EATING *and* DRINKING CHRIST



HERMAN HOEKSEMA

AN EXPOSITION OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

The Triple Knowledge Series

Volume 1 ***In the Midst of Death***

Volume 2 ***God's Way Out***

Volume 3 ***The Death of the Son of God***

Volume 4 ***The Lord of Glory***

Volume 5 ***Abundant Mercy***

Volume 6 ***Baptized into Christ***

Volume 7 ***Eating and Drinking Christ***

Volume 8 ***Love the Lord Thy God***

Volume 9 ***Love Thy Neighbor for God's Sake***

Volume 10 ***The Perfect Prayer***

EATING *and* DRINKING CHRIST

AN EXPOSITION OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

Second Edition



The Triple Knowledge Series - Volume 7

HERMAN HOEKSEMA



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION
Jenison, Michigan

©2015 Reformed Free Publishing Association

©1952 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company

©1971 Reformed Free Publishing Association published in volume 2 *of The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism*

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews

Scripture cited is taken from the King James (Authorized) Version

Unless otherwise noted, the quotations of the Heidelberg Catechism are taken from *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005)

Cover design by Gary Gore Book Design
Interior design by Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

Reformed Free Publishing Association
1894 Georgetown Center Drive
Jenison, Michigan 49428
616-457-5970
www.rfpa.org

ISBN 978-1-936054-68-8
ISBN 10-volume set 978-1-936054-83-1
ISBN ebook 978-1-936054-69-5
LCCN 2015935958

CONTENTS

Preface to the First Edition

Foreword

Chapter One
LORD'S DAY 28

The Institution of the Holy Supper
The Symbolism of the Lord's Supper
The Significance of the Lord's Supper
Bone of His Bone

Chapter Two
LORD'S DAY 29

The Fearful Error of the Roman Catholic Church
The Lutheran Doctrine of Consubstantiation
Spiritual Eating and Drinking

Chapter Three
LORD'S DAY 30

An Accursed Idolatry
Proper Partakers
Confession and Walk

Chapter Four
LORD'S DAY 31

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven
The Promise of the Gospel
The Preaching of the Promise
The Key Power of Christian Discipline

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

It is with a feeling of profound gratitude to the God of my salvation that I offer this seventh volume of my work on the Heidelberg Catechism to the reading public. May the same Lord that strengthened me and thus far enabled me to write use the fruit of my feeble efforts for the preservation of the Reformed truth which, according to my conviction, is the truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

HERMAN HOEKSEMA
1952

FOREWORD

To Herman Hoeksema's profound and fresh exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism is added this new volume, the seventh in *The Triple Knowledge* series, a vigorous discussion of the doctrine of the Lord's supper. *Eating and Drinking Christ* continues the author's treatment of the sacraments begun in volume 6, *Baptized into Christ*, in which he discussed the idea and institution of the sacraments in general and the sacrament of baptism in particular.

Following Lord's Day 28, he begins with the institution of the Lord's supper, followed by a description of the symbolism and the significance of the sacrament, explaining what it means to eat and drink Christ. He shows that the underlying truth and central meaning of the supper is that by it we are united with Christ, so that we are bone of his bone.

Next the author deals with the three major views of the Lord's supper. He rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, and using the strong language of the Catechism, calls the Romish teaching an accursed idolatry. He also refuses the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation, showing how it is incorrect. In contrast to these errors, he sets forth the biblical and Reformed view that the sacrament is a spiritual eating and drinking of Christ.

Hoeksema concludes his treatment of the sacrament by describing both positively and negatively the proper partakers of the supper. They are those who are truly sorry for their sins, believing that they are forgiven through Christ, and who desire to have their faith strengthened. But hypocrites and all who show by their confessions and lives that they are ungodly must be barred from the supper by the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

This mention of the keys gives the author the opportunity to segue into an explanation of the two keys, the preaching and Christian discipline, in which he emphasizes especially how these keys open and close the kingdom.

Mark H. Hoeksema

LORD'S DAY 28

Q. 75. How art thou admonished and assured in the Lord's Supper that thou are a partaker of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross, and of all his benefits?

A. 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, adding 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 he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ.

Q. 76. What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?

A. It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal; but also, besides that, to become more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

Q. 77. Where has Christ promised that he will as certainly feed and nourish believers with his body and blood, as they eat of this broken bread and drink of this cup?

A. In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed: *The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: this cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come*.

This promise is repeated by the holy 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? For we, being many, are one bread and one body; because we are all partakers of that one bread.

Chapter One



LORD'S DAY 28

The Institution of the Holy Supper

Two sacraments, and only two, were instituted in the church to be observed by her as long as she is in the world. These two sacraments are holy baptism and the Lord's supper.

They are related to each other. Together they form one whole, for both concentrate the attention of believers on the death of Jesus Christ, our savior and redeemer. Yet there is a clear distinction between the two. The sacrament of baptism signifies incorporation into Jesus Christ, and therefore cannot be repeated, while the sacrament of the holy supper emphasizes our nourishment by the body and blood of Christ, and therefore must be repeatedly celebrated.

This idea of the Lord's supper is indicated in the Belgic Confession:

> We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper, to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated and incorporated into his family, which is his church.
>
> Now those who are regenerated have in them a twofold life, the one corporal and temporal, which they have from the first birth, and is common to all men; the other spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth, which is effected by the word of the gospel, in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is not common, but is peculiar to God's elect. In like manner God hath given us, for the support of the bodily and earthly life, earthly and common bread, which is subservient thereto and is common to all men, even as life itself. But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life which believers have, he hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers, when they eat him, that is to say, when they apply and receive him by faith in the spirit.
>
> Christ, that he might represent unto us this spiritual and heavenly bread,

hath instituted an earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of his body, and wine as a sacrament of his blood, to testify by them unto us, that, as certainly as we receive and hold this sacrament in our hands and eat and drink the same with our mouths, by which our life is afterwards nourished, we also do as certainly receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life.

Now, as it is certain and beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ hath not enjoined to us the use of his sacraments in vain, so he works in us all that he represents to us by these holy signs, though the manner surpasses our understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible. In the meantime we err not when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ. But the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith. Thus, then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of his Father in the heavens, yet doth he not therefore cease to make us partakers of himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy both himself, and the merits of his sufferings and death, nourishing, strengthening, and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of his flesh, quickening and refreshing them by the drinking of his blood.

Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men. The ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament—as Judas and Simon the sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament but not Christ who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers.

Lastly, we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God, with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior with thanksgiving, making there confession of our faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup, he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are excited by the use of the holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.

Therefore we reject all mixtures and damnable inventions which men have added unto and blended with the sacraments, as profanations of them, and affirm that we ought to rest satisfied with the ordinance which Christ

> and his apostles have taught us, and that we must speak of them in the same manner as they have spoken.[1]

Because of the inseparable connection and close relation between the two sacraments, they cannot and may not be separated. He who is baptized is obligated to partake of the table of communion as soon as he is able to discern the Lord's body. This follows from the article quoted above. According to it, baptism is the sacrament of regeneration and of incorporation into Christ's body. The regenerated have a twofold life: the one from the first birth that is common to all men and the other spiritual and heavenly from the second birth. The life from the second birth is effected by the word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ and is not common but is peculiar to God's elect. Just as the natural life of man must be nourished, so the spiritual life of regeneration must be fed spiritually. That spiritual food and drink are symbolized in the bread and wine of the Lord's supper. Therefore we maintain that as soon as children can discern the Lord's body, they must partake of the table of communion.

The custom in some churches that allows a separation between the sacraments is to be condemned. Members are taught to make a distinction between baptism and the Lord's supper that does not and cannot exist. The Lord's supper is considered to be much holier than baptism. Therefore, the supper is only for those who are far advanced on the way of spiritual life, the deeply spiritual one who can speak of a profound experience of sin and grace. Often in such churches very few partake of communion. Many members their lifelong days remain only baptized, and if they make confessions, they distinguish confession of the truth and confession of faith. By maintaining this distinction they can be full members of the church and have their children baptized without ever approaching the Lord's table.

This is an untenable position. The sacrament of the Lord's supper is not one whit holier than the sacrament of baptism. Those in the church who come to years of discretion and are instructed in the way of God's covenant must either celebrate the Lord's supper with the congregation or repudiate their baptism and reveal themselves as profane. The church consists of believers and their children. Other members there are not in the church. In the church one is either a professing believer or a child who has not yet come to years of discretion. One who remains a baptized member and never confesses his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is a monstrosity that should be eliminated by proper disciplinary measures.

In the Church of the Refugees in London it was customary to demand that its members make confession of faith and come to the Lord's table at the age of

eighteen or twenty years. After this age they were no longer considered as members of the church of Christ in the world. It may be that this rule was too stringent, and that various factors may have to be taken into consideration that make it impossible always to apply a rule of this nature. Nevertheless, this practice was based on an essentially sound conception of the church as the gathering of believers and their children.

For the same reason I often wonder whether the practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches not to administer the Lord's supper to children before they reach the age of adolescence is not an error. Long before they reach this age, they are able to discern the Lord's body. There is, it seems to me, not sufficient reason to withhold them from this sacrament, by which they are nourished with the body and blood of Christ and commemorate Christ's death, until they have finished the required course in catechetical instruction and are able to make a complete confession of faith. Let it rather be demanded of them that they continue to attend catechism until they have finished the course, but in the meantime let them partake of the Lord's supper at least at a much earlier age than is usually the custom.

No fewer than three long Lord's Days are devoted to the explanation of the sacrament of communion. Lord's Day 28 gives a general exposition of the meaning of the sacrament and references its institution. Lord's Day 29 explains the relation between the sign and the thing signified. Lord's Day 30 compares the Lord's supper and the popish mass.

It is essential that a sacrament be definitely instituted by God through Jesus Christ. A sacrament that is not instituted by God for his church to receive and to observe would be a contradiction in terms. That institution is important. Water *per se* does not constitute the sacrament of baptism, nor do bread and wine have any significance as sacramental signs in themselves. No more than any red light on the road means that you must stop the car, do water, bread, and wine have significance as sacraments of God through which he cleanses souls from sin and feeds them unto everlasting life. When you see a red light on the road, the question is, is that light private or is it instituted and have the authority of the government? If it is not instituted you do not stop and do not have to stop; you may travel on. Only when the light has the authority of the government do you stop.

It is true that red is symbolic of danger, water is symbolic of cleansing, bread is symbolic of spiritual nourishment, and wine is symbolic of heavenly quickening and refreshment. If this were not true, they could not serve as signs. Although it is true that these natural elements are in themselves signs that can express certain symbolic significance, they thereby do not constitute sacraments.

The institution, the setting apart, of the water in baptism from all other water and of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper from all other bread and wine and God's pointing out of these signs, the divine act whereby he connects his word with those signs, is essential in the institution of a sacrament.

It is therefore proper and important that the Heidelberg Catechism calls special attention to the institution of the Lord's supper. At the last passover, which the Lord greatly desired to eat and ate with his disciples, he instituted the supper of holy communion.

It is hardly possible to explain the scriptural record concerning the last passover of Jesus with his disciples in any other way than by assuming that on the regular day, the fourteenth of Nisan, the Lord celebrated it. Thus we read in Luke 22:7: "Then came the day of unleavened bread, when the passover must be killed." This refers to the slaying of the paschal lamb, which was always done on the fourteenth of Nisan. All the rest of the account in the gospel according to Luke is in accord with this assumption.

> 8. He sent Peter and John, saying, Go and prepare us the passover, that we may eat.
> 9. And they said unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare?
> 10. And he said unto them, Behold, when ye are entered into the city, there shall a man meet you, bearing a pitcher of water; follow him into the house where he entereth in.
> 11. And ye shall say unto the goodman of the house, The Master saith unto thee, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the passover with my disciples?
> 12. And he shall shew you a large upper room furnished: there make ready.
> 13. And they went, and found as he had said unto them: and they made ready the passover.
> 14. And when the hour was come, he sat down, and the twelve apostles with him. (Luke 22:8–14)

There is a similar account in Matthew 26:17–20:

> 17. The first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover?
> 18. And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples.
> 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover.
> 20. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve.

The same account is found in Mark 14:12–17. Hence it was undoubtedly on Thursday evening, the fourteenth of Nisan, that the Lord celebrated the last passover with his disciples. No other explanation can possibly be given to the accounts in the synoptic gospels.

The theory that in that year the paschal supper was eaten on the fifteenth of Nisan instead of on the fourteenth, in order to maintain the view that Jesus died at the same time that the paschal lamb was slain, finds no support in the biblical

record. Others claim that Jesus held the paschal supper on the thirteenth of Nisan, a day early. This also is not in harmony with the account of the synoptic gospels. Besides, it means that the paschal lamb, which had to be offered in the temple, could not have been eaten.

What was the significance of the passover?

First, the passover was a harvest feast celebrated in the promised land, the land of the covenant. On the sixteenth of Nisan the first sheaf of the harvest was waved before the Lord. Thus we read in Leviticus 23:9–11: "The LORD spake unto Moses saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give unto you, and shall reap the harvest thereof, then ye shall bring a sheaf of the firstfruits of your harvest unto the priest: and he shall wave the sheaf before the LORD, to be accepted for you: on the morrow after the sabbath the priest shall wave it."

Second, the passover was a feast of commemoration that remembered the Lord's passing over the dwellings of his people that were covered by the blood of the lamb in the night the Destroyer went through the house of bondage to kill all the firstborn of Egypt. In the passover Israel commemorated that great deliverance from the house of bondage by the mighty hand of God. Thus God spoke to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt:

> 3. Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:
>
> 4. And if the household shall be too little for the lamb, let him and his neighbour next unto his house take it according to the number of the souls; every man according to his eating shall make your count for the lamb.
>
> 5. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats:
>
> 6. And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.
>
> 7. And they shall take of the blood, and strike it on the two side posts and on the upper door post of the houses, wherein they shall eat it.
>
> 8. And they shall eat the flesh in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs they shall eat it.
>
> 9. Eat not of it raw, nor sodden at all with water, but roast with fire; his head with his legs, and with the purtenance thereof.
>
> 10. And ye shall let nothing of it remain until the morning; and that which remaineth of it until the morning ye shall burn with fire.
>
> 11. And thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD'S passover.
>
> 12. For I will pass through the land of Egypt this night, and will smite all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the LORD.
>
> 13. And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are: and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plague shall not be upon you to destroy you, when I smite the

land of Egypt.

14. And this day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever. (Ex. 12:3–14)

Third, the passover was a feast that had typical significance. However, I would not say that circumcision and the passover constituted two Old Testament sacraments. Circumcision was a sacrament. The passover was in itself no sacrament, but it closely approached the New Testament conception of the sacrament of the Lord's supper. Israel celebrated its deliverance accomplished and at the same time looked forward to its deliverance as it was to be realized in the blood of the Lamb who was to be slain.

Jesus changed the passover into the New Testament sacrament of the Lord's supper. For that purpose he took not the lamb, but bread and wine. The lamb could not serve the purpose of a sign in the Lord's supper. The paschal lamb was the last lamb that could be eaten and sacrificed. The lamb eaten by Christ and his apostles, that had been carried into the temple and sacrificed there before it was carried into the upper room, that lamb of the passover that Christ so greatly desired to eat with his apostles, was the last that was ever and that could ever be typically slain, for at that passover the Lamb of God stood ready to be sacrificed. Therefore the paschal lamb could not serve in the New Testament as the sign of the sacrament. It was typical of the sacrifice that was to be accomplished on the cross, but it could not look backward to that accomplished sacrifice. But the Lord took the bread that was eaten at the passover and the wine that was drunk when the third cup, the cup of thanksgiving, was taken up at that supper. Instead of the lamb Christ definitely instituted the bread and wine.

That they were so instituted to serve as a sacrament and therefore as signs and seals is evident from the words spoken by the Lord at this institution. The bread and wine were separated from all other bread and wine by those spoken words. "As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28; Mark 14:22–24). The account in Luke 22:19–20 is virtually the same: "He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you." By these words the bread and wine of the Lord's supper were definitely separated and instituted as sacramental signs and seals.

By a definite command of Christ he instituted this sacrament to be observed by the church. When he gave the bread to the disciples, he said, "Take, eat; this

is my body.” When he gave the cup to them, he said, “Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.” According to the account in Luke the Lord added, “This do in remembrance of me,” which made it clear that the Lord instituted a sacrament that his church in the world was to observe throughout the ages.

That the observance of this supper is of great significance is evident from the repeated institution of it by a special revelation to the apostle Paul.

> 23. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:
>
> 24. And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.
>
> 25. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.
>
> 26. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come. (1 Cor. 11:23–26)

There can be no doubt that when the apostle wrote that he had received from the Lord this commandment concerning the Lord’s supper, he meant that he had received it by special revelation and not from the rest of the apostles. That the Lord from heaven gave a special revelation to the apostle Paul, who had not been personally with the Lord in his earthly sojourn, concerning the institution of the Lord’s supper emphasized the importance of this sacrament.

We are not surprised therefore that the church throughout the new dispensation, from the very earliest times, attached great significance to the institution of holy communion. The church guarded jealously that feast of commemoration that at the same time was a sacrament of nourishment.

The Symbolism of the Lord’s Supper

I speak of the symbolism of the supper rather than of the signs. The signs are bread and wine. But the symbolism at the table of communion is far richer than bare signs. The complete symbolism includes the following elements: the signs of the bread and wine, signifying the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; the *broken* bread and the *poured-out* wine, signifying that we can have no part with Christ except through his broken body and shed blood, that is, through his atoning sacrifice accomplished on the cross; eating the bread and drinking the wine at the table of communion, a symbol of eating and drinking Christ by faith; the word of the minister, through whom Christ by his Spirit addresses his word to the hearts of the communing believers; and the table of communion, signifying that in God’s tabernacle we eat and drink with God through our Lord

Jesus Christ and enter into his covenantal fellowship.

Let us briefly attend to each of these elements.

First, the symbolism of the bread and wine is plain to us all. The Catechism explains that Christ feeds and nourishes our souls to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as we receive from the hands of the minister and taste with our mouths the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ. To eat the crucified body and to drink the shed blood of Christ signifies "to become more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live, and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul."

The bread signifies Christ as the bread of life, as he said to the Jews in Capernaum, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:32–33, 35).

The Lord presented himself as the water of life to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well: "Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (John 4:13–14).

At the feast of tabernacles in Jerusalem the Lord said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:37–38).

In the institution of the Lord's supper Jesus did not use the symbol of water, but that of wine. Wine is the color of blood, and the wine at the communion table is the symbol of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Besides, according to scripture wine is a symbol of communion, prosperity, and joy. Thus we read in Genesis 14:18: "Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God." Of the blessing that Isaac bestowed upon Jacob we read, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the LORD hath blessed: therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine" (Gen. 27:27–28). The same is true of the blessing Jacob pronounced on Judah: "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk" (Gen. 49:11–12).

Wine belonged to the covenantal blessings of Jehovah upon his people Israel in Canaan, “He will love thee, and bless thee, and multiply thee: he will also bless the fruit of thy womb, and the fruit of thy land, thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil” (Deut. 7:13). “Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew” (Deut. 33:28). “He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth; and wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart” (Ps. 104:14–15).

Wine is the symbol of heavenly joy, and therefore it was fitting at the wedding of Cana that the heavenly Bridegroom changed the water into wine. Thus we understand that at the Lord’s supper it is not water, but wine that is used as the proper sign of the blood of the Lamb, by which not only our sin is changed into righteousness, but also our earthly life is translated into the joy of God’s heavenly tabernacle.

Second, scripture teaches that the bread at the table of communion must be broken, and although this is not expressly stated, the wine must be poured out as a token of the shed blood of Christ: “As they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body” (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22). In Luke 22:19 we read that Jesus “took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.” Breaking of bread is also emphasized by Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:24: “When he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.” The broken bread is the sign of the broken body of Christ.

Some object and say that the body of Christ was not really broken. Did not the apostle John emphasize this when he recorded the spear thrust in the side of Jesus? “When they came to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake not his legs: but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water. And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true; and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe. For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken” (John 19:33–36). The scripture quoted in this passage probably refers to the paschal lamb of which we read in Exodus 12:46: “In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof.” In Numbers 9:12 we read, “They shall leave none of it unto the morning, nor break any bone of it: according to all the ordinances of the passover they shall keep it.” Perhaps another reference is Psalm 34:20: “He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.”

Although in this sense the body of the Savior was never broken and was laid whole in the sepulcher of Joseph of Arimathea, yet in a real sense it was broken, as Jesus emphasized at his institution of the Lord's supper: "This is my body, which is broken for you." His body was broken by the nails hammered through his hands and feet, as well as by the spear thrust of the soldier that miraculously resulted in the flowing forth of blood and water from his side. It was broken exactly in such a way that Jesus could for six hours slowly pour out his lifeblood, taste death in all its fullness, and suffer the wrath of God for the sins of his own. It is proper to preserve this symbolism in the hands of the minister breaking the bread before the eyes of the assembled congregation.

The same can be said of the pouring of the wine into the cup, although this was not expressly emphasized in the accounts of the institution of the Lord's supper. Jesus "took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it: for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:27–28). "He took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Mark 14:23–24). "Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you" (Luke 22:20).

Just as the broken bread is the symbol of the broken body of Christ, so the poured-out wine is the symbol of the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Also this part of the rich symbolism of the supper of the Lord ought to be preserved in the celebration of it. There certainly can be no objection against the use of the individual cup. Especially for large congregations individual cups are undoubtedly to be preferred. The symbolism is not in the cup but in the wine. Where individual cups are used, there can be no objection, but it is entirely proper for the minister to pour out wine into one cup in the sight of the congregation before the filled cups are distributed to the communicants.

Third, there is symbolism in the eating and drinking of the signs of the broken bread and of the poured-out wine. At the institution of the Lord's supper the Savior commanded, "Take, eat; this is my body." When he had taken the cup, he said, "Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28). The signs of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper are not simply to be looked at, but are to be appropriated by eating and drinking. This eating and drinking is a sign of the spiritual activity of faith, whereby we appropriate Christ and all his benefits, as the Lord said to the Jews in Capernaum, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For

my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53–56).

Eating the broken bread and drinking the poured-out wine as signs of the activity of saving faith, whereby we appropriate the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, belong to the essential symbolism of the Lord's supper. This is also the instruction of the Heidelberg Catechism in answer 75. The sight of the signs of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ assures us that we are partakers of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross. "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…he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ." As certainly as the activity of saving faith is necessary for the appropriation of Christ and all his benefits, so surely do eating the broken bread and drinking the poured-out wine belong to the essential symbolism of the Lord's supper.

Fourth, to the symbolism of the sacrament belong the words of the institution of the Lord's supper that must be spoken by the minister who serves communion. These words are "take, eat; this is my body"; "this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many"; and "this do in remembrance of me." These words are not to be considered only in the sense of a command that must be obeyed, although this certainly is true. Not to partake of the table of the Lord; that is, not to eat the sign of his broken body and drink the sign of his shed blood, and thus not to heed the command of Christ to do this in remembrance of him, is disobedience. But more important is the truth that the word of Christ is powerful and efficacious and that this efficacious word he will surely speak through the Holy Spirit to the hearts of the believers when they celebrate the Lord's supper. Through the officiating minister Christ speaks his own word to believers. Without the presence of Christ at the communion table there is no sacrament, and then the Lord's supper cannot be a means of grace for the strengthening of our faith. The words of the minister, repeating preferably as literally as possible the words that Christ spoke at the institution of the Lord's supper, belong as an essential part to the celebration of communion.

Fifth, to the symbolism of the sacrament belong the table of communion and the supper itself. The supper is a sign of the fellowship of friendship. The table of communion is the table of God's everlasting covenant, as the Lord addressed the church in Laodicea, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he

with me” (Rev. 3:20). At the table of communion believers eat and drink with Christ and through Christ with their covenantal God who dwells with them, walks among them, and calls them his sons and his daughters. Thus the table of communion is a sign of the tabernacle of God with men as it will be realized in the new heavens and the new earth.

Such is the symbolism of the Lord’s supper in all its riches. The signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine remain the heart of the entire symbolism.

Nevertheless, the other elements may not be discarded or ignored. The eating and drinking of the signs, the minister’s repeating the words of Christ, and the table and the supper as signs of fellowship and covenantal communion certainly belong to the rich symbolism of the table of the Lord.

The Significance of the Lord’s Supper

Like the sacrament of holy baptism the holy supper concentrates in its significance around the idea of the covenant as a relation of friendship between God and his people in Christ. This second sacrament has appropriately been called the supper of the Lord or the table of the covenant or the communion table. The idea of the covenant as a relation of friendship between God and his people is beautifully symbolized in our eating and drinking with God at his table.

This truth is suggested in the Form for the Administration of the Lord’s supper:

> That we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his last Supper, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples, and said, *Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me; in like manner also when he had supped he took the cup, gave thanks and said, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do ye as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me*…that is, as often as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you shall thereby as by a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this my hearty love and faithfulness towards you; that, whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given my body to the death of the cross and shed my blood for you; and as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink the same with your mouth in remembrance of me.[2]

This is also expressed in question and answer 76 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

> *What is it then to eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ?*
>
> It is not only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal; but also… to become more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live, and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

The reference here is to Ephesians 5:30. The whole passage from which this text is taken speaks of the relation between Christ and his church as a marriage relation, which is the earthly symbol of the covenant of friendship between God and his people.

> 25. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it;
> 26. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,
> 27. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
> 28. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.
> 29. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church:
> 30. For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.
> 31. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.
> 32. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph. 5:25–32)

That the covenant of God is reflected in the marriage relation between man and wife is evident from the Old Testament. The relation between God and his Old Testament people Israel was referred to as a marriage relation in Isaiah 54:5: “Thy Maker is thine husband; the LORD of hosts is his name; and thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel; The God of the whole earth shall he be called.” In Jeremiah 3:14: “Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion.” In Hosea 2:18–23:

> 18. And in that day will I make a covenant for them with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven, and with the creeping things of the ground: and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.
> 19. And I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in lovingkindness, and in mercies.

20. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD.

21. And it shall come to pass in that day, I will hear, saith the LORD, I will hear the heavens, and they shall hear the earth;

22. And the earth shall hear the corn, and the wine, and the oil; and they shall hear Jezreel.

23. And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say unto them which were not my people, Thou are my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

Apostasy from Jehovah, especially idolatry, was characterized as adultery. In Numbers 25:1–3 the violation of the covenant with God on the part of Israel is called whoredom: "Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel." In Ezekiel 16:30–33 Israel is presented as a faithless wife committing adultery: "How weak is thine heart…seeing thou doest all these things, the work of an imperious whorish woman; in that thou buildest thine eminent place in the head of every way, and makest thine high place in every street; and hast not been as an harlot, in that thou scornest hire; but as a wife that committeth adultery, which taketh strangers instead of her husband! They give gifts to all whores: but thou givest thy gifts to all thy lovers, and hirest them, that they may come unto thee on every side for thy whoredom." The same idea is expressed repeatedly in the prophecy of Hosea: "Plead with your mother, plead: for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband: let her therefore put away her whoredoms out of her sight, and her adulteries from between her breasts." "Then said the LORD unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress, according to the love of the LORD toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine." "Ephraim is joined to idols, let him alone. Their drink is sour: they have committed whoredom continually: her rulers with shame do love, Give ye" (Hos. 2:2; 3:1; 4:17–18).

Also in the New Testament the relation between Christ and his church and, therefore, the relation between God and his people as a covenantal relation of friendship is presented under the figures of marriage and of a wedding feast. Thus we read in Matthew 22:1–14 of the parable of the king who made a marriage feast for his son and sent forth his servants to call those who were bidden to the wedding. The same figure lies at the basis of the parable of the ten virgins, the heart of which is expressed in Matthew 25:10: "While they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut." The same idea is expressed in Romans 7:4: "My brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye

should be married to another, even to him who is raised up from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God." In Ephesians 5, already quoted, this idea is so strong that when the apostle wrote, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh," he explained these words as being chiefly and directly applicable to the relation concerning Christ and his church (vv. 31–32). In Revelation 19:7 we read, "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready."

In these scriptural passages there are not two different relations symbolized by the covenant of marriage—the covenant between God and his people in the old dispensation and the love relation between Christ and his church as his bride in the new dispensation. On the contrary, the same covenantal relation in both dispensations is expressed in these passages from both testaments.

The relation is that through Christ, the Son of God in human nature, who died for his church on the accursed tree and rose again, who was exalted in the highest heavens, and who received the Spirit of promise and poured him out into the church, God established his eternal covenant of friendship with his people. Christ is the Son of God in human nature, Immanuel, God with us. Centrally in him God and man are forever united in the most intimate covenantal relation of friendship. In Christ the bride of the Lamb is the same as the wife of Jehovah. In union with Christ, the Son of God in the flesh, we have access to the Father as the triune God, and we stand in an eternal covenantal relation of friendship with him.

This truth is evident from many scriptural passages. "Jesus saith unto him [Thomas], I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him" (John 14:6–7). "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake" (vv. 9–11). "At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you. If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (vv. 20 23). Jesus prayed in his sacerdotal prayer, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast

loved me" (John 17:22–23). From these passages and many others it is evident that the bride of Christ is the wife of Jehovah and that the covenantal relation of friendship with the everlasting God is symbolized by the covenant of marriage between man and wife.

The Lord's supper signifies that God established his covenant with us unilaterally: he established it alone and sovereignly. This is expressed in question and answer 75. The central significance of the Lord's supper is that God established his covenant with us through the death of Christ as a sacrifice for our sins and reconciled us to himself and did not impute our trespasses unto us. He alone absolutely and sovereignly established his everlasting covenant with us. He established it forever with the elect in the death of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was prefigured in the ratification of the covenant, as God revealed to Abraham.

> 9. And he said unto him, Take me an heifer of three years old, and a she goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.
> 10. And he took unto him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.
> 11. And when the fowls came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away.
> 12. And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.
>
> 17. And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.
> 18. In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates. (Gen. 15:9–12, 17–18)

It was customary for covenanting parties to divide sacrificial animals and to place the pieces in juxtaposition to one another, and both parties would pass through those pieces. The meaning was that the covenanting parties would rather be cut in pieces and pass through death than ever to violate the covenant. In the case of the covenant God ratified with Abram, it was not Abram and God who passed through those pieces but God alone in the symbols of the smoking furnace and the burning lamp. This means that God established his covenant alone, without Abram as a party, and that God would rather die than ever violate his covenant. The covenant was realized in the cross, for in the death of the Son of God on Calvary, God established the basis of righteousness for his everlasting covenant and testified that in Christ God would rather pass through death than ever break his everlasting covenant with his people. The significance of the signs of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper is that God established his covenant and a basis of righteousness in the death of his Son, and on that basis God

promises the forgiveness of sins and everlasting life in the fellowship of his friendship. These are the promises of which the Heidelberg Catechism speaks in question and answer 75.

The Lord's supper is the wedding ring that Christ puts on the finger of his bride, the wife of Jehovah, to wear as a sure pledge in this world. The church, the bride of Christ, is still in the world, while her husband is in heaven. She is not yet finally joined to her husband, although in principle she is risen with him and placed with him in heavenly places. She still waits for the heavenly wedding. While she is in the world, she finds abundant reason to despair of ever being married and joining her heavenly bridegroom, for by nature she is unfaithful. According to the old man of sin she is still an adulteress. In the body of this death the motions of sin are still within her. Although in principle she loves the Lord her God with all her heart, mind, soul, and strength and delights in the law of God after the inward man, she notices another law in her members that wars against the law of her mind and brings her into captivity to the law of sin in her members (Rom. 7:22–23). According to that other law she still commits adultery.

Besides, in this world she lies in the midst of death, and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men. Therefore she cries out, "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" In that state and in that condition she needs comfort. That comfort she finds in the word of her God. As an added comfort and assurance the bridegroom puts the wedding ring on her finger. Looking at that wedding ring, she hears the voice of her bridegroom saying,

> As often as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you shall thereby, as a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this my hearty love and faithfulness towards you; that, whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given my body to the death of the cross and shed my blood for you; and as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink the same with your mouth in remembrance of me.[3]

This is the element of comfort and added assurance that the Lord our God through the holy sacrament of the supper of the Lord gives believers in addition to the promise as proclaimed in the gospel.

This is not a promise other than what comes through the preaching of the word, for the sacrament and preaching hold forth the same promise. The promise

is that God grants us remission of sins and life eternal for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross. Moreover, the one promise is coextensive with regard to those who receive and partake of it. It is not for all who outwardly hear the gospel and who outwardly receive and partake of the signs of the holy supper, but only for those who are engrafted by a true faith into Jesus Christ, that is, for the living elect. They and they only can eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ. To eat the crucified body and to drink the shed blood of Christ is "to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin and life eternal." While in the preaching of the word that promise of forgiveness and life is *heard*, in the sacrament of the holy supper it is *seen* in the signs of bread and wine, which signify as a sure pledge and seal God's hearty love and faithfulness toward his people.

The signs are not only displayed on the communion table to be looked at, but they are to be eaten and drunk. We not only see the signs by faith, but we also touch them, taste them, take them into our bodies, and digest them. This the Heidelberg Catechism explains in answer 75: "He feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ." Answer 76 explains that when we eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ we "become more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone*; and that we live, and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul."

The Catechism refers to John 6, which speaks to the Lord's supper and is important for a correct understanding of this sacrament. The reference is especially to the conversation of Jesus with the Jews in the synagogue in Capernaum the day after Jesus' miracle of feeding the five thousand, which was a sign that he is the bread of life. The Jews, not understanding this sign, were enthusiastic and wanted to take Jesus by force to make him their king, but the Lord sent his disciples across the sea and withdrew himself into a mountain. The next day the multitude again sought Jesus in Capernaum, and when they found him they were curious to know how he had come there from the other side of the sea. The Lord, however, not being interested at all in merely curious questions, answered them, "Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for the meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall

give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed" (John 6:26–27).

Following these words a striking and interesting conversation ensued that ended in the Jews' alienation from Christ. The chief subject of this conversation was the bread of life. At first it appeared as if Jesus and the Jews were discussing the same theme. The multitude seemed to be eager to receive the bread of life Jesus could give them. The Savior said to them, "Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world" (John 6:32–33).

The multitude, still not understanding that the Lord spoke of spiritual bread and having in mind the bread with which he miraculously had fed them on the preceding day, prayed him, "Lord, evermore give us this bread." Thereupon Jesus began sharply to disillusion them by saying to them, "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Upon this and the words that immediately followed this saying of Jesus, the Jews began to murmur, because they began to understand that he was talking about an entirely different bread than what they sought. And murmuring, they began to contradict him, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? how is it then that he saith, I came down from heaven?" (v. 42). The difference was accentuated when the Lord in his further speech to the Jews in Capernaum emphasized not only that he is the bread of life, but that the bread he will give them is his flesh, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). The Jews in their unbelief asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

> 53. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.
>
> 54. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
>
> 55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.
>
> 56. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.
>
> 57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.
>
> 58. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (John 6:53–58).

"Many therefore of his disciples, when they had heard this, said, This is a hard saying; who can hear It? From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him" (John 6:60, 66).

The Heidelberg Catechism calls attention to two aspects of this phase of holy communion. The first aspect is the act of Christ: he feeds and nourishes us with his body and blood. The second aspect is the act of faith whereby we eat the sign of the broken bread and drink the sign of the poured-out wine.

Bone of His Bone

What does the Heidelberg Catechism mean when it instructs us that Christ feeds and nourishes our souls to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood and that to eat the crucified body and to drink the shed blood of Christ means to become more united with his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, so that we are flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone?

To understand this we must remember that all our salvation is literally in Christ our Lord. We are saved by grace not only in the sense that Christ merited all the blessings of salvation for us by his death and perfect obedience, but also in the sense that the power of grace delivers us from all the power of sin and death and makes us actual partakers of righteousness and eternal life. This grace operates upon us from the God of our salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Christ is not only the mediator of our redemption, but he is also the mediator of our deliverance. From him we receive all the spiritual blessings of salvation. In order to receive them, we must be united with Christ, incorporated into him, and become one plant with him. All the spiritual blessings of salvation we need to become and remain children of God, redeemed and delivered and sanctified and glorified, are in him. Thus the apostle expressed it in 1 Corinthians 1:30: “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” We have redemption through Christ’s blood, even the forgiveness of sins. In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, for it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 1:14, 19; Col. 2:3, 9). Christ is the bread of life, and if any man comes unto him, he shall never hunger. He is the living bread which, if any man eat, he shall live forever (John 6:35, 48, 51). Christ presents himself as the water of life and calls the thirsty to come unto him and drink (John 7:37). He is the resurrection and the life, and he that believes in him will never die (John 11:25–26). He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Christ said, “I am the true vine…Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:1, 4–5). “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace

for grace" (John 1:16). It is plain from scripture that all the blessings of salvation are literally in Jesus Christ. He must nourish our souls, and he nourishes them to everlasting life with grace.

What is the meaning of the term "grace" that so frequently occurs in scripture?

The word "grace" has a variety of meanings in scripture. In the Old Testament the word means bending, inclining, attraction, beauty, charm, and favor. The word translated as "grace" in the New Testament has a great variety of meanings. It signifies pleasantness, favor, forfeited favor, operation of grace, benefits of grace, and thankfulness. In the epistles of Paul the word is often used in contrast with merit and work. A comparison of many scriptural passages where the word appears teaches us that God is absolutely the gracious one. He is gracious in himself, irrespective of any relation to the creature. Grace is a virtue of God. He is in himself gracious, for he is the absolute and infinite good and glorious God, the implication of all perfection. He is the charming, the attractive, the gracious God. At his right hand are pleasures forevermore. As the triune God he beholds and knows himself perfectly. He is attracted to himself, loves himself, and has pleasure in himself. In this sense God is absolutely gracious.

God also has pleasure in the creature. The creature, especially man, who was formed after the image of God, and in the highest sense his church in Christ, he has conceived eternally and willed as beautiful. Therefore he has pleasure in the creature for his name's sake, and it finds grace in his eyes. He lavishes upon that creature the evidence of his favor and draws it unto himself with cords of love into his eternal covenant of friendship.

When that creature lies in guilt and sin, so that in itself it cannot be the object of God's pleasure and favor but of his wrath and aversion, and if that creature is from eternity beheld, elected, and foreordained in Christ by God's sovereign grace to become conformed to the image of his Son, justified, glorified, found precious in his eyes, and engraved in the palms of God's hands, God shows grace to that creature in Christ Jesus the Lord. When that eternal grace goes out to the creature, it is forfeited favor, and it wholly contrasts with work and merit. By that grace all our transgressions are blotted out, and we are justified in the blood of the cross. In that grace we have the adoption unto children and the right to eternal life.

Grace is also a power and an operation within us whereby we are redeemed from the oppression, power, and dominion of sin and become conformed unto the image of God's Son. By the power of that grace we become pleasing to God, formed according to the image he has engraved of us in the palms of his hands.

We think especially of that grace when the Catechism instructs us that Christ

feeds our souls unto everlasting life. All the power of grace is in him alone. Out of his fullness we have received grace for grace. Christ is our all. All the spiritual blessings of salvation that we need to translate us from death into life, from darkness into light, from corruption into righteousness, and to raise us from lowest hell to highest heaven, are in him. He not only died as our juridical righteousness, but he also arose and was exalted at the right hand of God and received the Spirit without measure and as the quickening Spirit he set us free and bestowed on us the grace of eternal life.

It stands to reason that to receive all these blessings of salvation out of him we must be united with him.

A few simple and homely illustrations will elucidate the meaning of this. In our towns and villages we receive water in our homes from a central reservoir, tank or water tower, into which water is pumped from some natural source. The electric current that brings light into our homes is generated in a central power plant in a nearby city, and the gas to cook food and to heat our homes reaches them from huge storage tanks. From one reservoir all the homes and the city are supplied with drinking water, one power plant generates all the electricity for the city and homes, and from one central gas plant flows the gas for them. In the entire new Jerusalem Christ will be the spiritual power plant from whom the current of life and light will flow into our souls. He is the one and only storage tank in the entire kingdom of God, the sole reservoir, out of whom flows continually all the water of life to quench the thirst of all the citizens of that kingdom. He is God's spiritual reservoir of salvation for all his people. From Christ grace for grace and all the spiritual blessings of salvation unto eternal life flow into the souls of all the elect. To receive grace and salvation from Christ, we must be spiritually united with him.

If one's home is not properly wired and connected with the central electric plant in the city, one will turn on the light switch in vain. There will be no light. If from the gas tanks in the town, pipes do not conduct the gas into one's home, it is of no avail to put a beautiful gas stove in the kitchen and a gas furnace in the basement, for there will be no heat. In vain one turns the faucet to draw water if the home is not connected to a nearby central reservoir.

The same is true of our relation to Christ. If our souls are not spiritually connected with him, who is our life, light, righteousness, wisdom, knowledge, sanctification, and redemption, we will never have light, righteousness, and peace. Our souls will remain dark and miserable. We must be literally joined with Christ. As he must be in us for him to become our righteousness, holiness, and eternal life, so we must be in him, for us to draw out of him all the blessings of grace. Such is the underlying truth of the Catechism when it tells us that we

must be united with his sacred body and become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.

This truth is clearly taught in all of scripture. It is the meaning of the figure of the vine and of the branches that must be in the vine in order to bear fruit. Christ is the vine, and believers are the branches. The branches are nothing except for their organic union with the vine. Even as the vine bears fruit in and through the branches, so believers can bear fruit only because Christ lives and bears fruit in them. The same truth is taught by the figure of the church as the body of Christ. Christ is the head; the church is his body. Only from and by the head can the body live. What is true of the body as a whole is equally true of believers individually as members of that body. They have no life in themselves. Only by their organic union with the body do they live. For this reason the Bible speaks of believers as being in Christ, for of God they are in Christ Jesus, who is made unto them wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new (2 Cor. 5:17). The saints are called “the faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 1:1). They were sometimes darkness, but now they are light in the Lord (Eph. 5:8). Thus we are admonished to abide in him that we may bear much fruit (John 15:4; 1 John 2:28).

A spiritual union must be established between Christ and our souls before we can receive any fruit of Christ’s death and resurrection. This union is absolutely first. Unless that living connection is established between Christ and our inmost hearts, we are outside of him, and outside of Christ there is only guilt and damnation, corruption and death, darkness and desolation. Before there can be the faintest spark of life in us, before there can appear even the faintest glimmer of light in our souls, before the simplest prayer can be uttered from our lips, before even the slightest longing can arise in our souls for God and his Christ, that union must be accomplished. It is an absolute prerequisite for the reception of all salvation. Christ is our all, and our salvation is in him. We cannot begin to draw our life and light, knowledge and wisdom, and righteousness and sanctification from him until our inmost hearts are joined in spiritual unity with him who is the revelation of the God of our salvation.

How is this union accomplished? The answer of scripture is that it is not accomplished by us, but absolutely and unconditionally by God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Salvation is not of us but of God alone.

This must be emphasized over against all Arminianism, which teaches that ultimately man takes the initiative to come to Christ. According to this teaching Christ is absolutely powerless to save the sinner unless he is first willing to open his heart and to come to Christ. The Arminian admits that Christ is salvation and

that the soul must be united with Christ in order to receive salvation. But if this union is to be accomplished, the sinner must come to Christ. The Savior is willing to receive the sinner, to come into his heart, and to join that sinner unto himself; but the sinner must first come. He must accept Christ, or he must at least be willing to receive him.

But this is utterly absurd and impossible. If it were true, no man could ever be saved, for according to scripture the natural man is in the flesh, and the mind of the flesh is death. It is enmity against God; it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. The natural man is dead in sin and misery. He can neither perform nor will what is good. He loves iniquity and is a slave of sin. He loves darkness rather than light. He cannot see the kingdom of God. How then can such a man open his heart to Christ? How can he hunger and thirst after the bread and the water of life? If it were true that the sinner must first hunger and thirst for Christ, no sinner could be saved, because apart from Christ the sinner can neither come to him, nor long for him, nor seek him, nor utter the weakest prayer beseeching Christ to come into his heart.

Thanks be to God that salvation is not of man or of the will of man. Union with Christ does not depend on man's consent. Jesus said, "No man can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." "No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:44, 65).

According to the Heidelberg Catechism we are united with Christ's sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells in Christ and in us. The Father draws us with cords of love to Christ, who is exalted and draws all of us unto him. When we are so drawn and united with Christ, and he by his Spirit lives in us, we respond, we hunger and thirst, we long and pray, we come and embrace him, we eat the bread of life and are satisfied, we drink the water of life and thirst nevermore, we draw from him, who is the fullness of all the blessings of salvation, even grace for grace.

The other aspect of our becoming more and more united with the sacred body of Christ is that we are united with Christ through faith not of ourselves, but as the gift of God. Through faith Christ feeds and nourishes our souls unto everlasting life, and through the activity of faith we eat and drink him. In nourishing our souls unto eternal life, God in Christ does not treat us as stocks and blocks, but as rational, moral creatures. We are not nourished unto everlasting life in such a way that we do not taste the wonder of God's grace. Sometimes it happens in a hospital that a man is incapable of taking nourishment by eating and drinking and food is injected into his vein through a needle. He is nourished without any action on his part. He does not eat and drink; he does not even taste the food. He is wholly passive. But this is not the way Christ

nourishes our souls unto everlasting life; he nourishes us through faith.

The activity of saving faith is such that the sinner draws all the blessings of salvation out of Christ, eats his flesh and drinks his blood. Faith is the mysterious and wonderful spiritual power whereby the soul strikes its roots into Christ, clings to him, appropriates him, and draws out of him all the glorious blessings of salvation in him—forgiveness of sins, eternal righteousness, and life.

The difference between a believer and an unbeliever is similar to the difference between a living young tree and a dead fence post. You can plant a fence post deep into the ground, but you do not expect it to show signs of life, to develop branches, and to bear fruit. Rather, it will rot in the soil in which it is planted. But plant a sapling in the same soil, and it will strike roots into the ground, draw nourishment from it, grow, and bear fruit.

The same is true of a living, saving faith in relation to Christ. Bring the unbelieving, dead sinner into contact with Christ as he is revealed in the holy scriptures and there is no saving reaction. On the contrary, there is a reaction of unbelief unto damnation. Lead the believer to Christ through the preaching of the word and he will take hold of Christ, cling to him, strike the roots of his entire soul into him, and draw out of him all the spiritual nourishment necessary unto eternal life. What the roots are for the young tree, saving faith is for the believer in Christ. By faith the believer is rooted in Christ. Since he is revealed to us in the scriptures, true faith always turns to them, delights in the word of God, is called into activity through the preached word, and constantly grows according as faith increases in the knowledge and understanding of everything God has revealed in his word. By faith the sinner knows the Lord Jesus Christ as the fullness of his own emptiness, as the righteousness of his own unrighteousness, as the light of his own darkness, as the life of his own death, as the bread of life for which he hungers, as the water of life for which he thirsts, and as the way, the truth, and the life by which he longs to come to the Father. He recognizes him as his savior and redeemer, longs for him, and eats and drinks him unto righteousness and life. The believer knows Christ with the knowledge of love and delight.

These are the two aspects of the wonder of grace whereby we become more and more united to the sacred body of Christ, become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone. On the one hand, Christ imparts himself to us by the Spirit of grace; on the other hand, by the activity of saving faith we eat and drink him unto life eternal.

All this is effected by the preaching of the word as a means of grace.

This wonder of grace is signified in the supper of the Lord. That supper

signifies and seals that Christ feeds and nourishes our souls to everlasting life with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as we receive from the hands of the minister and taste with our mouths the bread and cup of the Lord as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ. The supper also signifies that we eat the crucified body and drink the shed blood of Christ, so that we are more and more united to his sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells in Christ and in us. Thus the Lord’s supper stimulates our faith, whereby we draw all of our salvation out of Christ who died for us and rose again.

LORD'S DAY 29

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

A. Not at all; but as the water in baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, neither is the washing away of sin itself, being only the sign and confirmation thereof appointed of God; so the bread in the Lord's Supper is not changed into the very body of Christ, though agreeably to the nature and properties of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ Jesus.

Q. 79. Why then doth Christ call the bread his body, and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood; and Paul, the communion of the body and blood of Christ?

A. Christ speaks thus not without great reason, namely, not only thereby to teach us that as bread and wine support this temporal life, so his crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink whereby our souls are fed to eternal life; but more especially by these visible signs and pledges to assure us that we are as really partakers of his true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Ghost) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.

Chapter Two



LORD'S DAY 29

The Fearful Error of the Roman Catholic Church

In the preceding Lord's Day the Catechism treated the subject of the institution of the Lord's supper and its general significance. It taught us, among other things, that by means of eating the bread and drinking the wine of the Lord's supper we become more and more united to the sacred body of Christ and become flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone.

Lord's Day 29 treats the subject of the sacramental operation. This topic should not be passed by lightly. Sometimes preachers complain that the Heidelberg Catechism devotes three long Lord's Days to the subject of the Lord's supper. Many have the opinion that if the Catechism were written today these long Lord's Days could be shortened considerably and probably compressed into one Lord's Day. There are other matters that demand our attention in our modern age, and our controversy, especially with Rome, certainly does not occupy the center of our interest as it did at the time of the Reformation. However, this is undoubtedly a mistake, for the mode of operation in the sacraments, especially in the sacrament of the Lord's supper, is just as important as it ever was, because fundamentally it concerns the grace of God.

How are the sacraments, especially the Lord's supper, a means of grace? How does the second sacrament work? How am I nourished with the body and blood of Christ through the Lord's supper?

The Catechism introduces the subject of sacramental operation by asking, "Do then the bread and wine become the very body and blood of Christ?" It instructs us that our being nourished by the body and blood of Christ is not effected by a magical operation on the signs, but by an operation of the Holy Spirit in our hearts through the signs of the broken body and the shed blood of Christ. By these signs Christ through his Spirit instructs us and assures us that he nourishes us with the bread of life.

Lord's Day 29 opposes especially Rome's error of transubstantiation and

denies the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation.

According to Rome, Christ is neither spiritually present in the Lord's supper, as taught by the Reformed, nor really present in his body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine, as taught by the Lutherans; but Christ is really present by changing the bread and wine into his body and blood.

The question can be asked whether the Roman Catholic Church really teaches this fearful error of transubstantiation. The answer is that it not only teaches this false doctrine, but also pronounces its curse upon all who deny it. This is evident from the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent.

> The holy Synod teaches, and openly and simply professes, that, in the august sacrament of the holy Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible things.[1]
>
> This faith has ever been in the Church of God, that, immediately after the consecration, the veritable [true] body of our Lord, and his veritable blood, together with his soul and divinity, are under the species [form] of bread and wine; but the body indeed under the species of bread, and the blood under the species of wine, by the force of the words; but the body itself under the species of wine, and the blood under the species of bread, and the soul under both, by the force of that natural connection and concomitancy whereby the parts of Christ our Lord, *who hath now risen from the dead, to die no more*, are united together; and the divinity, furthermore, on account of the admirable hypostatical union thereof with his body and soul. Wherefore, it is most true, that as much is contained under either species as under both; for Christ whole and entire is under the species of bread, and under any part whatsoever of that species; likewise the whole (Christ) is under the species of wine, and under the parts thereof.[2]

The Romish church teaches that the whole Christ is in the bread and the whole Christ is in the wine. Besides, the whole Christ is in each and every particle of both bread and wine. Moreover, it teaches that the effect of transubstantiation is permanent. Because the change of the substance of the elements into the substance of the body and blood of Christ permanently remains, the Roman Catholic Church concludes that the host, or wafer, may be preserved, brought to the sick, and carried in processions. Thus it is proper that the host be worshiped.

The Roman Catholic Church distinguishes between two kinds of worship: latria and dulia. Dulia may be rendered to the saints and to angels, but latria is

due to God alone. Christ is God manifested in the flesh, and therefore worship may be paid to him. Because after the consecration of the bread and wine Christ is present in the wafer, or host, in both his divine and human natures, the Romanists pay homage to and worship the wafer. They teach the propriety of worshiping the wafer as it represents Christ.

> Wherefore, there is no room left for doubt, that all the faithful of Christ may, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament. For not therefore is it the less to be adored on this account, that it was instituted by Christ, the Lord, in order to be received; for we believe that same God to be present therein, of whom the eternal Father, when introducing him into the world, says: *And let all the angels of God adore him*; whom the Magi, *falling down*, *adored*; who, in fine, as the Scripture testifies, was adored by the apostles in Galilee.
>
> The holy Synod declares, moreover, that very piously and religiously was this custom introduced into the Church, that this sublime and venerable sacrament be, with special veneration and solemnity, celebrated, every year, on a certain day, and that a festival; and that it be borne reverently and with honor in processions through the streets and public places. For it is most just that there be certain appointed holy days, whereon all Christians may, with a special and unusual demonstration, testify that their minds are grateful and thankful to their common Lord and Redeemer for so ineffable and truly divine a benefit, whereby the victory and triumph of his death are represented.[3]

The Roman Catholic Church declared concerning the doctrine of transubstantiation as follows:

> And because that Christ, our Redeemer, declared that which he offered under the species of bread to be truly his own body, therefore has it ever been firm belief in the Church of God, and this holy Synod doth now declare it anew, that, by the consecration of the bread and of the wine, a conversion is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood; which conversion is, by the holy Catholic Church, suitably and properly called Transubstantiation.[4]

The council anathemizes everyone who denies this doctrine of

transubstantiation.

> If any one denieth, that, in the sacrament of the most holy Eucharist, are contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and consequently the whole Christ; but saith that he is only therein as in a sign, or in a figure, or virtue [force]: let him be anathema.[5]
>
> If any one saith, that, in the sacred and holy sacrament of the Eucharist, the substance of the bread and wine remains conjointly with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and denieth that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and the whole substance of the wine into the blood—the species only of the bread and wine remaining—which conversion indeed the Catholic Church most aptly calls Transubstantiation: let him be anathema.[6]
>
> If any one denieth, that, in the venerable sacrament of the Eucharist, the whole Christ is contained under each species, and under every part of each species, when separated: let him be anathema.[7]

Regarding the substance of the bread and wine being changed permanently into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, the Council of Trent decreed the following:

> If any one saith, that, after the consecration is completed, the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are not in the admirable sacrament of the Eucharist, but [are there] only during the use, whilst it is being taken, and not either before or after; and that, in the hosts, or consecrated particles, which are reserved or which remain after communion, the true body of the Lord remaineth not: let him be anathema.[8]
>
> If any one saith, that, in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, is not to be adored with the worship, even external of latria; and is, consequently, neither to be venerated with a special festive solemnity, nor to be solemnly borne about in procession, according to the laudable and universal rite and custom of holy Church; or, is not to be proposed publicly to the people to be adored, and that the adorers thereof are idolaters: let him be anathema.[9]

It is a well-known fact that the laity in the Roman Catholic Church do not

partake of the communion wine but only of the wafer. The church admits that this usage is contrary to Holy Writ and to the custom of the early church. But it claims that it is not necessary to partake of the wine on the ground that the blood of Christ is in the body and the whole Christ, body and soul and divinity, is in every particle of both species; and he who eats the consecrated bread eats the whole Christ.

But this absurd and wanton violation of the ordinance of Christ is the result of the doctrine of transubstantiation itself. According to this theory the cup after consecration does not contain wine but the real blood of Christ. The church feared that in passing the communion cup a drop of wine, that is, a drop of Christ's blood, would be spilled. To avoid this profanation, the church decided that only the priests should drink the wine and the laity should receive only the wafer. Thus the simple and beautiful institution of the supper of the Lord was corrupted and profaned.

This corruption did not enter the church all at once but gradually developed. Even some of the early church fathers spoke of the signs in the Lord's supper as being connected with the body and blood of Christ, although Augustine did not teach anything like the doctrine of transubstantiation. He held that the unbeliever received nothing through this sacrament. During the Middle Ages the awful lie of transubstantiation was gradually adopted, although even then some opposed this doctrine. The Scholastics, whose purpose always was to maintain the tradition of the church, defended it. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 adopted the doctrine of transubstantiation, and in the sixteenth century the Council of Trent set its seal upon the doctrine and called them accursed who denied it.

Although they do not value proof from scripture as highly as did the reformers, the Romanists tried to find support for this theory of transubstantiation in scripture. They pointed especially to John 6:48–65, where the Lord spoke of himself as the bread of life. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world… Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life…For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (vv. 51–56).

There is not a direct reference in John 6 to the institution of the Lord's supper. Even if there is an indirect reference to that institution, there certainly is no proof for the doctrine of transubstantiation. Surely the Lord did not speak of a literal eating of his flesh and a literal drinking of his blood. This was exactly the error the Capernaumites made: "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying,

How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (v. 52). At the end of his discourse at Capernaum, the Lord specifically stated, "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life" (v. 63). The Lord spoke of the sacrifice that he would offer on the cross and that can be partaken of only by faith.

Moreover, as Hodge remarked, this argument proves too much for the Romanists:

> Our Lord expressly declares that the eating of which He speaks is essential to salvation. If, therefore, his words are to be understood of the Lord's Supper, then a participation in that sacrament is essential to salvation. But this the Church of Rome explicitly denies, and must in consistency with its whole system, insist on denying. Romanists teach that spiritual life is as necessary to an experience of the benefits of this sacrament, as natural life is to the body's being nourished by food.
>
> They further teach that baptism, which precedes the eucharist, conveys all the saving benefits of Christ's redemption; they therefore cannot make the eucharist essential, and consequently they cannot, without contradicting Christ or themselves, interpret John 6:48–65 as referring to the Lord's Supper.[10]

The Romish church also appeals to the words "this is my body" of the institution of the Lord's supper. As has been frequently pointed out against this argument of the Romanists, the copulative verb *is* does not necessarily denote the identity of the subject and the predicate it connects. When the Lord said, "This is my body," he was still present in the flesh; therefore, he could not have meant that the bread he handed to his disciples at the institution of the Lord's supper was identified with or transubstantiated into his own body. Certain it is that the night Christ was betrayed, the disciples did not eat the body of the Lord, but mere bread. Besides, the word "is" in scripture frequently means signifies. Of that there are many examples. In Matthew 13:38 the phrase "the field is the world" means that in the parable of the wheat and tares the field signifies the world. The same is true of the following passages where Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:7, 9). In the same sense when at the institution of the Lord's supper the Lord pronounced, "This is my body," the verb "is" means signifies or symbolizes. There is no reason whatsoever in Holy Writ to interpret these words as indicating a change of substance. The signs certainly are not changed into the body of Christ.

It certainly is a valid objection against the doctrine of transubstantiation that it involves an impossibility.

Hodge remarked regarding impossibility:

> The impossible cannot be true, and, therefore, cannot, rationally, be an object of faith. It is impossible that the accidents or sensible properties of the bread and wine should remain if the substance be changed. Such a proposition has no more meaning in it than the assertion that an act can be without an agent. Accidents or properties are the phenomena of substance; and it is self-evident that there can be no manifestations where there is not something to be manifested. In other words, nothing, a "non-ens" cannot manifest itself. Romanists cannot turn to the theory that matter is not a substance; for that is not their doctrine. On the contrary, they assert that the substance of the bread is transmuted into the substance of Christ's body. Nor can they help themselves by resorting to the pantheistic doctrine that all accidents are phenomena of God, for that would upset their whole system. [11]

Another and perhaps more serious objection to this doctrine, which is closely connected with the former objection, is that according to it God creates a lie. According to the Roman Catholic Church the accidents or properties of the bread and wine remain after the consecration. The bread and the wine still appeal to our senses as bread and wine and nothing else. They look like bread and wine, they feel like those substances, and they taste like them. Yet, according to the Romanists, after the priest expresses the formula of consecration, the substances of bread and wine are transubstantiated into the substances of the body and blood of Christ. Thus through the priest God is presented as making a lie.

Regarding this point Hodge stated:

> It is moreover impossible that the well-attested testimony of our senses should be deceptive. If it once be assumed that we cannot trust to the laws of belief impressed on our nature, of which faith in our sense perceptions is one of the most important, then the foundation of all knowledge, faith, and religion is overturned. What has Catholicism to say for itself, if the people cannot trust their ears when they hear the teachings of the Church, or their eyes when they read its decrees? It has nothing to stand upon. It is engulfed with all things else in the abyss of nihilism. To believe in transubstantiation we must disbelieve our senses, and this God requires of no man. It involves disbelief in Him who is the author of our nature and of the laws which are

> impressed upon it. There is no more complete and destructive infidelity than the want of faith in the veracity of consciousness, whether it be consciousness of our sense perceptions, or of the truths involved in our rational, moral, or religious nature.[12]

The most serious and chief objection to the doctrine of transubstantiation is that it presents the grace of God as being in things. According to this doctrine the gracious operation of God through the signs and seals of the Lord's supper is not upon the hearts of believers but upon the signs. The signs are changed: the bread is changed into the body of Christ, and the wine is changed into his blood. Christ operates magically upon these signs, and they are placed within one's physical reach. Grace is in things. By the physical acts of taking and eating and drinking one can receive the grace of Christ. He can lay hold with his physical hands on grace as it is presented in the bread and wine. He can taste it with his mouth, chew it with his teeth, and digest grace in his stomach. As one of the defenders of this doctrine expressed it in the eleventh century, "The very body of Christ was truly held in the priest's hand, broken and chewed by the teeth of the faithful." According to the Romish church it is unnecessary to possess an active faith to partake of the Lord's supper; one must merely go to the eucharist with an empty stomach.

Because of this error our controversy with the Roman Catholic Church is still significant. We must not foster the notion that our controversy with Rome on this score is antiquated and insignificant. The chief and fundamental error of the fallacy of transubstantiation is that Christ's righteousness and salvation are bound up in physical things by an act of the institute of the church. The blessings of salvation are divorced from the operation of the Holy Spirit and from the activity of faith. They are made accessible to all who can physically eat and drink, hear and see, and understand with their natural minds.

Closely related to this Romish fallacy is the theory of common grace. It also postulates that grace is in things. The reprobate receive many blessings from God: food and drink, life and health, wives and children, homes and riches, and talents and powers. According to the defenders of common grace, all these things are grace to the wicked reprobate, and even the preaching of the word is grace to all who hear. Over against this false theory that grace is in things, we must insist that although men have all things in common, yet there is no grace except through an operation of the Holy Spirit, which operation is only upon the elect.

The Lutheran Doctrine of Consubstantiation

Reformed theologians denote the Lutheran view of the Lord's supper by the term *consubstantiation*. It is not exactly a Lutheran term, although Lutherans accept it as a substantially correct representation of their view.

In distinction from the sacramentarians, as the Lutherans call the Reformed, and in distinction from the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the Lutherans teach that in the Lord's supper the body and blood of Jesus Christ are really and substantially present in, with, and under the signs of the bread and wine on the table of the Lord.

At the time of the Reformation a schism arose between the Reformed and the Lutherans concerning the doctrine of the Lord's supper. Although the reformers agreed on all the great doctrines taught in the scriptures, they could not agree on this point. Although several attempts were made to reconcile, they all failed. That the controversy was sharp and bitter, at least on the part of the Lutherans, can be discerned from the language of the Formula of Concord.

> For a solid explication of this controversy it is first to be understood that there are two sorts of sacramentarians. For some are exceedingly gross sacramentarians; these in perspicuous and plain words openly profess that which they think in their heart, to wit: that in the Lord's Supper there is nothing more present than bread and wine, which alone are there distributed and received with the mouth. But others are astute and crafty, and thereby the most harmful of all the sacramentarians; these, when talking of the Lord's Supper, make in part an exceedingly high-sounding use of our mode of speaking, declaring that they too believe in a *true* presence of the *true*, substantial, and living body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, which presence and manducation, nevertheless, they say to be spiritual, such as takes place by faith. And yet these latter sacramentarians, under these high-sounding phrases, hide and hold fast the same gross opinion which the former have, to wit: that, besides the bread and wine, there is nothing more present or taken with the mouth in the Lord's Supper. For the term (*spiritualiter*) signifies nothing more to them than the Spirit of Christ or the virtue of the absent body of Christ and his merit, which is present; but they think that the body of Christ itself is in no way whatever present, but is contained above in the highest heaven, and they affirm that it behooves us by the meditations of faith to rise on high and ascend into heaven, and that this body and blood of Christ are to be sought there, and in nowise in union with the bread and wine of the Holy Supper.[13]

It is difficult to understand clearly the exact meaning of the Lutheran doctrine of consubstantiation. Do the Lutherans teach that the literal and natural flesh and blood of Christ are masticated by the teeth and swallowed by the mouth together with the signs of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper? Some of their statements leave the impression that this is their view, but other parts of the Lutheran confessions emphasize that eating and drinking is some sort of spiritual and supernatural process.

The Lutherans base their view on a literal interpretation of the words spoken by the Savior at the institution of the Lord's supper, "Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remissions of sins" (Matt. 26:26–28).

Luther insisted that these words must be taken literally, and the same is taught in all the Lutheran confessions.

> We believe, teach, and confess that the words of the Testament of Christ are not to be otherwise received than as the words themselves literally sound, so that the bread does not signify the absent body of Christ and the wine the absent blood of Christ, but that on account of the sacramental union the bread and wine are truly the body and blood of Christ.[14]

Under the heading, "The False and Erroneous Doctrine of the Calvinists on the Lord's Supper," the Saxon Visitation Articles condemn the teaching "that the before-cited words of Christ are to be understood figuratively, and not according to the letter, as they sound."[15]

Proceeding from the literal interpretation of Jesus' words, the Lutherans teach, first, that the body and blood of Christ are really and substantially present in the signs of the bread and wine.

> Of the Supper of the Lord they teach that the true body and blood of Christ are truly present [under the form of bread and wine], and are [there] communicated to those that eat in the Lord's Supper [and received]. And they disapprove of those that teach otherwise [wherefore also the opposite doctrine is rejected].[16]

Concerning confession of the sound doctrine of the supper of the Lord against the sacramentarians, the Lutherans "believe, teach, and confess that in the Lord's Supper the body and blood of Christ are truly and substantially present, and that they are truly distributed and taken together with the bread and wine."[17] The

Lutherans reject the errors of the sacramentarians, who teach “that the body of Christ in the holy Supper is not received by the mouth together with the bread, but that only bread and wine are received by the mouth, while the body of Christ is taken only spiritually, to wit, by faith.”[18] “The pure and true Doctrine of [the Lutheran] Churches on the Lord’s Supper” is “that the true and natural body of Christ which hung on the cross, and the true and natural blood, which flowed from the side of Christ, are exhibited and received.”[19] “The body and blood of Christ are received in the Supper, not only spiritually, which might be done out of the Supper; but by the mouth, with the bread and wine; yet in an inscrutable and supernatural manner; and this for a pledge and ascertainment of the resurrection of our bodies from the dead.”[20]

Second, the Lutherans teach that the real and substantial presence of the body and blood of Christ in the signs of the Lord’s supper must not be explained from any words of consecration spoken by man, but from the omnipotence of Christ, who sits at the right hand of God, and by the union of the two natures of Christ.

> Now the foundations on which we rest in this controversy with the sacramentarians are the following, which, moreover, Dr. Luther has laid in his Larger Confession concerning the Supper of the Lord:
>
> The first foundation is an article of our Christian faith, to wit: Jesus Christ is true, essential, natural, perfect God and man in unity of person, inseparable and undivided.
>
> Secondly: that the right hand of God is every where, and that Christ, in respect of his humanity, is truly and in very deed seated thereat, and therefore as present governs, and has in his hand and under his feet, as the Scripture saith (Eph. 1:22), all things which are in heaven and on earth. At this right hand of God no other man, nor even any angel, but the Son of Mary alone, is seated, whence also he is able to effect those things which we have said.
>
> Thirdly: that the Word of God is not false or deceiving.
>
> Fourthly: that God knows and has in his power various modes in which he can be any where, and is not confined to that single one which philosophers are wont to call local or circumscribed.[21]

The Lutherans teach the ubiquity of the human nature of Christ. Christ is not confined to heaven, but is everywhere according to the human nature after his ascension. By this they do not mean the same as divine omnipresence or immensity. They teach that Christ not only by his Spirit and grace, but according to his human nature, is not confined locally to heaven but is able to be present

wherever he wants to be. Therefore it is possible for him to be present in and under and with the signs of the bread and wine on the Lord's table. They express this in the Formula of Concord where they reject the errors of those who teach "that Christ's body is so confined in heaven that it can in no mode whatever be likewise at one and the same time in many places, or in all places where the Lord's Supper is celebrated."[22] They also reject the errors of those who teach "that Christ could neither promise nor impart the substantial presence of his body and blood, inasmuch as the essential property of the human nature itself which he had assumed could by no means bear or admit of this."[23] They do not deny that the body of Christ is local, but maintain that it is local in a different sense from which our bodies are local, so that Christ can be everywhere, both in heaven and on earth, according to his human nature.

Third, the Lutherans emphasize that the body and blood of Christ are received not by faith only, but also by the mouth, so that together with the signs of the bread and wine in the Lord's supper, they also literally eat the body and drink the blood of Christ: "We believe, teach, and confess that the body and blood of Christ are taken with the bread and wine, not only spiritually through faith, but also by the mouth, nevertheless not Capernaitically, but after a spiritual and heavenly manner, by reason of the sacramental union."[24]

Fourth, the Lutherans teach that not only believers, but also unbelievers receive and eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ.

> We believe, teach, and confess that not only true believers in Christ, and such as worthily approach the Supper of the Lord, but also the unworthy and unbelieving receive the true body and blood of Christ; in such wise, nevertheless, that they derive thence neither consolation nor life, but rather so as that receiving turns to their judgment and condemnation, unless they be converted and repent (1 Cor. 11:27, 29).
>
> For although they repel from them Christ as a Saviour, nevertheless they are compelled, though extremely unwilling, to admit him as a stern Judge. And he no less present exercises his judgment over these impenitent guests than as present he works consolation and life in the hearts of true believers and worthy guests.[25]

The Saxon Visitation Articles teach that "the body and blood of Christ are received orally, not only by the worthy, but also by the unworthy, who approach them without repentance and true faith; though with different effect. By the worthy, they are received for salvation; by the unworthy, for judgment."[26]

Such is the Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's supper. I have intentionally quoted

extensively from the Lutherans' official confessions to avoid misrepresenting their view.

Regarding the final scriptural basis of the literal interpretation of the words of the Lord spoken at the institution of the Lord's supper, it is impossible to take these words literally for the simple reason that at the moment of the institution of the Lord's supper the Lord was still present in his natural body and blood. His body was not yet broken, and his blood was not yet shed. It follows that the Lord could not have meant that the bread that he held in his hand was identical with his body and that the wine in the cup he offered to his disciples was identical with his blood. The figurative interpretation that the bread and wine signify Christ's body and blood not only gives good sense, but also is the only possible interpretation.

The Saxon Visitation Articles state "that the true and natural body of Christ which hung on the cross, and the true and natural blood, which flowed from the side of Christ, are exhibited and received."[27] But this is impossible. The natural body and blood of Christ as he received them from the virgin Mary exist no more in that form and cannot be received and exhibited. His body was broken and his blood was shed, and he received a spiritual and heavenly body. This spiritual and heavenly body belongs to heaven and is locally in heaven. At the institution of the Lord's supper, Christ's offering his flesh to eat and his blood to drink can be understood only figuratively. By faith only we partake of the sacrifice he once offered on the cross.

Moreover, that the eating of Christ's flesh and the drinking of his blood are acts of faith alone is evident from John 6, a chapter often referred to as indirectly referring to the supper of the Lord. It is evident from John 6 that eating the flesh of Christ is equivalent to believing: "Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (v. 35). Jesus said, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world" (v. 51). "This is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (v. 40).

> 53. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.
>
> 54. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.
>
> 55. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.
>
> 56. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.
>
> 57. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live

by me.

58. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever. (John 6:53–58)

These passages show that eating the bread of life and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ are identical. It is not by literal manducation but by faith alone that we can eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. The Lord himself, in opposition to the sense put on his words by the people of Capernaum, said, “It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). It is plain from these words that the literal eating of the flesh of Christ and the literal drinking of his blood have no significance whatsoever.

Besides, in scripture the word “is” must frequently be understood figuratively. Thus in the sentence, “The seven ears are the seven years,” the sense is that the seven ears signify the seven years. And the same is true of such propositions as I am the living bread; the seven candlesticks are the seven churches; and the field is the world. It is thoroughly scriptural to interpret the words of Christ “this is my body” and “this is my blood” in the same figurative sense.

The Lutheran conception of the Lord’s supper is a curious mixture of physical and spiritual. Natural eating and drinking are purely physical acts. By these physical acts, according to the Lutherans, the communicants are supposed to eat the real and substantial body of Christ and to drink his real and substantial blood. Yet the Lutherans reject the idea that the communicants can literally manducate the body of Christ and swallow his blood by physical acts, but insist that in the Lord’s supper they perform spiritual and supernatural acts of eating and drinking.

The Lutherans also teach that not only believers and worthy, but also unbelievers and unworthy receive the body and blood of Christ. It is difficult to understand how unbelievers and unworthy can perform supernatural and heavenly acts, even apart from the fact that the literal eating of Christ’s body and the drinking of his blood cannot be to the condemnation of the partakers.

Therefore we must reject the Lutheran view of the Lord’s supper as unscriptural and impossible.

As I remarked in connection with the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, also the Lutheran conception of the Lord’s supper is exposed to the error that grace is in things.

The living Christ and all his grace can be received only spiritually and by a living faith.

Spiritual Eating and Drinking

We now consider whether the body and blood of Jesus Christ are present at the celebration of the Lord's supper, and if so, in what sense. What is the connection between the signs of the Lord's supper and the thing signified?

This question is not a simple one and easy to answer.

The Reformed churches reject the theories of transubstantiation and consubstantiation. Those theories identify the signs with the thing signified. Christ is corporally present in the eucharist, and his real body is eaten and his blood is drunk with the mouth.

If these theories are repudiated, what then is the Reformed conception of the sacrament of the Lord's supper? Is Christ present at all in the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine? If he is present, in what sense? Can the Reformed really maintain that the participants at the Lord's table eat Christ's body and drink his blood? If so, how do they eat his body and drink his blood?

Before answering these questions, I call attention to the Zwinglian view of the Lord's supper.

According to the traditional and generally accepted representation of the Zwinglian view, the reformer Zwingli saw no sacrament at all in the Lord's supper. According to him the Lord's supper is a mere feast of commemoration, and there is no operation of God in Christ, but rather an act on the part of the church.

It is doubtful whether this representation of the reformer's view does justice to him. It is true that he seemed to belittle the supernatural element in the sacrament. Sometimes he stressed the act of believers rather than the work of God and the operation of Christ through his Holy Spirit in the Lord's supper. He left the impression that to him the supper mainly serves the purpose to commemorate the death of Christ. Yet there are also expressions in his writings that seem to prove the contrary.

> The Lord's Supper is nothing else than the food of the soul, and Christ instituted the ordinance as a memorial of Himself. When a man commits himself to the sufferings and redemption of Christ he is saved. Of this he has left us a certain visible sign of his flesh and blood, both of which He has commanded us to eat and drink in remembrance of Him.[28]

The First Helvetic Confession, which supposedly conforms to the Zwinglian view, has the following regarding the power and efficacy of the sacraments:

> The signs, which are called sacraments, are two: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments are significant, holy signs of sublime, secret things. However, they are not mere, empty signs, but consist of the sign and substance…In the Lord's Supper the bread and wine are the signs, but the spiritual substance is the communion of the body and blood of Christ, the salvation acquired on the Cross, and forgiveness of sins. As the signs are bodily received, so these substantial, invisible and spiritual things are received in faith. Moreover, the entire power, efficacy and fruit of the sacraments lies in these spiritual and substantial things. For in these things themselves consists the whole fruit of the sacraments. [29]
>
> In regard to the Lord's Supper we hold, therefore, that in it the Lord truly offers His body and His blood, that is, Himself, to His own, and enables them to enjoy such fruit that He lives ever more and more in them and they in Him.[30]

The Second Helvetic Confession, which also is supposed to conform to the views of Zwingli, teaches the following regarding the holy supper of the Lord:

> By this holy Supper also it is sealed unto us, that the very body of Christ was truly given up for us, and his blood shed for the remission of our sins, lest our faith might somewhat waver. And this is outwardly represented unto us by the minister in the sacrament, after a visible manner, and, as it were, laid before our eyes to be seen, which is inwardly in the soul invisibly performed by the Holy Spirit…Therefore the faithful do receive that which is given by the ministers of the Lord, and do eat the bread of the Lord, and do drink of the Lord's cup. And at the same time inwardly, by the working of Christ through the Holy Spirit, they receive also the flesh and blood of the Lord, and do feed on them unto life eternal. For the flesh and blood of Christ is true meat and drink unto life eternal: yea, Christ himself, in that he was delivered for us, and is our Saviour, is that special thing and substance of the Supper; and therefore we suffer nothing to be put in his place.[31]

At the same time, this confession emphasizes the truth that the eating of Christ's body and the drinking of his blood are not only performed at the table of the Lord, but also without the supper.

> From all this it appears manifestly, that by spiritual meat we mean not an imaginary thing, but the very body of our Lord Jesus, given to us; which yet

> is received by the faithful not corporeally, but spiritually by faith: in which point we do wholly follow the doctrine of our Lord and Saviour Christ, in the 6th chapter of John. And this eating of the flesh and drinking of the blood of the Lord is so necessary unto salvation that without it no man can be saved. But this spiritual eating and drinking takes place also without the Supper of the Lord, even so often as, and wheresoever, a man does believe in Christ.[32]

This confession even emphasizes that in the Lord's supper the believer receives something more than otherwise.

> Besides that former spiritual eating, there is a *sacramental* eating of the body of the Lord; whereby the believer not only is a partaker, spiritually and internally, of the true body and blood of the Lord, but also, by coming to the Table of the Lord, does outwardly receive the visible sacraments of the body and blood of the Lord. True it is, that by faith the believer did before receive the food that gives life, and still receives the same; but yet, when he receives the sacrament, he receives something more. For he goes on in continual communication of the body and blood of the Lord, and his faith is daily more and more kindled, more strengthened and refreshed, by the spiritual nourishment. For while we live, faith has continual increasings; and he that outwardly does receive the sacrament with a true faith, the same does not only receive the sign, but also does enjoy (as we said) the thing itself…
>
> But as for him that without faith comes to this Holy Table of the Lord, he is made partaker of the outward sacrament only; but the matter of the sacrament, from whence comes life unto salvation, he receives not at all; and such men do unworthily eat of the Lord's Table…For when they do not approach with true faith, they do despite unto the death of Christ, and therefore eat and drink condemnation to themselves.[33]

I do not aver that all this can be attributed to Zwingli himself. The First Helvetic Confession was not written by him, but by a number of Swiss divines, Bullinger and others, while the Second Helvetic Confession was written by Bullinger, the successor of Zwingli. It is very questionable whether Zwingli's conception of the Lord's supper was that of a feast of commemoration and nothing more.

Calvin sometimes seemed to teach that in the Lord's supper there is an influence of Christ's glorified body on believers, but this is probably to be taken

figuratively, for in other passages the reformer clearly taught that the presence of the body and blood of Christ is present only spiritually and can be eaten and drunk not by the mouth, but only by faith. He emphasized that every imagination of a local presence is entirely to be removed. Christ as a man is now present only in heaven not on earth. Therefore his communion is to be sought only by faith. He cannot be included in the earthly elements.

This is surely the teaching of all the Reformed confessions. The Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 79 mentions two elements as constituting the power and efficacy of the supper of the Lord. Through the supper we spiritually eat and drink Christ at his table and our souls are fed to eternal life, and the Holy Spirit confirms our faith that we really are partakers of the suffering and obedience of Christ.

This is taught in the Belgic Confession.

> We believe and confess that our Savior Jesus Christ did ordain and institute the sacrament of the holy supper to nourish and support those whom he hath already regenerated, and incorporated into his family, which is his church.
>
> Now those who are regenerated have in them a twofold life: the one corporal and temporal, which they have from the first birth, and is common to all men; the other spiritual and heavenly, which is given them in their second birth, which is effected by the word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ; and this life is not common, but is peculiar to God's elect. In like manner God hath given us, for the support of the bodily and earthly life, earthly and common bread, which is subservient thereto and is common to all men, even as life itself. But for the support of the spiritual and heavenly life which believers have, he hath sent a living bread, which descended from heaven, namely, Jesus Christ, who nourishes and strengthens the spiritual life of believers when they eat him, that is to say, when they apply and receive him by faith in the spirit.
>
> Christ, that he might represent unto us this spiritual and heavenly bread, hath instituted an earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of his body, and wine as a sacrament of his blood, to testify by them unto us, that, as certainly as we receive and hold this sacrament in our hands and eat and drink the same with our mouths, by which our life is afterwards nourished, we also do as certainly receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Savior in our souls, for the support of our spiritual life.
>
> Now, as it is certain beyond all doubt that Jesus Christ hath not enjoined

> to us the use of his sacraments in vain, so he works in us all that he represents to us by these holy signs, though the manner surpasses our understanding and cannot be comprehended by us, as the operations of the Holy Ghost are hidden and incomprehensible. In the meantime we err not, when we say that what is eaten and drunk by us is the proper and natural body and the proper blood of Christ.[34]

Behind this last expression we might want to put a question mark. What does the Confession mean by eating Christ's proper and natural body and drinking his proper and natural blood? Can it mean that we eat the natural flesh of Christ and drink his natural blood, as it was separated at the cross? This is not the meaning, as is evident from what follows:

> But the manner of our partaking of the same is not by the mouth, but by the spirit through faith. Thus, then, though Christ always sits at the right hand of his Father in the heavens, yet doth he not therefore cease to make us partakers of himself by faith. This feast is a spiritual table, at which Christ communicates himself with all his benefits to us, and gives us there to enjoy both himself and the merits of his sufferings and death, nourishing, strengthening, and comforting our poor comfortless souls by the eating of his flesh, quickening and refreshing them by the drinking of his blood.[35]

The same article emphasizes that the bread and wine in the Lord's supper are not mere signs, but that in them the signs and the thing signified are connected in such a way that the thing signified in the signs can be received not by the natural man, but only by faith.

> Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men. The ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament—as Judas and Simon the sorcerer both indeed received the sacrament but not Christ who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers.[36]

The article also emphasizes that the Lord's supper ought to be celebrated in the church and that believers ought to be in the true spiritual disposition of heart and mind in order properly and fruitfully to partake of it.

> Lastly, we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God

> with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior with thanksgiving, making there confession of our faith, and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are excited by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.
>
> Therefore we reject all mixtures and damnable inventions which men have added unto and blended with the sacraments, as profanations of them, and affirm that we ought to rest satisfied with the ordinance which Christ and his apostles have taught us, and that we must speak of them in the same manner as they have spoken.[37]

The French Confession of Faith also teaches that the signs and the thing signified in the Lord's supper are connected, so that we can apprehend the thing signified through the signs only spiritually and by faith.

> We confess that the Lord's Supper, which is the second sacrament, is a witness of the union which we have with Christ, inasmuch as he not only died and rose again for us once, but also feeds and nourishes us truly with his flesh and blood, so that we may be one in him, and that our life may be in common. Although he be in heaven until he come to judge all the earth, still we believe that by the secret and incomprehensible power of his Spirit he feeds and strengthens us with the substance of his body and of his blood. We hold that this is done spiritually, not because we put imagination and fancy in the place of fact and truth, but because the greatness of this mystery exceeds the measure of our senses and the laws of nature. In short, because it is heavenly, it can only be apprehended by faith.[38]

The Scots Confession of Faith expresses the same truths concerning the Lord's supper. It condemns the doctrine of those who teach that the sacraments are nothing but mere signs, and it teaches that in the supper of the Lord, when righteously used, Christ is so joined with us that he becomes the nourishment and food of our souls. It emphasizes that this fruit is accomplished through the supper of the Lord by the Holy Spirit through faith.

> Notwithstanding the distance between His glorified body in heaven and mortal men on earth, yet we must assuredly believe that the bread which we break is the communion of Christ's body and the cup which we bless [is]

> the communion of his blood. Thus we confess and believe without doubt that the faithful, in the right use of the Lord's Table, do so eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord Jesus that He remains in them and they in Him; they are so made flesh of His flesh and bone of His bone…Yet all this, we say again, comes of that true faith which apprehends Christ Jesus, who alone makes the sacrament effective in us.[39]

The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England also emphasize the truth that a real connection must exist between the sign and the thing signified, but that the reality of the thing signified can be apprehended by faith only. Therefore in the supper we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ only spiritually.

> The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another; but rather it is a Sacrament of our Redemption by Christ's death: insomuch that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same, the Bread which we break is a partaking of the Body of Christ; and likewise the Cup of Blessing is a partaking of the Blood of Christ…
>
> The Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten, in the Supper, only after an heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper, is Faith.[40]

The Westminster Confession presents the Lord's supper as a sacrament that seals to true believers all the benefits of Christ and spiritually nourishes them, so they grow up in him and realize their part of the covenant of God.

> Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein he was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of his body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in his Church, unto the end of the world; for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of himself in his death, the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in him, their further engagement in, and to all duties which they owe unto him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with him, and with each other, as members of his mystical body.[41]

Through the bread and wine as the symbols of the body and blood of the Lord, Christ crucified is presented to the believer.

> The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained

> by Christ, have such relation to him crucified, as that truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit, in substance and nature, they still remain truly, and only, bread and wine, as they were before.[42]

The truth is once more expressed that there is a real, though spiritual, connection between the signs and the thing signified, so it can be said that believers truly eat the real, though spiritual, body of Christ and drink his real, though spiritual, blood.

> Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are, to their outward senses.[43]

The real essence of the sacrament, the thing signified in the sacrament, can be received only by true faith.

> Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so they are unworthy of the Lord's table, and can not, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.[44]

All the Reformed confessions emphasize that the eating and drinking at the table of the Lord are purely spiritual. There is a spiritual food. Christ imparts himself at the table of communion to believers as the true meat and drink unto eternal life. There is a spiritual operation. Through the Spirit, Christ imparts himself to believers. There is also a spiritual mouth by which we eat and drink and that spiritual mouth is faith. This entire spiritual mode of operation, this spiritual eating and drinking of Christ, takes place through the means of the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine.

For the sake of clarity it may be well to compare this spiritual eating and

drinking with the process of physical nourishment, as does the Belgic Confession. First, in physical nourishment there is a physical organism, the human body, that cannot sustain its own life but is dependent on the outside world. Constantly it must be supplied from without. Second, there is a physical substance, food and drink, that the body must assimilate. Because the body is physical, the food it assimilates and can assimilate must also be physical. A physical body cannot be fed with spiritual nourishment. Third, there is the longing of the body for physical food and drink: it hungers and thirsts. Fourth, there is the eating and drinking by the physical mouth. Finally, there is the process of assimilation whereby the body changes the food and drink into its own flesh and blood and is strengthened.

All this can be applied spiritually. There is a spiritual entity that must be nourished: the regenerated, inward man, which is created in Christ Jesus, is not independent, and cannot sustain its own life but must be nourished from without. The nature of regenerated life is spiritual. It consists of a spiritual knowledge of God in Christ, forgiveness of sin, righteousness before God, adoption unto children, holiness, hatred and abhorrence of sin, and delight in the law of God. That spiritual life must be nourished, sustained, and it must grow and develop unto perfection.

Just as the physical organism of the body cannot be nourished by spiritual food, so the spiritual entity of the regenerated man cannot be nourished by material food but must have spiritual nourishment. There must be spiritual nourishment—righteousness, holiness, wisdom, light, and knowledge—that is outside the regenerated man and can be assimilated by him. In one word, that spiritual food and drink is grace.

That grace is all in Christ. Christ is the food of the regenerated man, by which he is fed unto eternal life, for “of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). “Of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30). Christ is the fountain of the water of life. Hence Christ said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst…the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). Christ is the bread of life who came down from heaven to give life unto the world. Hence Christ said, “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. I am that bread of life. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (John 6:33, 35, 48, 51). Christ is the spiritual nourishment the regenerated man needs to sustain his life. Also the process of

assimilation, by which this spiritual food and drink becomes the believer's own, so that he becomes flesh of Christ's flesh and bone of his bone, is purely spiritual. Christ must impart himself to the regenerated believer, and the believer must eat and drink Christ. This mode of operation cannot be physical but must be purely spiritual.

According to the Roman Catholics there is an action of Christ through the priest on the physical food by which it is changed into the body and blood of Christ. But this would actually place the living Christ beyond one's reach, for the bread and wine can be taken only physically and it can have nourishing effect only on the body.

The operation in the Lord's supper is spiritual. Christ is truly present in the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine, but only spiritually. By an operation of his Spirit, Christ imparts himself to the believer not only mystically, but also through the believer's consciousness, so that he constantly is strengthened in righteousness and holiness, in knowledge and wisdom, and grows in the grace of the Lord. As Christ imparts himself by his Spirit to the regenerated man, the man eats and drinks Christ not with his physical mouth, but by the spiritual mouth of faith. Faith is the spiritual power of the soul to eat and to drink Christ. The faith whereby the believer receives Christ and assimilates him is wrought and strengthened chiefly by the word of the gospel and through the signs and seals of the sacraments, especially the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine.

Herein is the special significance of the Lord's supper. It is not so that in the supper grace is imparted to us that is not and cannot be received in any other way than by eating the sign of the broken bread and drinking the sign of the poured-out wine at the table of the Lord. Christ always imparts himself to the believer and feeds his soul unto everlasting life. The chief means to impart himself is always the preaching of the gospel. The sacraments add nothing to the word. But through the signs of the broken bread and the poured-out wine the Holy Spirit effects two things. First, through these visible signs he strengthens the personal assurance and the personal confidence of faith "that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation, are, freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits" (A 21). Second, the Spirit through the visible signs stimulates faith to a greater hunger and thirst for Christ, so that by faith we eat and drink him unto life eternal, even as he imparts himself to us at his table. Thus the supper of the Lord is a means to grow in grace.

It stands to reason that a spiritual disposition is required truly to partake of the table of the Lord. The unregenerated and unbeliever cannot eat and drink Christ.

They have no life that can be nourished. Like the gospel, the supper of the Lord is strictly particular. Unbelievers can receive the visible signs, but they cannot partake of the essence of the supper.

Even believers are not always ready to partake of the supper of the Lord. Just as we may be sick in body, so we may also be sick spiritually. We may nourish a certain sin from which we will not repent. There may be hatred in our hearts against the brother. We may fail to attend the preaching of the word of God. We may love the things of the world and seek them. In such dispositions we cannot fruitfully partake of the supper of the Lord.

We must be spiritually healthy. Spiritual health is characterized by a sincere and heartfelt sorrow over sin; by fervent longings for forgiveness and the grace of Christ; by earnest desires to live in sanctification, to crucify the flesh, and to walk in new and holy lives; and by sincere love of the brethren. Only in this true spiritual disposition of heart and mind can we expect to receive the spiritual food and drink presented to us at the table of the Lord.

LORD'S DAY 30

Q. 80. What difference is there between the Lord's Supper and the popish mass?

A. The Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ, who according to his human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven at the right hand of God his Father, and will there be worshiped by us—but the mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests; and further, that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.

Q. 81. For whom is the Lord's Supper instituted?

A. For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ, and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Q. 82. Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No; for by this the covenant of God would be profaned, and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation; therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.

Chapter Three



LORD'S DAY 30

An Accursed Idolatry

The eightieth question, with the well-known clause that the mass "is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry," did not appear in the original edition of the Heidelberg Catechism. It did appear in part in the second edition, and in the form in which it appears now, in the third edition of the Catechism. Some claim that the question and answer were inserted under the influence and at the advice of John Calvin, but this is doubtful. It was inserted by order of the Elector Frederick III as a counterblast to the anathemas of the Council of Trent.

> The same view of the Romish doctrine of transubstantiation and the sacrifice of the mass was generally entertained by the Reformers, and is set forth as strongly in the Articles of Smalcald and other symbolical books, both Lutheran and Reformed. It must be allowed to remain as a solemn protest against idolatry. But the wisdom of inserting controversial matter into a catechism for the instruction of the youth has been justly doubted. The eightieth question disturbs the peaceful harmony of the book, it rewards evil for evil, it countenances intolerance, which is un-Protestant and unevangelical. It provoked much unnecessary hostility, and led even, under the Romish rule of the Elector Charles Philip, in 1719, to the prohibition of the Catechism; but the loud remonstrance of England, Prussia, Holland, and other Protestant states forced the Elector to withdraw the tyrannical decree within a year, under certain conditions, to save appearances.[1]

With this judgment of Schaff I cannot agree. There certainly is more controversial material in the Heidelberg Catechism than what is contained in the eightieth question, although it is not always so definitely and clearly expressed. Why a book that is used for the instruction of the youth should not contain

controversial matter is difficult to understand. At any rate, the eightieth question with its severe judgment about the mass as an accursed idolatry is now included in the Heidelberg Catechism, and I have to explain it.

Zacharias Ursinus had some interesting remarks on the term *mass*.

> Before we proceed, however, to point out the differences between the Lord's supper and the Popish mass, it is proper that we should say a few words in reference to the term, *mass*. And first, there are some who derive the word *mass* from the Hebrew *masah*, which signifies tribute, or voluntary offering. The word has this meaning in Deut. 16:10, where it is said, "Thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the Lord thy God with a tribute of a free-will offering of thine hand." This offering was so called, being as it were, a yearly tribute, which was given most willingly and cheerfully. It is also understood by some to signify a sufficiency, meaning that so much should be given as might be sufficient, which, perhaps, is the more correct interpretation, since God in Deut. 15:8, commanded the Israelites to open their hands wide unto the poor, and to lend that which was sufficient for their need. This the Chaldee paraphrast interprets *missah*; from which it is supposed that it is called mass, or missa, as if it were a tribute, and a free-will offering, which should every where be offered to God in the church for the living and the dead. But this is not probable. It is true, indeed, that the church has borrowed some words from the Hebrew; as Satan, sabaoth, hallelujah, etc.; but these and similar words were introduced into the Latin church through the Greek church, and were introduced into the Greek Testament when it was first written in the Greek language; nor have we any Hebrew words in our church which the Greek church had not before. Furthermore, if we examine the writings of the Greek Fathers it will be seen, that the word missa is never used by them; from which we are inclined to believe that the word missa was not derived from the Hebrew.
>
> Therefore the term *missa*, which is doubtless a Latin word, seems to be taken from the Fathers, who used *remissa* for *remissio*. Turtullian says: "*We have spoken of remission* (remissa) *of sins*." Cyprian says: "*He who was to grant remission of sins, did not disdain to be baptized*." Again: "*He who blasphemes against the Holy Ghost, obtains no remission of sins*." Hence, as the Latin Fathers used the term *remissa* for *remissio*, so they also seem to have used *missa* for *missio*, which is derived from *mittendo*. But here again there is a great diversity of sentiment. For some will have it that *missa* is to be understood in the sense of *missio*, from an ancient custom of ecclesiastical rites, which was introduced into the Latin churches from the

> Greek, that when the sermon and the lecture were over, the deacon, before the consecration of the mysteries, sent away or commanded the catechumens, the demoniacs, and such as were excommunicated, to depart, saying, with a loud voice, "*If there be any catechumen still remaining in the church, let him depart*"; so that *missa* seems to be used in the sense of *missio* (sending away), because it was the last part of divine service. Others suppose that it is called *missa* in the sense of *dismissa*, or *dismissio*, from the manner in which the ecclesiastical assemblies, or congregations, were dismissed; because, when the prayers and other services were ended, the deacon exclaimed, "*Ite, missa est*"; that is, Go, you may depart. Others, again, understand it thus: "Go, now is the collection of alms"; which they say were called *missa*, from being sent, or thrown in for the benefit of the poor. In short, it was that which was transacted in the church after the departure of the catechumens or the collection of alms.[2]

The Catechism calls attention to a twofold difference between the Lord's supper and the mass. The first difference is that "the Lord's Supper testifies to us that we have a full pardon of all sin by the only sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which he himself has once accomplished on the cross; and that we by the Holy Ghost are ingrafted into Christ." "The mass teaches that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins through the sufferings of Christ, unless Christ is also daily offered for them by the priests." The second difference is indicated by the words that Christ "according to his human nature is now not on earth, but in heaven at the right hand of God his Father, and will there be worshiped by us." "The mass teaches that Christ is bodily under the form of bread and wine, and therefore is to be worshiped in them."

On the basis of this twofold Roman Catholic teaching concerning the mass, the Heidelberg Catechism pronounces the severe but perfectly true judgment that "the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry."

We can distinguish between the eucharist and the mass. Both presuppose that the bread and wine at the Lord's table are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ. While the eucharist, or the communion, consists only in the eating of the wafer and the priest's drinking of the wine, the mass consists in the priest's sacrifice of Christ under the form of bread and wine.

Does the Roman Catholic Church really teach that Christ must be worshiped as he is present in the bread and wine? And is there a continual sacrifice of Christ offered by the priest through the transubstantiated signs on the altar?

That Christ, under the symbols of bread and wine, is to be worshiped and

adored, the decrees of the Council of Trent leave no doubt.

> Wherefore, there is no room left for doubt, that all the faithful of Christ may, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, render in veneration the worship of latria, which is due to the true God, to this most holy sacrament. For not therefore is it the less to be adored on this account, that it was instituted by Christ, the Lord, in order to be received; for we believe that same God to be present therein, of whom the eternal Father, when introducing him into the world, says: *And let all the angels of God adore him*; whom the Magi, *falling down, adored*; who, in fine, as the Scripture testifies, was adored by the apostles in Galilee.
>
> The holy Synod declares, moreover, that very piously and religiously was this custom introduced into the Church, that this sublime and venerable sacrament be, with special veneration and solemnity, celebrated, every year, on a certain day, and that a festival; and that it be borne reverently and with honor in processions through the streets and public places. For it is most just that there be certain appointed holy days, whereon all Christians may, with a special and unusual demonstration, testify that their minds are grateful and thankful to their common Lord and Redeemer for so ineffable and truly divine a benefit, whereby the victory and triumph of his death are represented.[3]

In a series of radio questions and answers by Bertrand Conway we read:

> *Why do Catholics place one knee upon the floor before entering the pew?*
>
> Catholics genuflect on entering and leaving the Church as a mark of love and adoration to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who is really present upon the Catholic altar.
>
> *What is meant by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament?*
>
> After the candles are lighted upon the altar, the priest takes the Host consecrated at Mass out of the tabernacle, and places It in a stand of gold or silver called the monstrance, or ostensorium, which remains upon the altar, or upon an elevated throne where it may be seen by all the people, who kneel and adore the Saviour.
>
> The priest then puts incense into the thurible and waves it three times in the direction of the Blessed Sacrament, as a symbol of the people’s

prayer…

Then placing over his shoulders a long silk scarf, called the humeral veil, the priest takes up the monstrance, and with it makes the sign of the cross over the people; and thus the Eucharistic Christ blesses the people. [4]

It is evident that the bread called the "Eucharistic Christ" is worshiped as God and is the object of prayer by the audience. The same "Eucharistic Christ" is supposed to bless the people.

The Catechism rightly calls all of this idolatry. It stands to reason that the Roman Catholics deny this accusation. It is also true that as soon as one accepts the Roman Catholic theory of transubstantiation, this accusation of idolatry must fall, because the doctrine of transubstantiation is the sole basis upon which the mass rests. According to Roman Catholics, they do not worship bread and wine, but what is called "the real presence." Therefore they hurl anathemas at all who maintain

> that, in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, Christ, the only begotten Son of God, is not to be adored with the worship, even external of latria; and is, consequently, neither to be venerated with a special festive solemnity, nor to be solemnly borne about in procession, according to the laudable and universal rite and custom of holy Church; or, is not to be proposed publicly to the people to be adored, and that the adorers thereof are idolaters: let him be anathema[5]

From the protestant viewpoint, which denies transubstantiation, there is on the altar nothing but bread and wine. The Roman Catholics do not worship Christ and God in Christ but render homage to mere material signs. This is idolatry pure and simple.

From the Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent it is also evident that the mass is represented as a continual sacrifice of Christ.

> Forasmuch as, under the former Testament, according to the testimony of the Apostle Paul, there was no *perfection, because of the weakness of the Levitical priesthood*; there was need, God, the Father of mercies, so ordaining, that *another priest should rise, according to the order of Melchisedech,* our Lord Jesus Christ, who might consummate, and lead to what is perfect, as many as were to be sanctified. He, therefore, our God and Lord, though he was about to offer himself once on the altar of the cross unto God the Father, *by means of his death,* there to operate *an eternal*

> *redemption*; nevertheless, because that his priesthood was not to be extinguished by his death, in the Last Supper, on the night in which he was betrayed,—that he might leave, to his own beloved Spouse the Church, a visible sacrifice, such as the nature of man requires, whereby that bloody sacrifice, once to be accomplished on the cross, might be represented, and the memory thereof remain even unto the end of the world, and its salutary virtue be applied to the remission of those sins which we daily commit,—declaring himself constituted *a priest forever, according to the order of Melchisedech*, he offered up to God the Father his own body and blood under the species of bread and wine; and, under the symbols of those same things, he delivered [his own body and blood] to be received by his apostles, whom he then constituted priests of the New Testament; and by those words, *Do this in commemoration of me*, he commanded them and their successors in the priesthood to offer [them]; even as the Catholic Church has always understood and taught. For, having celebrated the ancient Passover, which the multitude of the children of Israel immolated in memory of their going out of Egypt, he instituted the new Passover [to wit], himself to be immolated, under visible signs, by the Church through [the ministry of] priests, in memory of his own passage from this world unto the Father, when by the effusion of his own blood he redeemed us, *and delivered us from the power of darkness, and translated us into his kingdom*. And this is indeed that clean oblation, which can not be defiled by any unworthiness, or malice of those that offer [it]; which the Lord foretold by Malachias was to be *offered in every place, clean to his name, which was to be great amongst the Gentiles*; and which the Apostle Paul, writing to the Corinthians, has not obscurely indicated, when he says, that they who are defiled by *the participation of the table of devils, can not be partakers of the table of the Lord*; by *the table*, meaning in both places the altar. This, in fine, is that oblation which was prefigured by various types of sacrifices, during the period of nature, and of the law; inasmuch as it comprises all the good things signified by those sacrifices, as being the consummation and perfection of them all.[6]

That the Roman Catholics teach that in the mass Christ through the priests is offered as a continual sacrifice is plainer yet from the next chapter.

> And forasmuch as, in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the mass, the same Christ is contained and immolated in an unbloody manner who once offered himself in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross; the holy

> Synod teaches, that this sacrifice is truly propitiatory, and that by means thereof this is effected, that we obtain mercy, and find grace *in a seasonable aid*, if we draw nigh unto God, contrite and penitent, with a sincere heart and upright faith with fear and reverence. For the Lord, appeased by the oblation thereof, and granting the grace and gift of penitence, forgives even heinous crimes and sins. For the victim is one and the same, the same now offering by the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross, the manner alone of offering being different. The fruits indeed of which oblation, of that bloody one to wit, are received most plentifully through this unbloody one; so far is this [latter] from derogating in any way from that [former oblation]. Wherefore, not only for the sins, punishments, satisfactions, and other necessities of the faithful who are living, but also for those who are departed in Christ, and who are not as yet fully purified, is it rightly offered, agreeable to a tradition of the apostles.[7]

It is clear that according to the Roman Catholic Church the mass is represented as a continual and often-repeated sacrifice of Christ offered by the priests and that this repeated sacrifice is necessary for the forgiveness of sins, both of those living on the earth and of the departed souls in purgatory. According to Roman Catholics the mass has all the essential elements of a true sacrifice. It is offered by a priest, Jesus Christ, through the ministry of his earthly representative, the Roman Catholic priest. It has a victim, Jesus Christ as he is present under the appearance of bread and wine. And it is offered as a real sacrifice through the mystical rite of consecration. In the mass there is therefore a continuation of the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross in an unbloody manner. The Romish church maintains that this sacrifice of the mass is necessary and denies the sufficiency of Christ's once-for-all-and-forever shedding of his blood to blot out all the sins of his people.

It is difficult to conceive how it is possible that such a simple and beautiful rite as the sacrament of the Lord's supper could be so corrupted that it is hardly recognizable, as is done in the Romish mass.

That this idea of a repeated and continual sacrifice of Christ through the Romish priest in the mass is in direct conflict with all that scripture teaches concerning the sacrifice of Christ and its application to his people is not difficult to show.

In its deepest sense Rome's teaching denies the truth of election. If this fundamental truth of scripture were maintained, the idea of a repeated and continual sacrifice of Christ for his people would have no place whatever in the system of the truth. Believers are chosen in Christ and according to that eternal

election they are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph. 1:3–4). According to this eternal election Christ shed his lifeblood on the accursed tree for all the chosen, and he shed that blood once for all. On the cross he died as the representative of the elect. They were in him in his death. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself not imputing their trespasses unto them. Their sins were blotted out. These are simply historic facts. According to this same truth of election in Christ, the objective justification of all the elect took place in eternity: they are justified and glorified from before the foundation of the world. This is the truth of Romans 8:29–30: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified."

In the counsel of God the elect are justified and glorified. This is true of all the elect in both dispensations. Hence Christ is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world. In God's decree Christ stands eternally as the slain lamb, and the elect stand before God as eternally covered by his blood and therefore justified. How a repetition of the one sacrifice on the cross offered for all the elect from all eternity, in which all the elect are justified, would ever be necessary, is impossible to see.

Moreover, in the historical moment of the cross, the same elect were justified in and through Christ. This too was objectively perfect for all who believe in Christ. The saints of both dispensations were justified, but not because of the repeated sacrifice of bulls and goats. Still less are they justified now or do they receive the forgiveness of sins because of any repeated sacrifice by a priest in the mass. Not even because of their faith are they justified, although faith is the means whereby the elect take hold of that justification, but only because of the one sacrifice of Christ offered on the cross more than twenty centuries ago are they justified. Hence the sacrifice of Christ in the mass, which is supposedly necessary for the forgiveness of sins, is really a denial of the truth that Christ died once for all and that all the elect are forever justified in him.

Besides, the truth that Christ died once for all and that the salvation of all the elect is forever finished, so that the sacrifice of Christ cannot be and need not be repeated, is abundantly testified by Holy Writ. All the scriptures testify that in the one sacrifice of Christ every one of the elect are forever justified and that this one sacrifice need not and cannot be repeated in any way or manner.

This is clear from John 10:11, 15, 27–28: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I

know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

On the cross Christ shed his lifeblood for his sheep. Those sheep the Father gave to Christ from all eternity. When he died on the cross, the elect were in Christ, and they died in and with him and are forever free from sin. This is evident from Romans 6:3–7.

> 3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?
> 4. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.
> 5. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:
> 6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.
> 7. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Ephesians 1:3–4 says that all the elect are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places, according as they are chosen in him. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (v. 7). This means that redemption through the blood of Christ and the forgiveness of sins belong to the spiritual blessings in heavenly places the elect have in Christ Jesus. Therefore a repeated sacrifice for their forgiveness is unnecessary.

The same truth is taught in Colossians 1:20–22:

> 20. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.
> 21. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled.
> 22. In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight.

Especially the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes the truth that Christ died for all his people once forever and that therefore his sacrifice can never be repeated. This is clear from Hebrews 7:23–27:

> 23. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death:
> 24. But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.
> 25. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.
> 26. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens;
> 27. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

The emphasis in this passage is that while the priests and the sacrifices of the old dispensation were necessarily many, the one sacrifice of Christ was offered once for all his people and can never be repeated.

The same truth is expressed in Hebrews 9:11–12: “Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

Redemption by the one sacrifice of Christ, with which he entered into the holy place, is eternal and irrevocable.

> 24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:
> 25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;
> 26. For then he must often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Heb. 9:24–26)
>
> 11. Every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins:
> 12. But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;
> 13. From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.
> 14. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. (Heb. 10:11–14)

The popish mass indeed may be said to be an accursed idolatry and a denial of the one and all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ. The one sacrifice of our Savior blotted out forever the sins of all the elect. Moreover, Christ applies the merits of this one sacrifice to his people by his Spirit. They receive the forgiveness of sins through justifying faith, and this faith is wrought and strengthened by the Spirit through the preaching of the word and the proper use of the sacraments.

Proper Partakers

Next the Catechism deals with the subject of the proper partakers of the Lord’s supper. Question and answer 81 discuss this subject from the viewpoint of the individual believer, and question and answer 82 discuss it from the aspect of the institute of the church. To put it differently, in question 81 the inquiry concerns those who should come and partake of the Lord’s supper. In question 82 the inquiry concerns those who should be admitted by the church to the supper of the Lord. Both questions proceed from the principle that the Lord’s supper is not for all but only for conscious believers.

This is the difference between the sacrament of baptism and the sacrament of the Lord's supper. In baptism the children who are baptized are entirely passive. Baptism signifies and seals the washing away of sins through Jesus Christ. Baptism witnesses and seals to us that God the Father makes an eternal covenant of grace with us, adopts us for his children and heirs, will provide us with every good thing, and will avert all evil or turn it to our profit. Baptism seals an act of God the Father, in respect to which the baptized infant is entirely passive. Moreover, baptism seals to us that the Son washes us in his blood from all our sins and incorporates us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection. Also in this act of the Son, the baptized infant is entirely passive. The same is true of the sacrament of baptism in relation to the work of the Holy Spirit. In baptism the Holy Spirit assures us that he will dwell in us, sanctify us to be members of Christ, and apply unto us everything we have in Christ—the washing away of our sins and the daily renewing of our lives. Also in this work of the Holy Spirit the baptized infant is entirely passive. Baptism is the sign and seal of our being engrafted into Christ, of our being incorporated into him. Our becoming active and assuming our part of the covenant of God are entirely the fruit of God's work in us.[8] However, in the Lord's supper the participants are active. They come to the table of the Lord, take the bread and wine, and eat and drink. At the table of the Lord they must be able to discern the Lord's body. While in baptism the baptized are passive, in the Lord's supper the participants become active. They *are* baptized, but they *partake* of holy communion. The Lord's supper is only for conscious believers.

Who must come to the table of the Lord? Who are the proper partakers of the signs of the bread and wine? The Catechism replies in answer 81 both positively and negatively. Positively, the answer is threefold. First, proper partakers of the supper of the Lord are only those who are truly sorrowful for their sins. Second, they trust that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death. Third, they desire to have their faith strengthened and long for holiness in life and walk. Negatively, the Catechism denies the Lord's supper to hypocrites and to those who do not turn to God with sincere hearts. These eat and drink judgment to themselves.

This places us before the question of proper self-examination, which is mentioned in the Belgic Confession.

> Further, though the sacraments are connected with the thing signified, nevertheless both are not received by all men. The ungodly indeed receives the sacrament to his condemnation, but he doth not receive the truth of the sacrament—as Judas and Simon the sorcerer both indeed received the

sacrament but not Christ who was signified by it, of whom believers only are made partakers.

Lastly, we receive this holy sacrament in the assembly of the people of God with humility and reverence, keeping up among us a holy remembrance of the death of Christ our Savior with thanksgiving, making there confession of our faith and of the Christian religion. Therefore no one ought to come to this table without having previously rightly examined himself, lest by eating of this bread and drinking of this cup, he eat and drink judgment to himself. In a word, we are excited by the use of this holy sacrament to a fervent love towards God and our neighbor.[9]

The Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper requires self-examination before partaking of the supper of the Lord.

The true examination of ourselves consists of these three parts:

First. That every one consider by himself his sins and the curse due to him for them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) he hath punished the same in his beloved Son Jesus Christ, with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.

Secondly. That every one examine his own heart, whether he doth believe this faithful promise of God that all his sins are forgiven him only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given him as his own, yea, so perfectly, as if he had satisfied in his own person for all his sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

Thirdly. That everyone examine his own conscience, whether he purposeth henceforth to show true thankfulness to God in his whole life and to walk uprightly before him; as also, whether he hath laid aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy, and doth firmly resolve henceforward to walk in true love and peace with his neighbor.[10]

The form then continues to state that all those and only those who are thus disposed God will certainly receive in mercy and count them worthy partakers of the table of his Son Jesus Christ. All those who do not feel this testimony in their hearts eat and drink judgment to themselves. Therefore the form admonishes all who do not walk according to the rules of self-examination and are defiled with sins of which they do not repent and do not confess, and thereby lead offensive lives, to keep away from the table of the Lord, as those who have no part in the

kingdom of Christ. Those who walk in such sins, and while they continue in such sins, must abstain from the Lord's supper, lest their judgment and condemnation be made the heavier. The form hastens to add that this does not mean that only the perfect may come to the table of the Lord and that only those may partake who are without sin.

> For we do not come to this Supper to testify thereby that we are perfect and righteous in ourselves; but on the contrary, considering that we seek our life out of ourselves in Jesus Christ, we acknowledge that we lie in the midst of death; therefore, notwithstanding we feel many infirmities and miseries in ourselves, as namely, that we have not perfect faith, and that we do not give ourselves to serve God with that zeal as we are bound, but have daily to strive with the weakness of our faith and the evil lusts of our flesh; yet, since we are (by the grace of the Holy Spirit) sorry for these weaknesses, and earnestly desirous to fight against our unbelief and to live according to all the commandments of God; therefore we rest assured that no sin or infirmity which still remaineth against our will in us can hinder us from being received of God in mercy, and from being made worthy partakers of this heavenly meat and drink.[11]

The same emphasis on the necessity of self-examination before coming to the table of the Lord is found in the epistles to the Corinthians.

> 27. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
>
> 28. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.
>
> 29. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.
>
> 30. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.
>
> 31. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.
>
> 32. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.
>
> 33. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.
>
> 34. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come. (1 Cor. 11:27–34)

"Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?"(2 Cor. 13:5).

The matter of proper self-examination is both important and difficult. Who is the proper subject of self-examination? Who is the object? What must be the

purpose and the attitude in self-examination? Must one examine himself to find out if he is a Christian, if he has faith? Or is the question whether he is in and walks in the faith.

A few years ago theologians in the Netherlands seriously discussed the subject of self-examination. Some considered self-examination to be improper for the covenantal child of God. They argued that a member of the church is in the covenant and house of God and partakes of the blessings of the covenant. He is baptized as a member of the church and must not forevermore ask if he is a child. A son who lives in his father's house and eats at his father's table does not question his sonship. Therefore self-examination from the viewpoint of the question whether one has faith and partakes of the blessings of God in Christ is really unbelief. Others emphasized the necessity of self-examination. They argued that one is in the covenant only through faith. One's salvation cannot be based on his being externally in the covenant of grace. Therefore one must ask whether he is a believer. It is true that faith itself is assurance and certainty. Nevertheless, the question is, do I have the faith? Besides, we must not forget that there are hypocrites in the church, and they must be brought to an honest acknowledgement that they do not have faith. There is counterfeit faith that looks a good deal like true saving faith. Thus it is necessary for one to examine himself, in order not to deceive himself. Moreover, those who have faith, but are often weak and doubting, must be strengthened by having their attention called to the evidences and marks of true, saving faith. Besides, God gave to man the powers of self-reflection and introspection, so that it is possible for him to make himself an object of his own examination. Above all, they argued that the word of God urges us to examine ourselves whether we are in the faith.

The matter of self-examination is not as simple as it would at first appear.

On the one hand, we must beware of false objectivism that would rule out the necessity of any form of self-examination by casting salvation in the form of a syllogism. The syllogism would be as follows: The major premise is that the promise of God is for every baptized person. The minor premise is that I am baptized. The conclusion is that I am partaker of the benefits of Christ. This syllogism is false because the major premise is false. The promise of God is not for all, but only for those who believe in Christ, and thus for the elect. Just as in the Lord's supper God promises his salvation not to all who receive the bread and wine, but only to those who believe, so also in baptism the promise of the covenant is only for the spiritual seed. Therefore we cannot base the certainty of our salvation on our baptism.

On the other hand, we must also avoid the danger of false subjectivism in self-examination. There can be no question that the word of God urges us to examine

ourselves. The question that must be determined in self-examination is not whether we will eat and drink at the table of the Lord, but whether or not we eat and drink unworthily. In 1 Corinthians 11:28 the apostle did not say, “Let a man examine himself to determine whether or not he will eat of the bread and drink of the cup,” but he wrote, “Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.” In 2 Corinthians 13:5 the apostle did not write, “Examine yourselves whether you have the faith.” This would be impossible, for proper self-examination proceeds from faith. Only the true believer can really examine himself. Rather, the apostle wrote, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.” The danger is that by the method of false subjectivism one attempts to attain assurance of faith by looking for certain marks and something in himself. This method must lead to disappointment. The result of this method will be that the contrite hearts of the faithful are dejected and led to despair, for there is only a small beginning of the new obedience in the very holiest of Christians. Whenever the believer looks at himself, he will find much sin and little faith and love. If he tries to base the assurance of his salvation and of being a child of God on evidences he finds in himself, he will discover a thousand reasons to doubt.

Therefore the question is, what is proper self-examination?

The subject of all proper self-examination is the believer, the Christian. It certainly is not and cannot be the openly and professed ungodly who is the subject of proper Christian self-examination. There is nothing in him that can be examined. The ungodly has the powers of reflection and of introspection, so generally he can examine himself. But in him there is nothing but darkness and ungodliness. He is incapable of doing any good, prone to all evil, dead in sin, and in bondage to corruption. Without the regenerating grace of the Holy Spirit he is neither able nor willing to reform the depravity of his nature and dispose himself to conversion. He is sinful, and he knows it. He does not have to examine himself to find out his corruption. The Spirit of God impresses upon him the testimony of God’s judgment. The book of his conscience is filled with the testimony that he is ungodly. There is nothing positive in him that needs to be examined.

Besides, the ungodly is not a proper subject for self-examination, for true self-examination must be done in the light of scripture and of God’s own judgment. He who examines himself must be able to take the prayer of the psalmist upon his lips, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24). This the ungodly never will do and never can do. Thus certainly the ungodly unbeliever is not the proper subject of self-examination.

The same is true of the hypocrite. Essentially the hypocrite does not differ

from the professed ungodly. The only difference is that he appears for a time, and perhaps for a long time, as a Christian. But before his consciousness he does not appear such. He knows very well that he is ungodly and wicked. He does not even have to examine himself to discover whether he is a hypocrite, for in his heart of hearts he knows this fact very well.

Therefore, the only proper subject of Christian self-examination is the believer. The believer is implanted into Jesus Christ by faith. Christ lives in him through his Spirit. Christ enlightens him and sheds abroad the love of God in his heart, works in him to will and to do of God's good pleasure. In this sense, and in this sense only, he is a new creature. And in that capacity, as a believer, he is the subject of proper self-examination, which is an act of faith. Only the believer is able and willing by virtue of and through the power of his active faith to conduct the self-examination that is demanded in the word of God.

To conduct proper self-examination, it is necessary to have a clear conception of what a believer or a Christian is in this world. The believer must examine *himself* with a view to the question whether his condition, his way and walk, is normal; that is, such as may be expected of a Christian in this world and in his present condition. Is his condition as it should be in the light of the word of God? Can he have assurance that he is a normal believer? He must know in the light of the word of God what is the proper criterion or standard of a Christian before he can fruitfully test himself. Thus the question is, what may be regarded as a normal Christian, a normal believer in this world? Is the Christian perfect? Is he without sin? Is he still a natural man, with the exception that he believes that he is righteous only in Christ, so that he is justified but not a new creature and not sanctified? Or is he in principle perfect, yet in such a way that sin still dwells within him?

To the question what a normal believing Christian is according to the standard of holy scripture different answers have been given. The answer of the perfectionist is that the Christian can live without sin. The question is not whether he actually does live without sin, but whether a normal Christian is capable of living entirely without sin. To that question the perfectionist answers affirmatively. If the Christian examines himself in the light of that standard, either his self-examination becomes very superficial, or he comes to an entirely negative conclusion. No Christian is ever capable of living a sinless life in this world.

The antinomian answers the question negatively. The Christian is in every respect just like any natural man, except that he believes in Christ for his righteousness and hopes in him for the future. If that is the normal standard of the Christian according to Holy Writ, it stands to reason that the Christian who

examines himself does not look for sanctification. The result of his self-examination is negative regarding his condition. He finds that he is still a sinner, and only according to his state he finds himself righteous as a believer in Christ Jesus.

The Heidelberg Catechism also considers this question when at the close of its discussion of the ten commandments, it asks, “Can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?” The answer is, “No; but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God” (Q&A 114). The Catechism asks whether those who are converted to God are *able* perfectly to keep God’s commandments. The question is therefore not whether they actually *do* keep the commandments, but whether they *can* keep them. This is a question of their condition, and the answer of the Catechism to this question is negative. The Christian, the normal believer, not only still commits sin, but also his condition is such that he can never get rid of sin in this life.

The question is still, what then is the picture of a normal Christian? Is his condition such that he is almost able to live sinlessly in the world? Is he mostly Christian, almost perfectly sanctified, so that only a few sinful blemishes and spots still adhere to him? Or can it be said that the Christian gradually reaches perfection in this life? Is his regenerated condition such that he gradually increases in holiness, that his sinful nature slowly but surely disappears, and that he gradually is delivered from the corruption of the flesh? Also this question the Catechism answers in the negative, and answers it emphatically. The very holiest of men have only a small beginning or principle of the new life and of the new obedience.

What does that mean? It implies that in this life the principle of regeneration never increases. Sanctification is not progressive regeneration. If the very holiest in this life has but a small beginning, the less holy also has the same small principle, and the least holy is in the same condition. There is no progressive increase in regeneration. The Christian has his earthly and sinful nature, body and soul, and he keeps that same sinful nature until the end. It remains carnal, corrupt, and earthly until the day of his death. But in that nature there is a small beginning, a principle of the new life. The heart of the believer, whence are the issues of life, is radically changed. The Christian is a man who possesses a new dominating principle of life and righteousness and holiness in the midst of a nature full of death, unrighteousness, and iniquity. That principle of the new life must have dominion. It must reign over the earthly and sinful life. The Christian delights in the law of God according to the inward man, but he sees another law

in his members that wars against the law of his mind. He always sins. He always hates sin. He always does what he hates. Thus the normal believer is a man who is sorry for his sins and fights against sin all his life until the moment of his death.

What must be examined? The answer is, self. I must examine me. The subject and the object in this examination are the same. The fruit of this examination must be that I learn to know myself in the spiritual, ethical sense, and that I pass a correct judgment on my own worth before God.

How is this possible? I certainly am not an impartial judge when I am called to pass a verdict on myself. When I come to me to examine me, me puts on his best face. Two factors of this examination are absolutely necessary. First, the proper subject of examination is the principle of the new life. Second, I conduct this examination in the objective light of scripture. When I want to see my own face, I stand before the mirror. When I want to see and judge myself correctly and spiritually, I place myself before the mirror of the word of God. I do this as a new man in Christ Jesus through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit must apply that word to me, cause its light to shine into the deepest recesses of myself, make me know through the scriptures God's judgment over me, and give me the grace to accept that judgment. In other words, through faith in Christ Jesus I, as a regenerated man, venture to stand in the judgment of God with the prayer of the psalmist, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." This examination is not conducted to determine if I have faith, for the examination itself is an act of faith. The question is rather whether I am in the faith and whether in every respect I am always a fighting saint.

What must be examined is self. What belongs to self? Self is the whole nature and all the activities of that nature; the inner self and the deepest recesses of the heart and mind; and the thoughts, desires, inclinations, longings, and aspirations —in one word, the whole inner self. To self also belong the external conversation and walk: the personal life, words, looks, gestures, and actions with relation to God and man. The believer must examine himself in his relations in the family—the relations between husband and wife, parents and children, and brother and sister. He must examine himself in relation to the world about him, in his relation as citizen in the state, in his relation as employer to employee or vice versa. He must examine his dealings in business and commerce and industry. He must examine his relation to his fellow members in the church of Christ, whether the relation of officebearer—minister, elder, or deacon—to the congregation or the relations among the members mutually. All this belongs to his conversation and walk. This whole self, inward and outward, must be

examined with a view to the question, what is my spiritual, ethical worth before God?

This self-examination concentrates around the three parts of the Heidelberg Catechism: sin, redemption, and gratitude. These three elements are also the three parts of proper self-examination mentioned in the Lord's supper form and referred to by the Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 81.

Proper partakers of holy communion are those who, upon thorough self-examination, find that they can confess that they are truly sorrowful for their sins or who, as the form expresses it, consider by themselves their sins and the curse due to them for these sins to the end that they abhor and humble themselves before God. This is essential. To determine at a given time whether we are proper partakers, we must not ask how holy and perfect we are. Still less must we approach the Lord's table in the consciousness that we have no sin, for "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8). Nor may we come to the Lord's table in the general conviction of the truth of total depravity.

Rather, one is a true partaker of the Lord's supper when he has true, spiritual knowledge of his personal sinfulness and sins, sins he can enumerate and mention by name before God. Does he put his trust in anyone or anything besides the true God, as revealed in Jesus Christ? Was he the cause that God's name was blasphemed? Did he neglect the means of grace? Is there something wrong in his relation as a parent to his children or in the relation of his children to him? Is he faithful to the vows he pledged when he had his children baptized, namely, to instruct them to the utmost of his power in the doctrines he professes to believe? Is there in his heart malice, envy, or hatred against the brother or sister? Does he find that he was, or is, motivated by the lusts of the flesh and committed fornication, whether in his heart or openly? Was he guilty of dishonest dealings with his neighbor? Does he seek the things of the world rather than the things above? Is he a faithful steward before God with regard to the things committed to him? Does he commit the sins of the tongue in slander and backbiting, and thus commit the works of the devil? Is he motivated by covetousness, and does he discover all the corruption of sin in his old nature? Before these concrete questions one must place himself or herself to conduct proper self-examination and to become a true partaker of the table of the Lord.

We are true partakers of the Lord's supper if we abhor ourselves because of all these sins and repent in true sorrow after God. This is necessary to become worthy partakers of the Lord's table, and also in this respect we must be careful, lest we deceive ourselves. The question is not whether our sorrow over sin is sufficiently deep. It never is. Never can we abhor ourselves deeply enough

because of our sins before God. The question is rather whether our sorrow over sin is true and genuine, that is, whether it is not the sorrow of the world but the sorrow after God; whether it is not sorrow because of the results of sin but sorrow over sin itself, sorrow because by our sins we offended the living God, our Savior in Jesus Christ, and grieved the Holy Spirit. Besides, we must be careful that our sorrows over sin include all sins. We cannot be sorry over sin piecemeal. We cannot repent of 95 percent of our sins and hide and nourish the rest in our hearts. Then we approach the table of the Lord with lies in our right hands, which are abominations before God. Only those who are truly sorrowful for their sins and repent in dust and ashes are worthy partakers of the table of the Lord.

We are true partakers of the Lord's supper if we also confess our sins before God and man. To confess is to say the same thing with someone else. To confess our sins is to express the same judgment on all our sins as God renders, for "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

According to the Heidelberg Catechism, proper partakers of the Lord's table trust that their sins are forgiven them for the sake of Christ and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death. According to the Lord's supper form, proper partakers believe the faithful promise of God that all their sins are forgiven them only for the sake of the passion and death of Jesus Christ and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed and freely given them as their own, so perfectly as if they had satisfied in their own persons for all their sins and fulfilled all righteousness.

The mere knowledge of sin is not sufficient to approach the Lord's table, for the table of the Lord is the symbol of covenantal fellowship with God. The act of coming to the Lord's supper is symbolic of the act of faith whereby we enter into the holiest, into the sanctuary of God. That fellowship with the ever-living God, that entrance into the sanctuary, is possible only on the basis of perfect righteousness. Hence the proper partaker of the Lord's table must be conscious that all his sins are forgiven him and that he is perfectly righteous before God in spite of the testimony of his own conscience and of the many infirmities that still remain in him.

This confidence can be based only on the sacrifice of Christ, the signs of which are exhibited in the bread and wine of the Lord's table. On nothing else his confidence of righteousness must be based—not on his birth from believing parents or his baptism, not on his works, piety, or religion. His trust for perfect righteousness must be based only on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ his Lord. He must approach the Lord's table heeding the exhortation of Hebrews 10:19–22:

“Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.”

Finally, according the Catechism, proper partakers of the Lord’s supper earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened and their lives more holy. According to the Lord’s supper form, they purpose to show true thankfulness to God in their whole lives; to walk uprightly before him; to lay aside unfeignedly all enmity, hatred, and envy; and firmly resolve to walk in true love and peace with their neighbors.

This last requirement can be regarded as the seal and test and at the same time as the fruit of the former three requirements. One who knows his sin, abhors his corruption before God, and is filled with true sorrow after God not only longs for forgiveness, but also for sanctification. He cannot rest until he is perfectly delivered from all his corruption. Besides, true sorrow over sin is rooted in the love of God, and the love of God manifests itself in love of the brethren.

The same is true of the trust and confidence of perfect righteousness in Christ: justification and sanctification are inseparably connected. He who embraces Christ by a true faith and knows that he is righteous in Christ before God is already sanctified and therefore longs for perfect holiness. “It is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness” (A 64).

The careless and profane who do not desire to increase in holiness have no place at the Lord’s table.

Regarding hypocrites and those who turn not to God with sincere hearts, the Catechism does not say that the church ought to bar them from the table of the Lord. But the Catechism says they are not proper partakers, and therefore they ought not to come. At the same time the Catechism assures them that they cannot receive a blessing at the table of the Lord and if they do come they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

What is a hypocrite? A hypocrite is a spiritual cheat. According to the simile the Lord used, a hypocrite is like a whitened sepulcher that appears beautiful on the outside, but is within full of a dead man’s bones and uncleanness. A hypocrite puts on a mask of the child of God while he is actually a child of the devil. He is an ungodly man who plays the part of the godly. From selfish motives he puts on the appearance of a good Christian in his outward confession and walk, but inwardly he is an unbeliever. His secret life is that of the ungodly. He has not the love of God. He is not filled with sorrow after God, does not

repent of sin before God, nor put his trust in Christ. He is not a believer but an unbeliever. He is a lover of self.

Moreover, the hypocrite is known as an ungodly man only to God and to himself. As long as he plays the role of a hypocrite, he is not known to others. You cannot call a man a hypocrite. God knows him, however, and the word of God judges him and condemns him as an ungodly and wicked man. He also knows himself, and before his consciousness he stands condemned as an unbeliever.

From this it follows that one need not be afraid that he himself is a hypocrite. It is not difficult to understand that believers sometimes fear that they are hypocrites and not real children of God. We do not like to appear before one another as we appear before God. One's outward appearance is not always a perfect representation of his inward state and condition. In the old nature we are always insincere. Insincerity cleaves to our best works, to our confession and walk and even to our prayers. We need not be surprised therefore that even believers sometimes feel they are hypocrites.

The difference between the real hypocrite and that feeling of hypocrisy is that the hypocrite has no life, and he knows it. He puts on an appearance of being a living child of God, while he knows he is inwardly wicked. He is not afraid that he is a hypocrite, but he is assured of it. The principal difference between him and the child of God is that while the child of God repents before God of his sins, even of his insincerity and hypocrisy, the hypocrite never does.

The Catechism speaks also of those who turn not to God with sincere hearts. There is undoubtedly a distinction between these people and hypocrites. Those who do not turn to God with sincere hearts may be children of God who temporarily refuse to repent. There is probably certain sins they love and from which they do not repent for a time. There is, for instance, the sin of hatred and envy against the brethren, which for a time they nourish their hearts. Perhaps they attempt to repent of all the rest of their sins and to confess them before God and to receive forgiveness and peace of heart and conscience, but they fail to receive these blessings of grace. The Lord does not answer their prayers but says to them, "You go back and confess the rest of your sins also. I am not going to forgive 75 percent of your sins if you want to keep 25 percent for yourself." Or in the words of the Lord Jesus, he says,

> 23. If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee;
> 24. Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.
> 25. Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into

prison.

26. Verily I say unto thee, Thou shalt by no means come out thence, till thou hast paid the uttermost farthing. (Matt. 5:23–26)

The condition of insincerity may be permanent. In that case the insincere is not a child of God at all, but is a hypocrite. But whether temporarily or permanently, one who is characterized by such a disposition of heart and mind should not come to the table of the Lord, for he will eat and drink judgment to himself.

The truth that hypocrites and the insincere eat and drink judgment to themselves is based on 1 Corinthians 11:29–30. He who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. The meaning is that by eating and drinking unworthily, that is, by approaching the Lord's supper merely to eat bread and to drink wine without spiritually discerning the Lord's body, that is, coming to the Lord's table without faith and repentance, one incurs a judgment of God upon himself rather than a blessing. The judgment of God one receives by eating and drinking unworthily does not necessarily mean eternal damnation to himself. In verse 30 Paul seemed to point in a different direction. There the apostle explained that because of disregarding and profaning the Lord's table many in the congregation were weak and sickly and many had died, by which undoubtedly he meant physical sickness and death. The apostle regarded the sickness and death of many as the Lord's chastisement to manifest his displeasure on the members of the church for their profaning of the Lord's table. Although these words do not necessarily refer to eternal damnation, this is certainly included in the judgment of God for all those who permanently profane the table of the Lord and do not discern his body.

The hypocrites and wicked certainly receive the bread and wine, but no more. As is the case with the preaching of the word that it is a savor of death unto death for the wicked reprobate, so it is also with the sacrament of holy communion: the wicked eat and drink damnation to themselves. They do not receive the grace of God but his curse, and his wrath abides on them.

In his exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism Ursinus mentioned four reasons unbelievers and ungodly bring upon themselves condemnation by eating and drinking the signs of the holy supper. First, they receive a curse because they profane the signs, and therefore they profane the thing signified, the body and blood of Jesus Christ, as they take to themselves those things that were not instituted for them but only for the believers. Second, by taking to themselves the signs of the covenant in the holy supper, they profane the covenant of God itself. They desire to appear in covenant with God when they are in league with the devil. Thus they make God appear as if he were the Father of all the wicked.

Third, by partaking of the signs of the bread and wine and outwardly receiving the benefits God designed only for believers, they do not discern the Lord's body, and they trample the blood of the Son of God under their feet. Fourth, they condemn themselves as hypocrites because in coming to the Lord's table, they profess to believe the doctrine that there is no salvation outside of Christ, while they never repent.[12]

Such is the answer of the Catechism to the question regarding the proper partakers of the holy supper. Only those who evince the proper spiritual disposition can obey the injunction of the Lord spoken at the institution of his supper, "Do this in remembrance of me." What it means to remember the Lord Jesus Christ at his table is beautifully explained in the form for the Lord's supper.

> After this manner we are to remember him by it:
>
> First. That we are confidently persuaded in our hearts that our Lord Jesus Christ (according to the promises made to our forefathers in the Old Testament) was sent of the Father into the world; that he assumed our flesh and blood; that he bore for us the wrath of God (under which we should have perished everlastingly) from the beginning of his incarnation to the end of his life upon earth; and that he hath fulfilled, for us all obedience to the divine law and righteousness; especially, when the weight of our sins and the wrath of God pressed out of him the bloody sweat in the garden, where he was bound that we might be freed from our sins; that he afterwards suffered innumerable reproaches, that we might never be confounded; that he was innocently condemned to death, that we might be acquitted at the judgment-seat of God; yea, that he suffered his blessed body to be nailed on the cross, that he might fix thereon the handwriting of our sins; and hath also taken upon himself the curse due to us, that he might fill us with his blessings; and hath humbled himself unto the deepest reproach and pains of hell, both in body and soul, on the tree of the cross, when he cried out with a loud voice, *My God, my God! why hast thou forsaken me?* (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34) that we might be accepted of God and never be forsaken of him; and finally confirmed with his death and shedding of his blood the new and eternal testament, that covenant of grace and reconciliation when he said: *It is finished*.
>
> Secondly. And that we might firmly believe that we belong to this covenant of grace, the Lord Jesus Christ, in his last Supper, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and gave it to his disciples and said, *Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance*

of me; in like manner also after he had supped he took the cup, gave thanks and said, Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins; this do ye as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me; (1 Cor. 11:24b–25) that is, as often as ye eat of this bread and drink of this cup, you shall thereby, as by a sure remembrance and pledge, be admonished and assured of this my hearty love and faithfulness towards you; that, whereas you should otherwise have suffered eternal death, I have given my body to the death of the cross, and shed my blood for you; and as certainly feed and nourish your hungry and thirsty souls with my crucified body and shed blood, to everlasting life, as this bread is broken before your eyes, and this cup is given to you, and you eat and drink the same with your mouth in remembrance of me.

From this institution of the Holy Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ, we see that it directs our faith and trust to his perfect sacrifice (once offered on the cross) as to the only ground and foundation of our salvation, wherein he is become to our hungry and thirsty souls the true meat and drink of life eternal. For by his death he hath taken away the cause of our eternal death and misery, namely, sin, and obtained for us the quickening Spirit, that we by the same (who dwelleth in Christ as in the head, and in us as his members) might have true communion with him, and be made partakers of all his blessings, of life eternal, righteousness, and glory.

Besides, that we by this same Spirit may also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love, as the holy apostle saith, *For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread* (1 Cor. 10:17). For as out of many grains one meal is ground and one bread baked, and out of many berries being pressed together one wine floweth and mixeth itself together; so shall we all, who by a true faith are ingrafted into Christ, be altogether one body, through brotherly love, for Christ's sake, our beloved Savior, who hath so exceedingly loved us, and not only show this in word, but also in very deed towards one another.[13]

Confession and Walk

Question 81 asks concerning those for whom the Lord's supper was instituted. The implication of the answer is that left to the individual believer is the determination whether or not he is a proper partaker of the Lord's supper. To put it differently, the question concerns those who must come to the table of the Lord as far as the church is concerned. Although the answer definitely states that the Lord's supper was instituted only for believers, yet also hypocrites and those

who do not sincerely repent of their sins before God, and who therefore eat and drink judgment to themselves, must be allowed to come to the Lord's table because the church does not judge hidden things.

Question 82 is distinct from the preceding one and is not concerned with the determination of whether or not the individual may come to the table of the Lord, but with the church as institute. The church also has a calling with regard to the sacrament of holy communion. Not everyone is to be admitted to the table of the Lord.

The Reformed churches believe in what is called close communion. Most churches in our day have open communion. They do not exercise Christian discipline, and the keys of the kingdom of heaven are long covered with rust. Anyone may determine wholly for himself whether or not he will partake of the Lord's supper. But Reformed churches believe that they have a calling with regard to this holy sacrament. That calling is expressed by the term *close communion*. It implies that not all who desire are permitted to come to the table of the Lord. Are those who by confession and life declare themselves to be unbelieving and ungodly to be admitted to the supper of the Lord? No, for this would profane the covenant of God and kindle his wrath against the whole congregation. Therefore, the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, is to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven until they show amendment of life.

Question 82 speaks of those who by confession and walk declare themselves to be ungodly and cannot be admitted by the church to the Lord's table. There is a most intimate relation between confession and walk. A true confession reveals itself in a sanctified walk, and the walk is based on and motivated by the confession. A false confession is motivated by the desire to cover up and to justify a walk according to the flesh and the world. It is utterly false to maintain that it matters not what we believe, if only we do something in life. Principle and practice are intimately related. Doctrine and life are inseparable. The scriptures everywhere emphasize the necessity and the obligation of the church and of the individual believer to maintain true doctrine, and everywhere the word of God warns against heretics and false teachers. Never does it evince any sympathy toward them but presents them as willful destroyers of the church and of individual believers.

Already in the old dispensation the word of God condemned false prophets as liars and deceivers. The false prophet deliberately spoke lies in the name of the Lord to entice and deceive the people to commit wickedness and idolatry. According to the law that prophet had to die. "The prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that

shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die" (Deut. 18:20). So serious was this matter that the Lord demanded that if a son prophesied lies in the name of the Lord, his father and mother who begat him must be the first to stone him or to thrust him through with the sword.

> 6. If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers;
>
> 7. Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth;
>
> 8. Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him:
>
> 9. But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.
>
> 10. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.
>
> 11. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you. (Deut. 13:6–11)

How sadly the old covenant people disobeyed this injunction is well known. According to the prophecy in Zechariah 13:3 this injunction will still be realized: "It shall come to pass, that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the LORD: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth." False prophets were deceivers who willfully spoke lies in the name of the Lord from the motive of covetousness, intending to destroy the people of God. Thus we read of the false prophets in Jeremiah 6:13–15:

> 13. From the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely.
>
> 14. They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace.
>
> 15. Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.

The people who follow in the way of their wicked lies will perish with them.

> 13. Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, the prophets say unto them, Ye shall not see the sword, neither shall ye have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place.
>
> 14. Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart.
>
> 15. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them

not, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed.

16. And the people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them, them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness upon them. (Jer. 14:13–16)

Jeremiah 23:9–40 gives a vivid description of those false prophets. Because of them the land was full of adulterers. Because of swearing the land mourned. Both prophet and priest were profane. They caused the people to err. While they committed adultery and walked in lies, they strengthened the hand of evildoers, so that none repented and returned from their wickedness. They promised peace and prosperity to everyone who walked in the imagination of his own heart. They were prophets of deceit; they caused the people of God to forget the name of the Lord, and they perverted the words of the living God (Jer. 27:14–18; 28:15–16; 29:8–9; Lam. 2:14). With their lying divinations they made the heart of the people of God sad and strengthened the hands of the wicked (Ezek. 13:22). When they spoke lies in the name of the Lord, their purpose was to devour souls. “There is a conspiracy of her prophets in the midst thereof, like a roaring lion ravening the prey; they have devoured souls; they have taken the treasure and precious things; they have made her many widows in the midst thereof” (Ezek. 22:25).

The New Testament also warns frequently against false teachers and false doctrine. The Lord Jesus warned against false prophets. “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Jesus said that by their fruits they will be known, for men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles. Every good tree brings forth good fruit, but a corrupt tree brings forth evil fruit (Matt. 7:15–16). He continued, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done many wonderful works? And then I will profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (vv. 21–23).

Always Jesus emphasized the element of deceit in the false prophets. “For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many” (Matt. 24:5). “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt. 24:24; Mark 13:22). Paul mentioned the names of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who erred concerning the truth and said that the resurrection was past and attempted to overthrow the faith of many (2 Tim.

2:17–18). Paul wrote, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim. 4:3–4).

False teachers oppose the truth. They are gainsayers, vain talkers, and deceivers who are motivated by the desire for filthy lucre, as the apostle wrote in Titus 1:9–11:

> 9. Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.
>
> 10. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision:
>
> 11. Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre’s sake.

False teachers are ministers of Satan who transform themselves into apostles of Christ.

> 13. Such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.
>
> 14. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.
>
> 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works. (2 Cor. 11:13–15)

False teachers pervert the gospel of Christ, and the apostle Paul did not hesitate to call them accursed.

> 6. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:
>
> 7. Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.
>
> 8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.
>
> 9. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:6–9)

False teachers are very deceitful in their ways and privily bring in heresies and lure many in their deceitful ways. False teachers are motivated by covetousness and make merchandise of the people of God.

> 1. There were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.
>
> 2. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.
>
> 3. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not. (2 Pet. 2:1–3)

The apostle John also warned the church against the influence of false teachers.

> 7. Many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.
> 8. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.
> 9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doc-trine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.
> 10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed:
> 11. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds. (2 John 7–11)

The apostle Paul characterized false teachers in no uncertain words. “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with very wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14).

From these passages it is plain that it is very dangerous to harbor false teachers and false doctrines in the church. It is also evident that the motives of false teachers are not love of God, love of Christ, and the love of the truth but covetousness and the desire to make merchandise of the people of God. It is further plain what methods false prophets and teachers use to inculcate false doctrines in the church of Christ. And it is clear that there is an intimate connection between false doctrine and a walk according to the flesh. Therefore the church of Christ ought not to allow false teachers to remain in the church and to partake of the Lord’s supper.

It is striking that there is not one part of the doctrine of the truth in Jesus Christ our Lord that has not been denied and gainsaid in the history of the church and that is not denied and attacked today. This is true of the doctrine of holy scripture. Throughout the ages man has denied, and he continues to deny, the doctrine that Holy Writ is the infallible record of the word of God. This strikes at the very root of the Christian faith. The doctrine of the Trinity, the fundamental doctrine on which rests the whole truth of scripture, has been and is denied and attacked today. Many gainsay the doctrine of predestination, the truth concerning election, the heart of the church. Many have distorted and continue to distort the truth that Jesus Christ came in the flesh. The denial of this truth, according to the apostle John, is the mark of an antichrist. The truth that Christ is really God and really man who has assumed human nature has been and is distorted by many today. The truth of the atonement—that God in Christ reconciled the world unto himself and that Christ died vicariously for the sins of his people—has been distorted, attacked, and denied by many in the past, and many do so today. The

truth of the resurrection and in connection therewith the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ was attacked in the church of Corinth in the days of the apostle Paul and is still gainsaid by many who do not love the truth of the gospel. So it is with all other parts of the doctrine of scripture. The truths of the exaltation of Christ at the right hand of God and his second coming, the truths concerning the church and the means of grace and the sacraments, both baptism and the supper of the Lord—all these doctrines have been distorted and attacked and denied by many false preachers and teachers.

Many are the winds of doctrine that always try to prevent the church from steering a straight course along the lines of the truth in Jesus Christ our Lord. Many have been and are deceived by false doctrines, and being deceived they are led in ways of corruption and of the world. The church ought not to allow false teachers and false doctrines to gain a foothold in the church. Those who propagate false doctrines ought to be barred from the Lord's supper, which is essentially the same as excommunicating them from the church of Christ.

Also evident from the quoted passages are the motivations of false teachers and the methods they employ to inculcate their teachings into the church of Christ. Why are there always so many who attack the truth in Christ revealed in the holy scriptures? Are these false teachers simply characterized by intellectual errors? Do they, as it is often alleged, perhaps honestly err? Must they be considered as erring brethren? Do they present what are their honest convictions concerning the truth of the gospel?

This certainly is not the judgment of scripture. According to the Bible, both in the Old Testament and the New, a false teacher or a false prophet is a wicked person, one who pretends to speak the word of the Lord, while he knows that he contradicts it. Moreover, he deliberately presents the lie as the truth to deceive the people of God, to corrupt the church, and to lead believers astray from the ways of righteousness and truth. According to scripture, moreover, a false teacher is motivated by selfish reasons, covetousness, and filthy lucre. He is a minister of Satan who appears as an angel of light. Scripture has no sympathy toward the false teacher. The apostle Paul characterized the false teacher as one who has recourse to the sleight of men and to cunning craftiness, whereby he lies in wait to deceive. He gambles with the truth. He means to fleece the sheep rather than to feed them. With cunning craftiness false teachers seek to introduce false doctrines into the church. They never come openly, but privily they try to inculcate their false teachings. There is no love of God in their hearts. They love not the Lord Jesus Christ and the church, but they love filthy lucre. Therefore they are enemies of the cause of God in Christ, and they cannot be admitted to the Lord's table.

The same is true for those who are permanently deceived by false teachers and follow their doctrines. It is possible that a Christian is temporarily deceived by false teachers, but if Christians are really believers and love the gospel of Jesus Christ, they will return to the truth as soon as they see it and learn to know it in the light of scripture. But for the rest, the false teacher and those who follow him, they cannot be admitted to the table of the Lord and have no place in the church of Jesus Christ.

The same holds true, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, for those who in their lives and walk in the world declare themselves to be ungodly. There is a close connection between doctrine and life: false doctrine leads to a sinful walk and conversation. False doctrine does not lead to a denial of Christ, but denies Christ. In the way of false doctrine the church loses Christ. In Christ, however, is all salvation. Without Christ we have nothing. All that we have and ever will have in regard to the riches of the blessings of salvation is literally in Christ. In him are righteousness, knowledge of God, wisdom, holiness, sanctification, and eternal life. Christ is the head, from whom flows all the fullness of grace and salvation into his people. The believer therefore must abide in Christ and grow into him. Just as a tree strikes its roots into the soil to seek its nourishment, so the believer, by the grace of God, has roots that strike into Christ to seek all the nourishment, all the spiritual blessings of salvation, in him alone. As we grow into Christ, we will also grow in sanctification of life, crucify our old natures, hate sin, fight the good fight, and walk as being of the party of the living God in the world. Growing into Christ, we derive everything out of him, and as we derive all salvation out of him, we become conformable to his image and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling.

From this you can easily gather how dangerous it is to tolerate false doctrine. False doctrine is a denial of Christ, and therefore leads the church away from him. We have Christ only in the truth of Holy Writ. Another Christ than what is revealed in scripture we have not. Therefore as soon as you depart from the truth of Holy Writ, leave the truth, and follow after false teachers, you lose Christ and strike the roots of your soul into wrong soil. Doctrine and life are inseparably connected, and false doctrine leads inevitably to a life of corruption and sin in the world.

There is a mutual relation between doctrine and life and between false doctrine and a walk in sin. While it is true that false doctrine leads to a life of corruption, it is equally true that a life of sin is the motive for corrupting the truth. The false teacher and those who follow in his ways know well that the truth judges and condemns them. Therefore they hate and corrupt the truth and love and propagate the lie to justify their sinful lives and walks. The Lord Jesus

said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself” (John 7:16–17). The opposite is also true. If any man will not do the will of the Father, he will oppose and deny the doctrine of Christ. Because he loves the darkness and lives in the darkness, he also loves the lie and hates the truth. There is a mutual relation between false doctrine and a walk in sin.

That those who by their walk declare themselves to be unbelieving and ungodly have no part with the table of the Lord is evident from all scripture. The apostle Paul wrote, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1 Cor. 10:21). Again and again scripture emphasizes that he who walks in ungodliness and corruption has no inheritance in the kingdom of God. “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:19–21). Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

> 3. Fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;
> 4. Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.
> 5. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
> 6. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.
> 7. Be not ye therefore partakers with them. (Eph. 5:3–7)

It is the calling of the church to bar from the Lord’s table all who in confession and walk profess themselves to be ungodly.

LORD'S DAY 31

Q. 83. What are the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

A. The preaching of the holy gospel, and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church; by these two, the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers, and shut against unbelievers.

Q. 84. How is the kingdom of heaven opened and shut by the preaching of the holy gospel?

A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits; and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted; according to which testimony of the gospel God will judge them, both in this and in the life to come.

Q. 85. How is the kingdom of heaven shut and opened by Christian discipline?

A. Thus: when according to the command of Christ, those who under the name of Christians maintain doctrines, or practices inconsistent therewith, and will not, after having been often brotherly admonished, renounce their errors and wicked course of life, are complained of to the church, or to those who are thereunto appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, are by them forbidden the use of the sacraments; whereby they are excluded from the Christian church, and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ; and when they promise and show real amendment, are again received as members of Christ and his church.

Chapter Four



LORD'S DAY 31

The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven

Usually three distinguishing marks are mentioned by which the church may be known in the world and distinguished from what calls itself church but is not. These marks are the preaching of the word of God, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the right exercise of Christian discipline, or the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Some reduce these marks of the true church to two, namely, the preaching of the gospel and the proper administration of the sacraments, since Christian discipline or the use of the keys of the kingdom of heaven serves only as a sentinel that watches over the preaching and the proper administration of the sacraments.

In a way it is possible safely to limit the distinguishing mark of the church in the world to the preaching of the word of God. This is always the chief distinguishing mark of the church. Where the word of God is purely preached and heard, there undoubtedly is the church. There is Christ, and where Christ is, there is the church. Where the word of God is not preached, there the church cannot be. There is only one sphere where the word of God is heard in this world, and nowhere else is it heard. That sphere is the church. It stands to reason that where the word of God is purely preached there also is the proper administration of the sacraments. Besides, the preaching of the word is the chief key of the kingdom of heaven and the main means of Christian discipline. The sacraments and discipline stand and fall with the preaching of the word, so that in a way we can say that the distinguishing mark of the church is the pure preaching of the word.

This does not alter the fact that we can and must treat the keys of the kingdom of heaven separately. This subject is both doctrinally and practically important for the church of Christ in the world, and there are many questions that must be answered about the keys. What is meant by the keys of the kingdom of heaven? That they represent the power and authority to open and shut that kingdom is

evident. But what is the idea and the character of this power? Is not Christ's alone the power to open and shut the kingdom of heaven? In what sense is that power conferred upon men? On what men is it conferred? Is it perhaps delegated to Peter alone as the proper successor of Christ in the world? Was it bestowed on the apostles, so that after the termination of the apostolic period there is no more power of the keys? Or does that key power continue to be exercised properly by the church? And if by the church, is it exercised only by the officebearers or by the whole church? How is that power exercised, and how can it be efficient to bind in heaven what is bound on earth and to loose in heaven what is loosed on earth? And what is the purpose of Christian discipline as exercised by the key power?

Also from a practical aspect the subject of the keys of the kingdom of heaven is important. We can assert that the church, or what calls itself the church in the world, has long forgotten to employ these keys. About this we need not be surprised. Especially in our American world the church is no longer a strong fortress but an open city, into which everyone can enter or from which anyone can exit according to his good pleasure. The result is that the preaching of the word is corrupted and the holy sacraments are profaned.

Even in the Protestant Reformed Churches it is necessary to emphasize ever and again the practical importance of the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Is it not true that many among us do not realize the tremendous importance of the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven? Is it not true that many assume an erroneous attitude concerning this key power by the church? When we confess our faith in the church, we promise before God and the congregation that we will submit to Christian discipline. Yet how often this solemn vow is broken, and how often those who profess to be the people of God show a sad ignorance when they carelessly and profanely withdraw themselves from discipline when it is exercised. How many fail to understand that it is not left up to individuals whether or not they will visit the brother that sins against them, although, according to Matthew 18, it is their sacred calling and obligation of love to the brother to admonish him. Moreover, how many of us fail to understand the true, spiritual character of Christian discipline. Hence from every viewpoint it is certainly important to treat the subject of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

Lord's Day 31, which speaks of the keys of the kingdom of heaven and Christian discipline, is intimately connected with the preceding question and answer. There the question of open or close communion was broached, and it was asked whether they also are to be admitted to the supper of the Lord who by confession and life declare themselves to be ungodly. The answer was negative: the ungodly may not be admitted to holy communion, because the church must

watch over the sacredness of the covenant of God, and if they would open the communion table to all, including the ungodly, the covenant of God would be profaned and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation. Thus “it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.” According to the Catechism exclusion from the Lord’s supper is essentially the same as being cast out of the kingdom of heaven.

Most of the Reformed confessions mention this key power of the church. Article 29 of the Belgic Confession states the following:

> The marks by which the true church is known, are these: if the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin: in short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church. Hereby the true church may certainly be known, from which no man has a right to separate himself.[1]

The Scots Confession of Faith mentions the same distinguishing marks of the true church.

> The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess, and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed Himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and the apostles declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, with which must be associated the Word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished. Then wherever these notes are seen and continue for any time, be the number complete or not, there, beyond any doubt, is the true Kirk of Christ, who, according to His promise, is in its midst.[2]

The Westminster Confession speaks of Christian discipline, or the keys of the kingdom of heaven, as follows:

> The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of Church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate.

To these officers the keys of the kingdom of heaven are committed, by virtue whereof they have power respectively to retain and remit sins, to shut that kingdom against the impenitent, both by the Word and censures; and to open it unto penitent sinners, by the ministry of the gospel, and by absolution from censures, as occasion shall require.

Church censures are necessary for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for deterring of others from the like offenses; for purging out of that leaven which might infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and the holy profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God, which might justly fall upon the Church, if they should suffer his covenant, and the seals thereof, to be profaned by notorious and obstinate offenders.

For the better attaining of these ends, the officers of the Church are to proceed by admonition, suspension from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper for a season, and by excommunication from the Church, according to the nature of the crime and demerit of the person.[3]

The keys of the kingdom of heaven are literally mentioned in scripture. We find mention of them in Matthew 16 when Jesus asked his disciples, "Whom do men say that I, the Son of man, am?" After receiving various answers, he confronted them with the direct question, "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, as the spokesman of the apostles, replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vv. 13–16). Jesus then mentioned the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

17. Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.

18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.

19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (vv. 17–19)

Jesus referred to the same key power in Matthew 18:15–18.

15. If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.

16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.

17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.

18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

The same power Jesus indirectly delegated to the apostles when he appeared to them after the resurrection.

> 21. Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.
> 22. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:
> 23. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained. (John 20:21–23)

Revelation 3:7 attributes the key power to Christ alone: “To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth.”

These scriptural passages teach that Christ alone holds the key of David, that is, the key of the kingdom of heaven. Revelation 3:7 teaches that no man opens or shuts that kingdom of heaven and that when Christ opens, no man can shut; and when he shuts, no man can open. The exalted Christ, who was crucified and raised from the dead, and unto whom is given all power in heaven and on earth, is the only one who holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Christ alone is set over the whole house of God. His is all the authority, and he is become the quickening Spirit, so that he has not only authority, but also the power to include in and to exclude from the kingdom of heaven.

What is included in that power? What is meant by loosing and binding in Matthew 16 and 18? Do these expressions refer to legislative power and authority, so that Christ determines what is right and wrong and true and false in the kingdom of heaven? Or does it imply also judicial authority, authority over persons, so that ultimately he determines not only *what*, but also *who* will be included in and who will excluded from the kingdom of heaven?

Both are included. If we proceed from the correct idea that Christ holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, it stands to reason that he has not only all the legislative authority and power, but also all the judicial authority and power in that kingdom. His is the power and authority to declare the spiritual, ethical character of what is valid in the kingdom of heaven. His is also the spiritual power and authority to bestow this spiritual character, to determine on whom it will be bestowed, and thus to determine who will and who will not have a place in his everlasting kingdom. To open and shut the kingdom of heaven is the power of Christ to open and shut that kingdom legislatively and judicially. It is the power to open the gates of the kingdom of heaven for those who are still without and belong within and for those who are within and belong without. It is the power to shut the gates to keep within those who are in the kingdom and to keep outside of the kingdom those who have no place therein.

Further, the passages quoted above teach that Christ exercises this power on earth and in the church in the world through the apostles. Christ conferred on his apostles the authority and power to open and shut the kingdom of heaven. Although this expresses the same idea, it is better to maintain that Christ, the organic and judicial head of his church, exercises the key power through the apostles. In Matthew 16:18 the church is considered from the viewpoint of a fortress or a city with its gates. That city or fortress of the church is built upon a rock. That rock is Peter, not Peter as a person or Peter from the viewpoint of his subjective faith but Peter as he manifested himself in his confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." That foundation is to be laid through the instrumentality of the apostles, and on that foundation Christ will build his church. The church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). This church, this strong fortress, is conceived of as being built in the world and the gates of hell will not prevail against that church (Matt. 16:18). The figurative expression "the gates of hell" means that which issues forth from those gates: the power of death, of sin and of darkness, the powers of hell. Christ assures his church that those powers will never overwhelm or overcome or prevail against his church, which is built on that sure foundation. The gates of the church are securely closed, as a strong fortress. It is impregnable, and no powers of darkness can possibly overwhelm it.

The keys of those gates, the authority and power to open and shut, to include in or to exclude from that church and the kingdom of heaven, are bestowed upon the apostles. That this power is not conferred on Peter alone but on him as spokesman of the apostles is plain from Matthew 18, where the same power is bestowed on all the apostles. As this key power is conferred on them, it implies that in a special manner the Spirit of promise will infallibly teach them the truth in Christ Jesus and that, infallibly inspired, they will be able in the name of Christ to declare and to determine what will have a place in the kingdom of heaven, as well as who will and who will not have a place in that kingdom. Their infallible inspiration as apostles is the requisite for their authority and power.

It is also evident from the quoted passages that Christ exercises the key power not only through the apostles, but also through the church and on the basis of the infallible word. The final injunction of Matthew 18, "tell it to the church," cannot refer to the apostles, for they are not the church. Neither can it refer to their successors, for the apostles had no successors. Rather, it must mean the whole church, as headed by the apostles and founded on the doctrine of the apostles. After the apostles' deaths, Christ exercises his key power through the church as it hears the word of the apostles and is in that sense obedient to the apostles and through them to Christ. It is the church as it is locally manifested in

the instituted congregation, and as it functions through its officebearers, particularly through its ministers and elders. The church has the calling and the sacred obligation and—by the word of the apostles and the holy scriptures, as well as through the indwelling Spirit—the power to employ the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The key power is the power conferred on the church, the power that Christ exercises through the church, to determine what and who will have a place in the kingdom of heaven.

The purpose of the exercise of discipline is threefold.

First, the chief purpose is always the glory of God in Christ, for the church in the world is a manifestation of God in Christ. It must show forth his glorious virtues; it has the calling to be holy, even as he is holy. The church may not be mixed with the elements of darkness. This does not imply that there are no sin and no sinners in the church visible. But it does mean that all members of the church manifest sorrow after God, repent of their sins, crucify the flesh, and strive to walk in sanctification of life. For the glory of God all those who are not disposed to lead lives of repentance and sanctification are excluded from the kingdom of heaven.

Second, Christian discipline is diligently exercised for the well-being of the church. If it is not exercised, the covenant of God is profaned, the wrath of God is kindled against the church, and soon, if the power of evil and the workers of iniquity are left in the visible church, it will become subject to those powers and be corrupted.

Third, when members of the church walk in sins from which they do not repent, it is certainly not to their salvation to leave them undisturbed without rebukes and admonitions. The positive purpose of the exercise of Christian discipline is the salvation of the members of the church.

The Promise of the Gospel

In our ecumenical age, it is almost like a voice crying in the wilderness when we insist that the church must exercise its power of the keys. Under the slogan of a wrong interpretation and application of John 17:21, “that they may all be one,” most churches have long ago discarded the truth of the gospel, abrogated their confessions, and strive to unite into one ecumenical church in which Arminians and Calvinists, moderns and Barthians, Baptists and Episcopalians and even Roman Catholics can find a place. They attempt to make one body of all the churches over the whole world. Except that it is not the body of Christ, for the salt has lost its savor and is good for nothing but to be cast on the dunghill and to be trodden underfoot of men. In the light of this ecumenical striving, the subject

of the keys of the kingdom of heaven has become antiquated. Yet the true church, however small, may not follow this false ecumenical trend but must insist on the exercise of the power of the keys.

In summary, the key power consists in the authority, power, and sacred obligation to open and shut the kingdom of heaven to men on earth in such a way that this act on the part of the church on earth will be valid in heaven. This power and authority rest essentially only with Christ: he only can open and no man shuts; he shuts and no man opens. This power and authority were conferred on the apostles, and the same power and authority are transmitted through the word of God as contained in the scriptures and by the indwelling Spirit to the church of the new dispensation. The purpose of this exercise of the key power is threefold: the glory of God in Christ, the maintenance of the purity of the visible church, and the salvation of the sinner who repents.

Question and answer 84 instruct regarding the preaching of the word as a key power. Three elements demand our attention. First, the content of the preaching is defined as the promise of the gospel. Second, this promise of the gospel must be preached by the church. Third, the Catechism explains how by the preaching of the promise of the gospel the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers.

What is meant by the promise of the gospel? Both scripture and the confessions frequently speak of that promise.

Scripture refers to the promise in the plural to express the manifold riches of its implications, as well as in the singular to denote its unity and identity. Always the promise is the same in both dispensations. It is the promise given to Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Having mentioned these saints of the old dispensation and having spoken of their lives, deaths, and translation by faith, Hebrews 11:13 says that they all died in faith not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, were persuaded of them, embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. Having reviewed the lives and battles by faith of many more of the great cloud of witnesses, and including them all in his view, the author of Hebrews stated that they all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise (v. 39).

It is evident from these passages that throughout the old dispensation there was a promise given to the saints, which they embraced and believed, by which they lived and died, and for which they were willing to be strangers and pilgrims in the earth; to suffer hunger and exile and imprisonment; to endure cruelty, mockeries, and scourging; to be slain with the sword and sawn asunder; to wander in sheepskins and goatskins; and to be afflicted, destitute, and tormented.

In the greatness of their faith and endurance and the severity of their sufferings, we see reflected the beauty and the riches of the promise they possessed and saw afar off.

Galatians 3 is a classic chapter on the subject of the promise. It teaches that the promises were made to Abraham and his seed and that this seed of Abraham is centrally and essentially Christ. It is plain that Christ, the seed, who is the fulfillment of the promise, is the chief recipient of the promise. The chapter states that the law, which came four hundred and thirty years later than the promise to Abraham, could not make the promise of none effect and that God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise (vv. 16–18). The conclusion is that if we are Christ's we are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise (v. 29). Regarding the content of this promise, scripture speaks of it as the promise of the Holy Spirit, who is given to Christ (Acts 2:33) and to those who are of him by faith (Gal. 3:14). Scripture also speaks of it as the promise of life (1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 1:1), the promise of eternal life (1 John 2:25), the promise of Christ's coming (2 Pet. 3:4), the promise of entering into his rest (Heb. 4:11), the promise of becoming heirs of the world (Rom. 4:13), and the promise of raising up a Savior from the seed of David (Acts 13:23). Scripture also speaks of the Spirit as the Spirit of promise (Eph. 1:13); of children of the promise, that is, of children who are born not only in the line of the promise, but also by the power of the promise, according to the promise, and upon whom the promise rests (Rom. 9:8). Scripture points out the heirs and the coheirs of the promise (Heb. 11:9). At the beginning of the new dispensation the scriptures speak of the same promise that "is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

The confessions also speak of the promise and give it a very rich content. Question and answer 22 teach that it is necessary for a Christian to believe all things promised in the gospel, as taught in the articles of the catholic undoubted Christian faith. The whole content of the Christian faith is there described as the promise of the gospel. Declared in that promise is that God, the almighty creator of heaven and earth, is our Father in Jesus Christ; that God established an eternal covenant of grace with us, made us his children and heirs, and provides us with all good things. Included in the promise of the gospel is that Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son, came into human flesh as he was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary; that Christ suffered and died on the cross of Calvary, descended into all the agonies of hell and satisfied for all our sins; that God in Christ reconciled us unto himself; that Christ arose from the dead on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty; and that from thence in the fullness of time he will come again to

judge the living and the dead and to make all things new. The promise also includes the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of Christ, who is given unto the elect to apply to them and the whole church all the blessings of salvation: forgiveness and righteousness, sanctification and complete redemption, preservation and perseverance, and the glory of everlasting life.

The promise of the gospel is also the chief object signified and sealed in the sacraments, which are holy, visible signs and seals appointed by God to declare more fully and to seal unto us the promise that God grants us freely the remission of sins and life eternal for the sake of that one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross (Q&A 66). Answer 69 explains the same promise of the gospel in connection with the sacrament of baptism: "I am as certainly washed by [Christ's] blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water." What it means to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ is expressed in answer 70: "It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ's blood, which he shed for us by his sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin and lead holy and unblameable lives." Forgiveness of sins, regeneration, and sanctification to be members of Christ, so that we can put off the old man and put on the new man, are implied in the promise of the gospel. Even infants receive this promise, for "redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult" (A 74). Answer 75 speaks of the same promise in connection with the supper of our Lord: "His body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood shed for me…and…he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood." Answer 76 explains that forgiveness of sins, life eternal, and becoming more and more united to Christ by the Holy Ghost is the promise signified and sealed in the supper of the Lord.

The Belgic Confession teaches that the promise of the gospel is that God will forever be our gracious Father, that Christ washes us from all our sins by the power of the Holy Ghost and regenerates us from children of wrath unto children of God. The promise implies all the gifts of grace: washing, cleansing, and purging our souls from all filth and unrighteousness, renewing our hearts, and filling them with all comfort, and our putting on the new man and putting off the old man with all his deeds.[4]

Article 35 speaks of the same promise as implying all the merits of Christ's sufferings and death and the nourishment and strengthening of our souls, quickening and refreshing them by the drinking of his blood. [5]

The Canons of Dordt also speak of the promise of the gospel, although not in

so many words. It is undoubtedly the promise of the gospel that

> God hath decreed to give to Christ [this elect number], to be saved by him, and effectually to call and draw them to his communion by his Word and Spirit, to bestow upon them true faith, justification, and sanctification; and having powerfully preserved them in the fellowship of his Son, finally, to glorify them for the demonstration of his mercy and for the praise of his glorious grace.[6]

> Moreover, the promise of the gospel is that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life. This promise, together with the command to repent and believe, ought to be declared and published to all nations, and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of his good pleasure sends the gospel.[7]

That this promise of the gospel is not meant for all, but only for the elect, is implied in Canons 2.8.

> This was the sovereign counsel and most gracious will and purpose of God the Father, that the quickening and saving efficacy of the most precious death of his Son should extend to all the elect, for bestowing upon them alone the gift of justifying faith, thereby to bring them infallibly to salvation; that is, it was the will of God that Christ by the blood of the cross, whereby he confirmed the new covenant, should effectually redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to him by the Father; that he should confer upon them faith, which, together with all the other saving gifts of the Holy Spirit, he purchased for them by his death; should purge them from all sin, both original and actual, whether committed before or after believing; and, having faithfully preserved them even to the end, should at last bring them free from every spot and blemish to the enjoyment of glory in his own presence forever.[8]

The Canons speak of the promise of the gospel for all who come to God and believe on him.

> As many as are called by the gospel are unfeignedly called. For God hath most earnestly and truly declared in his Word what is pleasing to him, namely, that all who are called should come unto him. He, moreover,

> seriously promises eternal life and rest to as many as shall come to him, and believe on him.[9]

The Canons teach that the gift of faith, and therefore the Holy Ghost, is essential to the promise of the gospel.

> Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because he who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.[10]

Of the same promise of the gospel, as witnessed and sealed in holy baptism, the first part of the baptism form speaks. The promise of the gospel sealed in holy baptism is that God makes an eternal covenant of grace with us and adopts us for his children and heirs and therefore will provide us with every good thing and avert all evil or turn it to our profit. God swears by an oath that he will surely fulfill his promise to his people. Moreover, the Son seals that he washes us in his blood from all sin and incorporates us into the fellowship of his death and resurrection, so that we are freed from all sin and accounted righteous before God. Perfect righteousness in Christ is implied in the promise of the gospel, as sealed unto us in holy baptism. The promise of the gospel includes the gift of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ, for there is no promise of the gospel except through the Holy Spirit. In baptism the Holy Spirit assures us that he will dwell in us and sanctify us to be members of Christ and apply unto us all the benefits of salvation, namely, the washing away of sins and the daily renewing of our lives until we are presented without spot or wrinkle among the assembly of the elect in life eternal.[11]

Thus, according to all the Reformed confessions, Christ and all his benefits, as merited by him and as applied by him through the Holy Spirit, are implied in the promise of the gospel.

From scripture and the confessions it is apparent what the content of the promise of God is. In one word it is Christ and all his riches of salvation and blessing. It is the promise that God will raise up a savior out of the seed of David; that this seed of David will bear the sins of his people; and that God will raise him from the dead and give him glory, exalt him on the throne of his father

David, and give him the ends of the earth for his possession. Christ is the promised seed.

The promise implies the assurance of righteousness and peace, of forgiveness and sonship, of deliverance and sanctification, of eternal life and glory, and of the incorruptible and undefilable inheritance that fades not away. It implies for Christ and all who are in him that they will be heirs of the world, inherit the new and heavenly kingdom, and dwell in God's eternal tabernacle forever.

It is important to emphasize that the promise also implies the gift of the Holy Spirit, who was given first to Christ and then to those who are of him. Through this Spirit all the blessings of Christ are realized in the church. It is a mistake to present the matter as if God promised only the objective blessings of salvation to the seed of Abraham, or even to men in general, and that it depends upon their consent whether or not the promise will be realized to them. The promise of the Holy Spirit is God's promise to pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. Through his Spirit he effectually works the salvation of Christ in the hearts of all his people in the way of regeneration, calling, faith, justification, sanctification, perseverance, and glorification. Through the Spirit they are translated from darkness into light and are kept in the power of God unto the salvation that is to be revealed in the last time.

All this is included in the promise, that is, in God's positive declaration that he will surely bestow all these blessings and benefits of salvation upon all his people.

From all this, and especially from the promise of the gift of the Holy Spirit, it is clear that the promise of God is unconditional. The promise is not and cannot be conditioned by anything on the part of man. A promise is not the same as an offer. In an offer the person who makes the offer declares his willingness to do something for or to bestow something on a person to whom the offer is made. But for its realization the offer depends on the willingness and consent of the other party. In this sense man can really never promise anything, for he is never certain that he can realize what he promises. He is dependent on many circumstances and on the willingness of the one to whom the promise was made. I can offer a man a thousand dollars, but if he refuses, the offer is made in vain.

A promise is different from an offer. A promise is a declaration, written or verbal, that binds the person who makes it to do or to forbear to do the thing promised. It is an engagement, regardless of any corresponding duty or obligation on the part of the person to whom the thing is promised. A promise implies the declaration of a certain good, together with the positive assurance that this good will be bestowed upon or performed in behalf of the person to whom the promise is made.

This certainty of the promise is emphasized because God makes the promise. God conceived of the promise in his eternal decree. He realizes the promise in Christ Jesus, and he declares the promise. This implies that the promise cannot be dependent on anything outside of God, for God is sovereign, and his work cannot be contingent upon the will of the creature. This signifies that the promise is as faithful and true as God is unchangeable. He will surely realize the promise. When he binds himself to do or to bestow anything, he is bound by himself and all his divine attributes to realize the promise to those to whom he makes it, for he cannot deny himself.

This idea of the promise necessarily implies that it is made to a definite party. An offer that is contingent upon the acceptance and consent of the second party may be general. A promise that binds the promising party and is certain of realization requires a definite second party. Thus it is in scripture: the promise is centrally made to Christ and through him to the seed of Abraham, the children of the promise, those who are called heirs and coheirs of the promise. That this is the idea of the promise is clearly expressed in Hebrews 6:13–14, 17: "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath."

To the heirs the promise is certain, because it is rooted in the immutable counsel of the Most High.

The Preaching of the Promise

The word of God as a key power to open and shut the kingdom of heaven does not refer to the promise of God *per se* but to the preaching of the promise or the preaching of the gospel. This is evident from question and answer 83, which identifies the keys of the kingdom of heaven as the preaching of the holy gospel and Christian discipline, or excommunication out of the Christian church. By these two the kingdom of heaven is opened to believers and shut to unbelievers. This is also evident from question and answer 84.

The gospel is glad news, or tidings, about the promise of God. It is glad news for two reasons. It is good news, first, because the heirs of the promise, the elect of God, are in the world and therefore in misery and death. In the world they are subject to sin and corruption and to all kinds of suffering and tribulation. The present experience of the heirs of the promise is sorrow and grief, affliction and torment, and misery and groaning. The promise holds before them deliverance from their present state of misery and destitution. Second, the gospel is glad

news because of the promise of the unspeakably great riches of the inheritance. The promise does not hold before the heirs a deliverance from sin and death that will restore them to a former state and condition of bliss, but it fills their hearts with the hope of glory such as never was conceived in the heart of man.

This glad news concerning the promise can be imparted only by God who conceived of the promise. God proclaims the promise. He preaches the gospel through Jesus Christ. The gospel that speaks of things that eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and that never has been conceived in the heart of man can come only through revelation. This revelation of God, this divine proclamation of the gospel, always took place through the agency of men. God uses preachers of the gospel who can with authority declare in the name of God glad news about the promise, its certainty of fulfillment, its riches of blessings, and its progress and realization in history. All through the history of the world there are heirs of the promise. They know the promise. They are eager for it and long for its realization. They inquire about its content and the nearness of its fulfillment. One who can answer this inquiry and bring some glad news about the promise was and still is a preacher of the gospel.

The preaching of the gospel is one of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.

What is preaching? Briefly, preaching is the proclamation of the gospel, and the gospel is the sure promise of God concerning salvation to the heirs of the promise. The content of the preaching may be nothing else than the gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed in the holy scriptures. Further, preaching is authoritative proclamation of that gospel. The preacher is an ambassador, one who is sent to proclaim glad tidings of good things, the things that are promised in the gospel of Jesus Christ. For that reason the church preaches the gospel, for she only can speak with authority as the one who is sent. The church proclaims the gospel through its official ministry. And preaching is the official proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the service of the living word of God through Christ. Especially the last element of this definition of preaching is important here, for it is only through the powerful and living word of Christ himself that preaching can be or become a key to open or shut the kingdom of heaven. It is not in the power of any man either to open or to shut that kingdom. Only Christ has the keys. But it pleases him to exercise the power of the keys through men, the apostles, and the church, which is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. Through the preaching Christ speaks his efficacious and living word. Only because it pleases Christ to speak his own word does the preaching become effective as key power.

From all this it is evident that if the preaching of the gospel is to be a power to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven, it cannot be a well-meant offer of

salvation. The promise must be preached. It must never be offered.

Thus it is also constantly presented in scripture. Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). Paul preached the gospel among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:2). He preached the gospel of God among the Thessalonians and spoke unto them the gospel of God with much contention (1 Thess. 2:8–9, 2). He testified of the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). Frequently in scripture to preach means to evangelize or to declare glad tidings of the gospel of God in Christ (1 Cor. 15:1; 2 Cor. 11:7; Gal. 1:11; Rev. 14:6).

Never do we find in all the word of God that the gospel is offered or that it presents the promise of God as a well-meant offer of salvation to all who hear the preaching of the gospel. If the promise of God were for all men, distinctive preaching of the gospel would be impossible. There would be an opening of the kingdom of heaven but no shutting of that kingdom. Nor is preaching of the gospel as a key of the kingdom of heaven possible when it is conceived of as God's well-meant offer to all who hear. The preaching as a well-meant offer presents the door of the kingdom of heaven as always standing wide open. Then the preaching does not open the gate, but man enters the kingdom of heaven by his free will. Then the preaching does not shut the gate of the kingdom of heaven, but it is closed by man, who rejects the offer and refuses to enter. An offer is a conditional proposition: it depends and is contingent on man's consent. If the gospel were such a well-meant offer on the part of God, dependent on the will of man, no man would ever enter the kingdom of heaven. If the promise were the preaching of a conditional offer, there would be nothing in the condition that man could fulfill. He cannot of himself believe the promise. Of himself he cannot will to believe in Christ. He cannot repent and turn unless God first realizes the promise to him. The promise of God in the preaching of the gospel is either unconditional or it is impossible of realization. The preaching is never an offer of salvation to all men, because the promise is not given to all, but only to the seed of Abraham, to those who are in Christ, to those who are in sovereign grace elected unto salvation from before the foundation of the world.

It follows, according to question and answer 84, that the preaching of the gospel must point definitely to those for whom the promise is intended and must exclude those who have no part in it. Thus and thus only can the kingdom of heaven be opened and shut by the preaching of the gospel. To all and every believer the preaching of the gospel declares and publicly testifies that "whenever they receive the promise of the gospel by a true faith, all their sins are really forgiven them of God, for the sake of Christ's merits." By the same preaching of the gospel, it is also declared and testified "to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and

eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted." According to that testimony of the gospel God will judge them both in this life and in the life to come.

Thus the preaching of the gospel can be a key power to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven.

A gospel for all is a gospel for none. It may soothe the conscience of a wicked man and send him to hell with an imagined hope. It will not comfort the elect, because such preaching does not mention them definitely as heirs of the promise. The gospel must be so preached that it definitely declares to the heirs of the promise that it is for them.

The particular gospel must be proclaimed to all who externally hear the gospel. This is true partly because we do not know who the elect are, and therefore it is impossible to preach to them only. Further, it must be preached to all because it is the will of God that also the reprobate must hear the gospel of salvation by the way of faith and repentance, in order that sin appears as sin and to leave them without excuse. The gospel does not mention the elect and reprobate by their natural names, and therefore its preaching must be general. Nevertheless, in this general preaching of the gospel the heirs of the promise must be called by their spiritual names, so they know that the sure mercies of David are for them. Under and through the preaching of the gospel, God gives them new, spiritual names by which they can know he intends the promise for them.

Objectively they are the elect, but according to their spiritual names, wrought by the Holy Spirit of promise in their hearts, they are believers. Believers are those who sincerely repent of their sins. They are the weary and heavy laden, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the contrite and brokenhearted, and those who have learned to place all their hopes and expectations only in the blood of Jesus Christ their Lord, who loved them and died for them and was raised for their justification. In principle they are crucified to the world and the world to them. They have earnest desires to walk in all good works, and they manifest them in their lives. They fulfill their part of the covenant of God and walk in new obedience; cleaving to the one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; trusting in him and loving him with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength; forsaking the world; crucifying their old natures; and walking in new and holy lives. To those the kingdom of heaven is opened by the preaching of the gospel. To them the promise of God is yea and amen. They will never be ashamed. They will be kept in the power of God unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

The same preaching of the gospel shuts the kingdom of heaven to all

unbelievers. They too have names of their own. They are not filled with sorrow after God, and they never repent of their sins. They love darkness rather than light and refuse to be converted to God. To those the preaching of the gospel proclaims that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and to eternal condemnation. They are outside of the kingdom of God.

How can the preaching of the word be effective to the opening and shutting of the kingdom of heaven? The answer is that Christ speaks through the preaching. Christ and he only has the key power. He only opens and no man shuts; and he only shuts and no man opens.

This implies that preaching is the declaration of the promise with authority. Christ is always essentially the preacher. He alone speaks with authority. His authority Christ has delegated to the church through the apostles. Therefore the church through its official ministry speaks with authority and proclaims the gospel of God on the authority of Jesus Christ. It is certainly not the calling of every individual Christian to preach the gospel, although he is indeed a witness. Preaching is always the proclamation of the gospel with authority.

One word used in the original scriptures to denote preaching means “to speak as a herald.” The preacher must deliver his message and must strictly adhere to it. He must deliver it with authority and be able to say, “Thus saith the Lord.” He must clearly leave the impression that the audience is under obligation to hear and to do the word he preaches. All the hearers are obliged to bow before that word because it is the authoritative word of Christ.

No false show of humility or fear of men may keep the preacher from addressing his audience with authority, provided he brings the word of Christ and nothing else. No word of man has any authority whatsoever, but the word of Christ is binding on the consciences of all who hear whether they receive the word and obey it or reject it and rebel. Because the preached word comes with the authority of Christ himself, the preaching of the gospel is a key to open the kingdom of heaven to everyone who believes and to shut the kingdom to everyone who does not sincerely repent.

The preaching of the gospel is not only authoritative, but it is also a word of power and therefore is efficacious. The real preacher is Christ, to whom was given all power in heaven and on earth. He speaks the word of God. That word “is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb. 4:12–13). By the preaching it pleases God through Christ, the exalted Lord and the chief prophet of God who alone

gathers his church, to speak to his people unto salvation. To all who do not sincerely repent, hypocrites included, the same Christ with his same powerful word speaks unto damnation. Because this word is powerful and efficacious the apostle could write:

> 14. Thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.
> 15. For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:
> 16. To the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?
> 17. For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ. (2 Cor. 2:14–17)

Thus only is the preaching of the gospel a key power to open the kingdom of heaven to all who believe and repent and to shut that kingdom to all unbelievers and wicked who never repent of their sins. Believers are saved, and they know it. Unbelievers are damned, and through the preaching of the word they receive the testimony of their damnation in their consciences.

Thus the preaching of the gospel has a salutary effect on the church of Christ in the world. It has the effect to exclude unbelievers who do not sincerely repent. It excludes the wicked without, for it is improbable that with such definite preaching they will ever join the visible church on earth. It also excludes the carnal seed, the unbelievers and impenitent within the church. These usually separate themselves from the visible church that is characterized by pure and definite preaching of the gospel. They become enemies of the church of Christ and of the people of God. They manifest themselves as those who are of antichrist, as John wrote:

> 18. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.
> 19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us. (1 John 2:18–19)

Although they are hypocrites and they remain in the visible church for a time as tares among the wheat, they cannot escape the power and authority of the pure and definite preaching of the gospel. God through Christ binds on their consciences that they have no place in the kingdom of heaven.

In contrast, such preaching of the gospel includes the true heirs of the promise and of the kingdom of God. Through the preaching they hear the powerful voice of the Good Shepherd, calling his sheep by his name. They follow him, and he gives them eternal life. They hear through pure and definite preaching the voice

of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest.” They are strengthened in their faith that they belong to him who died for them and arose. They are quickened in their love of God, in the love wherewith he loved them through Jesus Christ their Lord, and in the love wherewith they love him with all their hearts, minds, souls, and strength. They are confirmed in the hope that does not make ashamed, because the love of God is shed abroad in their hearts, the hope of the eternal, incorruptible, and undefilable inheritance that fades not away.

As by pure and definite preaching of the holy gospel those who are within the visible church on earth are confirmed and strengthened in their faith, so by that same preaching the kingdom of heaven is opened to those who are without. They are called by the word of Christ, and being called, they join themselves to the true church in the world. Thus the preaching of the gospel as a key power to open and to shut the kingdom of God is beneficial to the church of Christ in the world.

The Key Power of Christian Discipline

Question and answer 85 explain the key power of Christian discipline. The answer has the following elements. First, it teaches that personal admonition is not a right or a private privilege that the believer may use or neglect, but it is a command of Christ. When anyone in the church sins, his brothers and sisters in Christ have the obligation to admonish him. Second, it describes the objects of discipline as those under the name of Christians who depart from the right way either in doctrine or walk. Third, it emphasizes that those who depart must often be brotherly admonished before the sin can be made public. Fourth, after they have been often brotherly admonished, they must be reported to the church, that is, in case they do not renounce their errors and wicked course of life. It is therefore not the sin *per se*, but the impenitence of the sinner that is the proper object of Christian discipline. Fifth, if the sinner also refuses to listen to the admonitions of the church, he is excluded from the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper, and thereby he is excluded from the Christian church and by God himself from the kingdom of Christ. Sixth, the sinner may be received again into the communion of the church upon sincere repentance and promise of amendment.

The Belgic Confession speaks of Christian discipline as follows:

> We believe that this true church must be governed by that spiritual policy which our Lord hath taught us in his Word, namely, that there must be ministers or pastors to preach the Word of God, and to administer the

> sacraments: also elders and deacons, who, together with the pastors, form the council of the church; that by these means the true religion may be preserved and the true doctrine everywhere propagated, likewise transgressors punished and restrained by spiritual means; also that the poor and distressed may be relived and comforted, according to their necessities. By these means everything will be carried on in the church with good order and decency, when faithful men are chosen according to the rule prescribed by St. Paul in his epistle to Timothy.[12]

The Belgic Confession mentions more directly the discipline of the church.

> In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the church, yet they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, hath instituted. And therefore, we reject all human inventions, and all laws which man would introduce into the worship of God, thereby to bind and compel the conscience in any manner whatever. Therefore we admit only of that which tends to nourish and preserve concord and unity, and to keep all men in obedience to God. For this purpose, excommunication or church discipline is requisite, with the several circumstances belonging to it, according to the Word of God.[13]

The Church Order of Reformed churches speaks elaborately of Christian discipline.

Article 71 emphasizes that discipline is spiritual and is therefore distinct from the sword power. The spiritual nature of Christian discipline consists of reconciliation and forgiveness and of removing the offense out of the church of Christ.

> As Christian discipline is of a spiritual nature, and exempts no one from civil trial or punishment by the authorities, so also besides civil punishment there is need of ecclesiastical censures, to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor and to remove the offense out of the church of Christ.[14]

Articles 72 and 73 emphasize that Christian discipline must be exercised according to the rule of love and kept within proper bounds. Therefore the sins of a brother must be kept as secret as possible and not be published

unnecessarily.

> In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offense, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.[15]
>
> Secret sins of which the sinner repents after being admonished by one person in private or in the presence of two or three witnesses, shall not be laid before the consistory.[16]

However, when a sin is public or becomes public by the sinner's refusal to repent and listen to the admonition of one or more witnesses, the church through its officebearers is in duty bound to deal with the matter.

Article 74 explains in what way the consistory becomes concerned in a matter.

> If anyone, having been admonished in love concerning a secret sin by two or three persons, does not give heed, or otherwise has committed a public sin, the matter shall be reported to the consistory.[17]

In the case of a public sin, the consistory is most probably acquainted with the matter, and therefore it will not have to be reported to the consistory.

Article 75 explains how a public sin must be confessed. Usually the majority vote of a consistory is sufficient. Nevertheless, in case of serious differences of opinion in the consistory, the advice of two neighboring consistories or the classis must be asked.

> The reconciliation of all such sins as are of their nature of a public character, or have become public because the admonition of the church was despised, shall take place (upon sufficient evidence of repentance) in such a manner as the consistory shall deem conductive to the edification of each church. Whether in particular cases this shall take place in public shall, when there is a difference of opinion about it in the consistory, be considered with the advice of two neighboring churches or of the classis.[18]

Articles 76 and 77 speak of the proper method of discipline that leads to final excommunication.

> Such as obstinately reject the admonition of the consistory, and likewise those who have committed a public or otherwise gross sin, shall be suspended from the Lord's Supper. And if he, having been suspended, after

> repeated admonitions, shows no signs of repentance, the consistory shall at last proceed to the extreme remedy, namely, excommunication, agreeably to the form adopted for that purpose according to the Word of God. But no one shall be excommunicated except with the advice of the classis.[19]

Article 77 prescribes in more detail the steps that lead to excommunication.

> After the suspension from the Lord's table, and subsequent admonitions, and before proceeding to excommunication, the obstinacy of the sinner shall be publicly made known to the congregation; the offense explained, together with the care bestowed upon him, in reproof, suspension from the Lord's Supper, and repeated admonition; and the congregation shall be exhorted to speak to him and to pray for him. There shall be three such admonitions. In the first, the name of the sinner shall not be mentioned that he be somewhat spared. In the second, with the advice of the classis, his name shall be mentioned. In the third, the congregation shall be informed that (unless he repent) he will be excluded from the fellowship of the church, so that his excommunication, in case he remains obstinate, may take place with the tacit approbation of the church. The interval between the admonitions shall be left to the discretion of the consistory.[20]

This article leaves room for four steps of censure. The first is barring the offender from the table of the Lord without announcing anything to the congregation. This is called silent censure. The second step is announcing the sin to the congregation without the name of the offender. The third step is mentioning in the church the offense and the offender's name. This announcement is made not only so that the congregation can know and approve of the consistory's actions, but also so that the congregation can have the opportunity to admonish the offender and to pray for his repentance. This third step of censure may not be administered without the advice of classis. This also gives the offender an opportunity to appeal his case to the classis if he so desires. The final step is excommunication from the church. This step must be preceded by an announcement in the church that the consistory will apply the final step of censure unless the offender repents. This announcement is made in the church to give the congregation an opportunity to admonish the offender and to pray for his repentance. If the offender does not repent, excommunication follows.

Article 78 explains the way an excommunicated sinner can again be received into the fellowship of the church.

> Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church in the way of repentance, it shall be announced to the congregation, either before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, or at some other opportune time, in order that (in as far as no one can mention anything against him to the contrary) he may with profession of his conversion be publicly reinstated, according to the form for that purpose.[21]

It stands to reason that only by a public confession before the whole church and a public reinstatement the excommunicated sinner can again be received into the fellowship of the church.

Article 79 indicates the way officebearers may be suspended or deposed from office.

> When ministers of the divine Word, elders or deacons, have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities, the elders and deacons shall immediately by preceding sentence of the consistory thereof and of the nearest Church, be suspended or expelled from their office, but the ministers shall only be suspended. Whether these shall be entirely deposed from office shall be subject to the judgment of the classis, with the advice of the delegates of the synod mentioned in Article 11.[22]

This article makes a distinction between ministers of the divine word and elders and deacons. Elders and deacons may be suspended and deposed from their offices by a double consistory without the advice of the classis. A minister may only be suspended, and his deposition from office is left to the judgment of the classis with the advice of synodical delegates.

Article 80 enumerates the sins that make an officebearer worthy of suspension or deposition.

> Furthermore, among the gross sins which are worthy of being punished with suspension or deposition from office, these are the principal ones: false doctrine or heresy, public schism, public blasphemy, simony, faithless desertion of office or intrusion upon that of another, perjury, adultery, fornication, theft, acts of violence, habitual drunkenness, brawling, filthy lucre; in short, all sins and gross offenses, as render the perpetrator infamous before the world, and which in any private member of the church would be considered worthy of excommunication.[23]

It is clear that an officebearer may not be expelled from office for minor offenses. At the same time it is also clear that deposition from office cannot be the end of the matter. One who is thus deposed from office cannot remain as a member of the church unless he repents of his sin, and excommunication must follow.

Matthew 18:15–18 is the scriptural ground for this key power of Christian discipline.

> 15. Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother.
>
> 16. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.
>
> 17. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.
>
> 18. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

In 1 Corinthians 5:1–5 the apostle spoke of a gross sin of fornication committed by someone in the church, and Paul was grieved that the church had not excommunicated this gross offender. Paul wrote that he had already judged and excommunicated this fornicator who had committed adultery with his father's wife.

> 3. I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed,
>
> 4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 5:3–4)

The apostle continued to admonish the Corinthians:

> 7. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:
>
> 8. Therefore let up keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
>
> 9. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators:
>
> 10. Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.
>
> 11. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat…
>
> 13. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Cor. 5:7–13)

The apostle also admonished the Thessalonians, "If any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may

be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14). To obey not the word of the apostle Paul is the same as not to obey the word of God. This disobedience can refer either to the doctrine of the word of God, to a walk in disharmony with it, or to both. To have no company with such a one certainly implies excommunication from the church of Christ, for if the church can have no company with someone, this implies that it cannot allow such a person to be admitted to the table of the Lord. The apostle added in verse 15, “Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” This implies that the church must always live in the hope that the sinner will come to repentance.

“A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Titus 3:10–11). That the church must have no fellowship with those who teach false doctrine is also clear from 2 John 10–11. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”

The church of Pergamos was admonished to cast out those who held the doctrine of the Nicolaitans.

> 14. I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication.
>
> 15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.
>
> 16. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. (Rev. 2:14–16)

From these passages it is plain that the word of God admonishes the church to exercise discipline over those who depart from the truth, either in doctrine or walk or both, and if they do not repent to excommunicate them from their fellowship.

It is important to understand certain definite principles concerning the key power of Christian discipline.

The key power lies only in the word of God. The word of man or the opinions of men can have no power to open or to shut the kingdom of heaven. Whether Christian discipline consists of private admonition, in which a brother admonishes another, or in the action of the whole church through the consistory, the word of God must always be the content of the admonition. Only Christ holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and Christ speaks his word only through the holy scriptures. This does not mean that in admonishing the brother or in finally excluding him from the communion and fellowship of the saints we may only read the Bible to him. But it does mean that all our admonitions and

exhortations must be based on the holy scriptures. This implies that we must be certain that the brother has sinned either privately or publicly and that we can point out his sin to him and rebuke him with the word of God on our lips. Only then can Christian discipline be to the glory of God in Christ, to the well-being of the church, and to the salvation of the brother. Only then can such discipline be a key power to open and to shut the kingdom of heaven.

Another important principle, which is often ignored, is that Christian discipline must be motivated by the love of God in Christ and the love of the brother. Anyone who as a minister or an elder has labored for some time in the church of Christ will know by experience how this principle of love is often violated and ignored, and how in this respect the key power of Christian discipline is often misunderstood and wrongly applied. Christians often act as if they think the key power in the church is the same as the sword power in the world. Instead of admonishing the brother from the motives of love of God in Christ and the salvation of the brother, they seek their own rights. To use an illustration, say that someone has borrowed a thousand dollars from a brother and refuses to pay it back. In such a case the brother from whom the thousand dollars was borrowed frequently seeks his right, that is, the return of the thousand dollars rather than the salvation of the brother. It is not the sin of the brother that grieves him, but the nonpayment of the debt. He is like the man pictured in the parable of the unmerciful servant.

> 28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.
> 29. And his fellow-servant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
> 30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt. (Matt. 18:28–30)

I by no means claim that in this illustration the brother who borrowed a thousand dollars should not return the money. But I do maintain that the chief matter does not concern the money but the sin of the brother. If the brother is admonished in love concerning his sin of not returning the money and paying the debt he owes, and he repents of his sin, the money will be returned as a matter of fact. Nevertheless, it is not chiefly a money matter and a question of right, but it is a spiritual, ethical matter concerning the sin of the brother. Christian discipline must be motivated by the love of God in Christ and the love of the brother.

That this principle of love is often ignored in Christian discipline is also evident from other facts. Often when one brother attempts to admonish another brother, he at the same time publishes the sin of the brother on the streets of

Ashkelon, while his Christian obligation is to keep it as secret and private as possible.

Another fact that lies in the same line and evidences the same lack of love and the violation of that important principle in Christian discipline is that an admonishing brother frequently hurries technically through the rule prescribed in Matthew 18. He visits the offending brother once and then again with two or three witnesses, in order to bring quickly the matter before the consistory and to make it public. Technically such a brother followed the rule of Matthew 18, but if he would have been motivated by the love of God and the brother, he would have admonished him repeatedly and in private before giving the matter any wider publication.

There is an essential difference of motive between the sword power of the world and the key power of the church. The sword power is motivated and must be motivated by justice: the evildoer must be punished, and the welldoer must be protected. The motive of Christian discipline is love of God in Christ Jesus, as this love of God is manifested as love to sinners. This is taught in the parable of the unmerciful servant.

> 23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.
> 24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.
> 25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.
> 26. The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.
> 27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt. (Matt. 18:23–27)

God reconciled us to himself when we were still enemies, and he manifested his love toward us in sending his only begotten Son into the world to pay the debt that we could never pay. If that love of God is shed abroad in our hearts, we certainly will love him and the brother for his name’s sake, and motivated by that love, we will be ready to forgive the brother. In that love of God we are willing to deny ourselves, earnestly seek the glory of God, the well-being of his church, and the salvation of one another.

The second difference between the sword power of the world and the discipline of the church is the purpose of each. The purpose of the sword power is the maintenance of justice and righteousness. The calling of the sword power is to maintain the law in its own sphere of the public relationships of the citizens. The purpose of Christian discipline is the salvation of the sinner, the purity of the

church, and the glory of God.

The third difference between the exercise of sword power and the exercise of Christian discipline is the objects of each. The power of the sword is concerned only with some public offenders. The objects of Christian discipline are all impenitent sinners, no matter what the nature of their sins may be.

The fourth difference is the end or outcome of the exercise of the sword power and of the exercise of Christian discipline. The outcome of the sword power is punishment, whether by fine or prison or capital punishment. Even as the motive and purpose of Christian discipline are not revenge and the maintenance of justice and righteousness, so also its end is not punishment but is either forgiveness or excommunication from the church.

That the principle of love must be the motivation of all Christian discipline is clear from the classic passage in Matthew 18:15–18, which teaches that the offended party is obligated to visit the offending brother. This does not mean that the same obligation does not rest upon the offending brother, for it is certainly his calling to go and confess his sin to the offended brother. But the Lord addressed the brother against whom the sin was committed to make sure that the brethren meet. It seems far more certain that this will be realized when the offended brother takes the initiative than when this is left to the brother who sinned. Also in this respect the offended party must be a follower of God. We did not love God, but he loved us. He blotted out our sins and reconciled us unto himself and sought us as sinners when we were still enemies. Therefore it is certainly the obligation of love that the offended party seeks the erring brother. Thus the Lord said, “Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” This implies too that when anyone sins against us, it is not left up to our choice whether or not we will go and rebuke the brother, but the sin of the brother imposes upon us a sacred obligation to go.

Moreover, if the brother trespasses against us, we must not approach him in the spirit of pride to defend our right or to avenge the wrong the brother has committed against us. We must meet him in the spirit of humility and of sorrow because the brother walks in the way of sin. For this reason we must not visit him to make light of his sin or to smooth things over, for also this would not manifest the spirit of love. The Lord definitely admonished the offended party that he must go to the brother to tell him his fault. He must rebuke him with the word of God and attempt to bring him to repentance. Further, the truth that Christian discipline must be motivated by the spirit of brotherly love in the love of God is also evident from the Lord’s admonishment of the offended party to keep the sin of the brother as private and secret as possible. He must tell the

brother his fault between himself and him alone. The matter must be covered up and must be kept within proper limits.

Finally, if upon the admonition the brother repents, this ends the matter, for it is the sacred obligation of love to forgive one another.

The offended party can forgive the erring brother only in the way of repentance. Where there is no conviction of sin and therefore no sincere repentance and desire for forgiveness, it is absolutely impossible to grant and to receive forgiveness.

The right to forgive exists only among brethren in the Lord Jesus Christ and is based on the blood of the cross. No one has the right to forgive those whom God does not forgive, and God forgives only on the basis of righteousness in Christ Jesus. Thus the right to grant forgiveness of sins, which is at the same time a privilege, can be maintained only in the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is never an end to the obligation to forgive. This is evident from the context in Matthew 18. After the Lord had laid down the rule that an offended brother must go and rebuke the offending party, Peter approached the Lord with the question, “Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?” Jesus answered him, “I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but, Until seventy times seven.” Also in this respect we must be followers of God as dear children. The mercy of the Lord is without end. No matter how often we sin against him, he is ready to forgive in the way of sincere repentance, and he even works that repentance in our hearts through his Spirit and grace by the preaching of the word. Therefore if the brother sins against us seventy times seven times and repents and asks for forgiveness as often as he sins against us, it is our sacred obligation to forgive. Always we must be able to say, “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

What kind of sin is the object of Christian discipline, and what sin is ultimately sufficient cause for excommunication from the visible church on earth? The answer is, all known sin of impenitence. We dare not make a distinction between gross sins and minor sins. No sinner can be excluded from the kingdom of heaven. A murderer who repents may belong to the church of Christ, even though the power of the sword inflicts capital punishment upon him. In contrast, one offending word spoken against the brother of which the offender refuses to repent may be the cause of his excommunication from the church on earth and from the kingdom of God in heaven. Any sin, whether it be in doctrine or in walk, of which the sinner does not repent is the object of Christian discipline and ultimately may be the cause of his being expelled from the kingdom of God.

What if, after repeated admonitions, the brother refuses to acknowledge his

sin and remains impenitent? In that case it becomes finally a matter for the whole church. Thus the Lord taught in Matthew 18:16–17: “If he will not hear thee, take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.”

All this refers to private sin, that is, to sin that is unknown to the whole church. When a sin is public in its nature and is known to the whole church, the church through its officebearers is obliged to take action. The consistory has the obligation to visit and to admonish the offending brother to bring him to repentance. Even in such a case the rest of the members of the congregation may not assume that they have no further obligation with respect to the offending brother because the case is in the hands of the consistory. Since the obligation of love never ceases, they too must exhort and rebuke the brother to bring him to repentance. Nevertheless, when a sin is public and known to the church, the consistory may not leave the matter to the members of the congregation but must take action. However, in regard to a private sin that is known to only one brother, the rule of Matthew 18 must be followed to the end. If after repeated admonitions the offender does not repent, the offended party must take along one or two witnesses, so that in their mouths every word can be established. If the offender does not heed the admonitions of the offended party in the presence of these witnesses, the matter must be reported to the church. If ultimately the sinner shows no repentance, he must be unto the church as a heathen man and a publican. What this implies is plain from Matthew 18:18. “Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven.” In other words, the impenitent sinner is excluded from the kingdom of God, both on earth and in heaven.

The way this final remedy is ultimately applied is also characterized by the spirit of love, which always hopes that the sinner will repent. The consistory labors with the erring brother, in the meantime barring him from the table of the Lord. If he is repeatedly admonished and reveals no spirit of repentance, his censure is announced to the church without mentioning his name. If after this censure the brother comes to repentance, his censure is removed and his repentance is likewise announced without mentioning his name. However, if he becomes hardened in his sin and shows continued impenitence, a second step of censure is applied with the advice of the classis. This step of censure is announced to the congregation with the offender’s name. It is understood that these announcements concerning the steps of censure are not made to satisfy the members’ curiosity, but to give them the opportunity to visit and to admonish the offending party. The whole church exercises discipline. Upon the whole church

rests the obligation of brotherly love, of exhortation and admonition, and of prayer that the offending brother will come to repentance. If after all these private and public admonitions the sinner still does not show any signs of repentance, he is excommunicated from the church of Christ in the world and thereby from the kingdom of God in heaven. Whatsoever is bound on earth is bound in heaven, and whatsoever is loosed on earth is loosed in heaven.

The proper exercise of Christian discipline according to the word of God is of great benefit to the church of Christ in the world. It is of benefit to the erring brother, who through the admonitions of the word of God is brought to repentance and reestablished in the fellowship of the saints. This applies only to the brother, not to him who bears the name of Christian but continues to walk in the way of sin and impenitence. He will harden himself against and through all Christian admonitions and exhortations. He will ultimately leave the church of Jesus Christ or be excommunicated from the fellowship of the people of God in the world. But the erring brother will repent and be saved not by human efforts, but because it pleases Christ to use the exhortations of the brethren and of the whole church to bring his wandering sheep back to the fold.

Moreover, Christian discipline is of great benefit not only to the erring brother, but also to the mutual relationship of believers and to the whole church. When Christian discipline is exercised properly and faithfully, the bond of Christian fellowship will be strengthened, and believers will be built up in the love of God through Jesus Christ. Then the whole church is benefited, because by the exercise of Christian discipline she constantly casts off the impure elements of the flesh, grows in the knowledge and grace of Christ Jesus, and is firmly established in the truth.

NOTES

Chapter One: LORD'S DAY 28

[1] Belgic Confession 35, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America), 70–73.
[2] Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, in ibid., 270–71.
[3] Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, in ibid., 270–71.

Chapter Two: LORD'S DAY 29

[1] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 1, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:126.
[2] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 3, in ibid., 2:129–30.
[3] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 5, in ibid., 2:131–32.
[4] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 4 in ibid., 2:130.
[5] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 1, in ibid., 2:136.
[6] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 2, in ibid., 2:136–37.
[7] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 3, in ibid., 2:137.
[8] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 4, in ibid.
[9] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 6, in ibid., 2:137–38.
[10] Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884), 3:682–83.
[11] Ibid., 3:684.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Formula of Concord 7, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:136–37.
[14] Formula of Concord 7, affirmative 2, in ibid., 3:137–38.
[15] Saxon Visitation Articles 1, in ibid., 3:186.
[16] Augsburg Confession 10, in ibid., 3:13.
[17] Formula of Concord, affirmative 1, in ibid., 3:137.
[18] Formula of Concord, negative 5, in ibid., 3:143.
[19] Saxon Visitation Articles 1.4, in ibid., 3:182.
[20] Saxon Visitation Articles 1.5, in ibid.
[21] Formula of Concord 7, affirmative 5, in ibid., 3:138–39.
[22] Formula of Concord 7, negative 11, in ibid., 3:144.
[23] Formula of Concord 7, negative 12, in ibid.
[24] Formula of Concord 7, affirmative 6, in ibid., 3:139.
[25] Formula of Concord 7, affirmative 7, in ibid., 3:140.

[26] Saxon Visitation Articles 1.6, in ibid., 3:182.
[27] Saxon Visitation Articles 1.4, in ibid.
[28] Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3:626–27.
[29] First Helvetic Confession 20, in Arthur C. Cochrane, ed., *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1966), 107.
[30] First Helvetic Confession 22, in ibid., 108.
[31] Second Helvetic Confession 21, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:892.
[32] Second Helvetic Confession 21, in ibid., 3:893.
[33] Second Helvetic Confession 21, in ibid., 3:894.
[34] Belgic Confession 35, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 70–72.
[35] Belgic Confession 35, in ibid., 72.
[36] Belgic Confession 35, in ibid.
[37] Belgic Confession 35, in ibid., 73.
[38] French Confession of Faith 36, in Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, 156–57.
[39] Scots Confession of Faith 21, in ibid., 179–80.
[40] Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England 28, in ibid., 3:505–6.
[41] Westminster Confession of Faith 29.1, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:663–64.
[42] Westminster Confession of Faith 29.5, in ibid., 3:665–66.
[43] Westminster Confession of Faith 29.7, in ibid., 3:666.
[44] Westminster Confession of Faith 29.8, in ibid., 3:666–67.

Chapter Three: LORD'S DAY 30

[1] Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 1:536.
[2] Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus: Scott & Bascom, 1852), 417–18.
[3] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, Decree concerning the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 5, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:131–32.
[4] Bertrand L. Conway, *The Question-Box Answers: Replies to Questions Received on Missions to Non-Catholics* (New York: Catholic Book Exchange, 1903), 447–48.
[5] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Thirteenth Session, On the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist 6, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 2:137–38.
[6] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Twenty-second Session, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass 1, in ibid., 2:176–78.
[7] Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent, Twenty-second Session, Doctrine on the Sacrifice of the Mass 2, in ibid., 2:180–81.
[8] Form for the Administration of Baptism, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 258–263.
[9] Belgic Confession 35, in ibid., 72–73.
[10] Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper in ibid., 268–69.
[11] Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper in ibid., 269–70.
[12] Ursinus, *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, 427–28.
[13] Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 270–71.

Chapter Four: LORD'S DAY 31

[1] Belgic Confession 29, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 62–63.
[2] Scots Confession of Faith 18, in Cochrane, *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, 176–77.
[3] Westminster Confession of Faith 30.1–4, in Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:667–68.
[4] Belgic Confession 34, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 68–70.
[5] Belgic Confession 35, in ibid., 70–73.

[6] Canons of Dordt 1.7, in ibid., 156.
[7] Canons of Dordt 2.5, in ibid., 163.
[8] Canons 2.8, in ibid., 163–64.
[9] Canons 3–4.8, in ibid., 168.
[10] Canons 3–4.14, in ibid., 169.
[11] Form for the Administration of Baptism, in ibid., 258.
[12] Belgic Confession 30, in ibid., 64–65.
[13] Belgic Confession 32, in ibid., 66–67.
[14] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 71, in ibid., 400.
[15] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 72, in ibid.
[16] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 73, in ibid., 401.
[17] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 74, in ibid.
[18] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 75, in ibid.
[19] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 76, in ibid.
[20] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 77, in ibid., 401–2.
[21] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 78, in ibid., 402.
[22] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 79, in ibid.
[23] Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches 80, in ibid., 402–3.