystical body" was not defined by the confession, but it is generally considered by both Baptists and Protestants as referring to all the elect of God. However, we noted that James Robertson and John Nisbet, the Younger affirmed in the 1600's that the mystical body of Christ was the Church of Scotland. James Robertson was hanged for his faith December 15, 1682 and John Nisbet was executed on April 14, 1683. (As a side note, the year is erroneously given as 1863 in the 1989 edition of *A Cloud of Witnesses*, printed by Sprinkle Publications. The book contains last speeches and testimonies of the Scottish Covenanters after 1680.) Since such terms as "mystical body," "invisible church," "catholic church (with either a capital "C" or not), "universal church," and other like expressions are not found in the Scriptures, I maintain that it is best not to use them to avoid confusion. The Scriptures do teach that the Lord's Supper is to be administered in a congregation and we ought to teach accordingly.

Article 1, of the *Westminster Confession* also states that the Lord's Supper is for "the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers," Equally, the "Larger Catechism" of the *Westminster Confession* affirms that both baptism and the Lord's Supper are "seals of the same covenant." The Protestants further teach through their confessions and writings that baptism took the place of circumcision and the Lord's Supper replaced the Passover. (Sadly, many Baptist equally teach that the Lord's Supper replaced Passover, but Christ was killed on the same day that the Passover lamb was slain during His crucifixion. The Lord's Supper was instituted the night before in the upper room, but we will not do a detailed study of the last few days of Christ at this time. Our purpose now is trying to understand what this "sealing" involves.) In order to understand what is meant by this "sealing" we will supply quotes from John Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter XVII.

First, then, the signs are bread and wine, which represent the invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ. For as God, regenerating us in baptism, ingrafts us into the fellowship of his Church, and makes us his by adoption, so we have said that he performs the office of a provident parent, in continually supplying the food by which he may sustain and preserve us in the life to which he has begotten us by his word. Moreover, Christ is the only food of our soul, and, therefore, our heavenly Father invites us to him, that, refreshed by communion with him, we may ever and anon gather new vigour until we reach the heavenly immortality. But as this mystery of the secret union of Christ with believers is incomprehensible by nature, he exhibits its figure and image in visible signs adapted to our capacity, nay, by giving, as it were, earnest and badges, he makes it as certain to us as if it were seen by the eye; the familiarity of the similitude giving it access to minds however dull, and showing that souls are fed by Christ just as the corporeal life is sustained by bread and wine. We now, therefore, understand the end which this mystical benediction has in view—viz. to assure us that the body of Christ was once

sacrificed for us, so that we may now eat it, and, eating, feel within ourselves the efficacy of that one sacrifice,—that his blood was once shed for us so as to be our perpetual drink. P. 557.

Notice that Calvin stated among many things (1) that the bread and wine represent “invisible food which we receive from the body and blood of Christ”; (2) that as the believer is “refreshed by communion with him, we may ever and anon gather new vigour until we reach the heavenly immortality”; (3) that it is a “mystery of the secret union of Christ with believers”; (4) that in eating the believer *feels* within himself the efficacy of that one sacrifice. Calvin further affirms that the bread and wine is to “nourish our spiritual life,” p. 558.

Allow me to say that Calvin does have many good things to say about the believer communing and fellowshiping with Christ and in preparing himself for the Lord’s Supper. But our purpose in this study is to try to understand what the Protestants mean by this mystery of the Lord’s Supper being a seal to our conscious. From the quote given above, we see that it is said that this sealing includes among many things a *feeling* within the believer of the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. I will now try the listener’s patience by providing others quotes from Calvin.

The sacrament, therefore, does not make Christ become for the first time the bread of life; but, while it calls to remembrance that Christ was made the bread of life that we may constantly eat him, it gives us a taste and relish for that bread, and makes us *feel* its efficacy. P. 559.

The sum is, that the flesh and blood of Christ feed our souls just as bread and wine maintain and support our corporeal life. ... Therefore, what our mind does not comprehend let faith conceive—viz. that the Spirit truly unites things separated by space. That sacred communion of flesh and blood by which Christ transfuses his life into us, just as if it penetrated our bones and marrow, he testifies and *seals* in the Supper, and that not by presenting a vain or empty sign, but by there exerting an efficacy of the Spirit by which he fulfils what he promises. P. 563.

The rule which the pious ought always to observe is, whenever they see the symbols instituted by the Lord, to think and *feel* surely persuaded that the truth of the thing signified is also present. For why does the Lord put the symbol of his body into your hands, but just to assure you that you truly partake of him? If this is true let us *feel* as much assured that the visible sign is given us in *seal* of an invisible gift as that his body itself is given to us. ... I say then, that in the mystery of the Supper, by the symbols of bread and wine, Christ, his body and his blood, are truly exhibited to us, that in them he fulfilled all obedience, in order to procure righteousness for us—first that we might become one body with him; and, secondly, that being made partakers of his substance, we might *feel* the result of this fact in the participation of all his blessings. P. 564.
[Emphasis mine—JKB]

From these quotes it is seen that among many things this *mystery* performs a *seal* to the sincere believer whereby he *feels* something. Therefore, the *Westminster Confession* says this *mystery* (sacrament) is “for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the *sealing* all benefits there unto true believers, ...” On the other hand, the *London Confession* says that this *ordinance* is “for the perpetual remembrance, and *showing forth* the sacrifice of himself in his death, ...” For the Protestant there must of necessity be some type of *feeling* involved. What this *feeling* is we are left to the individual to know what it is. For the Baptist, while certainly the soul ought to be engaged in the ordinance, the command is to *remember* and *show forth* the Lord’s death. For the one, there is an uncertainty of emotions or feeling left to the understanding of a believer still shackled to his sinful nature. For the other, there is a clear declaration to the believer to remember and show forth (by eating bread and drinking wine) the Lord’s death. One is shrouded in a mystery; the other is a clear and simple obedience.

By a clear and simple obedience, I do not want to leave the impression that that is all there is to the Lord's Supper. Obviously, there should be a preparation by the believer to examine himself and seek to draw nigh to the Lord in fellowship with Him. Equally, there are many way in which a believer should cultivate his soul in preparation for the Lord's Supper and, hopefully, the Lord would visit him in the meal so that his soul would overflow of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ for his (the believer's) soul. But the Scriptures do not indicate some mysterious sealing based on some experience of the believer.

However, our time is up for today and we will, the Lord willing, continue our study of the Lord's Supper in the next podcast.