

Lord's Day 30

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

A. *The Lord's Supper testifies to us, first, that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ, which He Himself accomplished on the cross once for all;¹ and, second, that through the Holy Spirit we are grafted into Christ,² who with His true body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father,³ and this is where He wants to be worshipped.⁴ But the mass teaches, first, that the living and the dead do not have forgiveness of sins through the suffering of Christ unless He is still offered for them daily by the priests; and, second, that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine, and there is to be worshipped. Therefore the mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.*

¹ *Matt. 26:28; John 19:30; Heb. 7:27; 9:12, 25, 26; 10:10-18.*

² *I Cor. 6:17; 10:16, 17.*

³ *John 20:17; Acts 7:55, 56; Heb. 1:3; 8:1.*

⁴ *John 4:21-24; Phil. 3:20; Col. 3:1; I Thess. 1:10.*

81. **Q.** *Who are to come to the table of the Lord?*

A. *Those who are truly displeased with themselves because of their sins and yet trust that these are forgiven them and that their remaining weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life. But hypocrites and those who do not repent eat and drink judgment upon themselves.¹*

¹ *I Cor. 10:19-22; 11:26-32.*

82. **Q.** *Are those also to be admitted to the Lord's Supper who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly?*

A. *No, for then the covenant of God would be profaned and His wrath kindled against the whole congregation.¹ Therefore, according to the command of Christ and His apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, until they amend their lives.*

¹ *Ps. 50:16; Is. 1:11-17; I Cor. 11:17-34.*

LORD'S DAY 30

THE TABLE OF THE NEW COVENANT

Text: Lord's Day 30
Reading: Hebrews 10 : 1-18

Psalm 40 : 3
Psalm 18 : 16
Psalm 6 : 1, 2, 6
Psalm 93 : 4
Psalm 103 : 3, 4, 7

Introduction: Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ:

Lord's Day 30 is the last Lord's Day in the Catechism which deals with the sacraments, specifically with the Lord's Supper. Question 80 discusses the famous heresy of the Romanist Mass, question 81 sets the norm for communicant members, and question 82 speaks conclusively about the table of the Lord's Supper.

We may say that in this Lord's Day we are confronted with God's basic demands with respect to the table of communion. And these are not just *any* demands, but very specifically the demands of *His covenant*. In this last Lord's Day on the Lord's Supper we are dealing with a point which until now has not really received much attention, namely, that the table of the Lord has everything to do with God's *covenant*.

Christ declared that He made a new covenant in His blood. And so the Lord's Supper is the covenant table of the New Testament Church. Therefore I want to deal with the covenantal character of the Lord's Supper.

The fact that I choose "the covenant" as theme for this Lord's Day is quite legitimate and based on the contents of this part of our confession. Answer 82 very specifically speaks about "the covenant of God" possibly being profaned. The holiness of God's covenant is at stake in our celebration of the Lord's Supper! I add to this that the first question (80) deals with the matter of the one sacrifice of Christ, and a sacrifice, too, is fully a covenantal matter. Therefore the theme of the covenant may well

function as a help to understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's table is a communion within the covenant between God and His people. And so the Catechism finally comes to speak about its true basis of the Lord's Supper. That basis is the new covenant in the blood of Christ. I summarize this Lord's Day as follows:

The confession concerning the Lord's Supper as the table of the new covenant.

- 1. the strength of this new covenant**
- 2. the demand of this new covenant**
- 3. the holiness of this new covenant.**

1. The first question of this Lord's Day deals with the "papal mass". I know that nowadays many would like to get rid of this question, because it disturbs the dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants. If you say beforehand to those with whom you are seeking conversation that they are engaged in "an accursed idolatry", further conversation seems ridiculous. Some churches have therefore dropped the concluding words of this question.

The question has come up in our time again. Is there really so much *difference* between the Lord's Supper and the Mass? Are not both the supper and the mass directives to Christ Whom they seek to glorify? What is all the fuss really about?

Both may perhaps indeed refer to Christ, but the differences are nonetheless great. The Catechism mentions especially *two* differences. The first difference is on the

point of *transubstantiation*, the changing of bread and wine into the real (physical) body and blood of Christ (see Lord's Day 29). The second main difference—and the Catechism actually deals with this first!—lies in the understanding and appreciation of *the sacrifice* of Christ.

The mass is clearly meant as a *sacrificial ritual*. That is why there is a priest who sacrifices and an altar upon which the sacrifice is brought. Everyone understands that these concepts (sacrifice, priest, altar) bring us into the atmosphere of the Old Testament. That old covenant existed in and was maintained by the ongoing *sacrificial* process. Israel had to sacrifice daily to renew and continue the covenant. There were many different kinds of sacrifices, but the main sacrifice was the shedding of blood, the sin-offering, because *blood* was the means of atonement!

These sacrifices had to be brought *every day* because sin was also committed every day. The priests brought three official sacrifices each day—in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. The old covenant emphasized constant offerings.

Yet, we know that the old covenant was an interim situation! It would not always be this way. This continuous sacrificing pointed to *one* sacrifice, the sacrifice of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. The writer of the letter to the Hebrews can therefore state that Christ became the Mediator of a *new* covenant (9:15), not a different covenant as such, but a permanently *renewed* covenant which is better and more lasting than the one which has disappeared.

So the difference is that while the old covenant was based on *many* sacrifices, all pointing to Christ, the new testament is based on the *one* sacrifice of Christ on the cross! The sacrifices stop at Golgotha. The new covenant no longer knows of continued sacrificing for sin but is based on the one, complete, perfect, and final sacrifice of Christ. In Hebrews 10:14 we read: "For by a *single* offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified". The priests of the old dispensation had to sacrifice daily, but Christ was given all power and glory in the heavenly sanctuary at God's right hand after one perfect sacrifice!

There lies the *strength* of the new covenant. It is stable. It rests on one foundation which can never be moved

and having been once laid, cannot be laid again. The new covenant is the fulfilment and perfection of the old covenant. And the point is that we must view the Lord's Supper only in the light of this fulfilment! For the Lord's Supper is a sign a seal of the *new* covenant in Christ's blood. As Christ Himself said: "This cup is the new covenant in My blood".

Therefore—and this is the heart of the matter—the Lord's Supper can never be a sacrificial happening. Nothing is slaughtered, killed, and burned. There is no altar in the New Testament Church and there are no priests who serve at this altar. All this has been fulfilled at Golgotha. The bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are not elements in a sacrificial occurrence, but point back to the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ.

This is why the Catechism says: "The Lord's Supper testifies to us . . . that we have complete forgiveness of all our sins through the *one* sacrifice of Christ which He Himself accomplished on the cross *once for all*". The language is exclusive: *complete* forgiveness, *all* our sins, *once* for all. We cannot and may not add anything to this or take anything away from this.

The Catechism says that the Lord's Supper "testifies" to us of the completeness of Christ's sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is a strong witness that *all* my sins are forgiven because of *one* sacrifice. The new signs and seals direct me to Christ's body and blood. Now I know for sure, because the covenant finds its strength and core in Christ's perfect work of salvation. As our one and only Redeemer, He is the strength of the new covenant.

But what does Rome say, also from out of the perspective of the covenant? Rome says that Golgotha is not final and conclusive, for Christ must be continually sacrificed. According to Rome, the Lord's Supper is indeed a sacrificial ritual, and therefore there must be an altar and a priest. Golgotha is indeed the basis, but only as the first in a new series of sacrifices. The mass is the ever-returning, never-ending continuation of Golgotha.

Here lies the *heart* of the Roman Catholic heresy. Rome says that Golgotha is not enough. The living and the dead must be reconciled time and again by the ongoing sacrifice of Christ. Yes, even the *dead* must so be reconciled. Rome has masses for the dead in order to reconcile whatever is still left to be reconciled.

Then you can also understand why according to Rome the bread and wine must *change* into the real body and blood of Christ. It all fits together. Christ must be *physically* present. Otherwise He cannot be sacrificed!

So, what is really behind the Romanist doctrine of the mass? Well, as with much heresy, there is a wrong understanding of the (history of) the covenant. Rome simply transfers the style of the old covenant to the new covenant, thereby in effect negating the truth and progress of the new covenant. Rome does not appreciate the decisive new beginning of Golgotha. Rome reduces the work of Christ on the cross to an insufficient effort, and makes the mass *necessary* for salvation!

Do you see, however, that in the Romanist system the new covenant is not really *new* at all? The basis is not “Christ and Him crucified”, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, but the basis has become Christ crucified plus the subsequent masses (sacrifices of Christ) and other good works. Christ is no longer the only and perfect Redeemer, but He remains Saviour via the priest and the altar, through the ministry of the church!

The church of Rome does not have a proper view of the new covenant. As a matter of fact, Rome does not at all have an eye for the covenant as the definitive relation between God and His people in Christ. Instead Rome stresses the bond between the believer and the church and makes clear that the believer depends wholly for his salvation on the (sacrificial) work of the church.

But whenever people truly understand the meaning of the covenant in its Biblical perspective, they will also begin to appreciate the strength and the beauty of this covenant, its glory in Christ’s one sacrifice. They will begin to see the great *demand* of this new covenant. The one sacrifice of Christ is the *last* sacrifice for sin. This means that the new covenant does not only have a strong and lasting basis, but also brings with it a new and great demand of continuous sacrifice of *praise and love*. I come to the second point.

2. The second question in this Lord’s Day asks: “Who are to come to the table of the Lord?” This question is directly related to the first. The Roman Catholic Church says that anyone who seeks forgiveness and reconciliation may come. But the Reformed Churches speak much

more strongly, declaring that only those may come who want to live according to the demands of the new covenant in Christ’s blood! The table is for covenant children who also adhere to the covenant.

We saw that in Christ’s one sacrifice lies the complete forgiveness of all our sins. But to partake in this forgiveness, we must embrace Christ alone by faith and live for Him only.

Therefore, says the Catechism, there are some important covenantal demands which are put to those who wish to attend the Lord’s Supper. A proper self-examination is required before attending the Lord’s Supper, a self-examination which, as the Form for the Celebration says, consists of three parts.

First, covenant children must know their *misery*. They must be “truly displeased with themselves because of their sins”. They must understand and confess that it is their sin which drove Christ to His cross. True celebration of the Lord’s Supper begins with a deep-rooted understanding and heartfelt confession of sin.

This is a matter of being *truly displeased* with oneself. Whoever has seen the unbearable weight of the dreaded curse over sin and by faith has seen Christ bear this curse on the cross, will come to despise and abhor all sin with a strong hatred. Being *displeased* with oneself does not mean having a vague sense of unhappiness with oneself. It means finding no pleasure in yourself because of your sins! For these sins broke the covenant with the Lord and brought Christ to the cross. A true covenant child honestly starts to hate his sins. To know that he is a sinful person causes him grief.

May I emphasize for a moment that we must feel ourselves, as sinners, completely unworthy before God? Through our sins we have disrupted the covenant relationship and endangered the covenant itself. The first demand is, then, that every covenant child shall know and confess his weakness. The Lord’s Supper is not for those who are strong and without sin, but for those who are weak and sinful. Does this not apply equally to us all? Our first admission is: I am overcome with shame, O Lord, do not chide me nor in Thy wrath chastise me (Psalm 6). We are the weak link in the chain of the covenant. The covenant communion with God is possible only if we truly confess this terrible weakness!

But then, in the second place, our God directs us to the strong Party, to Jesus Christ and Him crucified. Covenant children must know their *deliverance*. Then we arrive at the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross where He has completely met all the covenant demands of God.

So the demand is also that we trust that our sins are forgiven us “by the suffering and death of Christ”. The demand even goes one step further, for we must also trust, says the Catechism, that “our remaining weakness is covered”. Christ removes our actual sins and also covers our remaining weakness with His one sacrifice! He who constituted the covenant communion also consolidates and continues it. We have nothing to add to Christ’s work in this respect. The demand of the covenant is, therefore, that we believe in the only Mediator of this covenant and seek all salvation outside of ourselves only in Him, *knowing* that in Him it has been given to us. Yes, the covenant song also includes this line: “The LORD heard when I pleaded and my appeals He heard”.

Third, it is out of Christ’s sacrifice and power that covenant children receive new strength for life. By His death, Christ has “obtained for us the life-giving Spirit”, as the Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper so beautifully says. Therefore it is said of those who are to attend the Lord’s Supper that they “also desire more and more to strengthen their faith and amend their life”. Covenant children must know of deep *gratitude* for the deliverance given in Christ.

The Catechism uses the word “desire”. We truly long to have all our doubts removed and our faith strengthened. We truly want to break with sin and better our lives according to God’s Law. This is the strong desire, the new attitude of covenant children.

These are the three parts of the self-examination which is required of everyone who attends the Lord’s Supper. True knowledge of misery, great rejoicing in deliverance, and a strong desire to show gratitude to God. Hating our sins more and more, we desire to break with them completely. We want to show the obedience of Christ, His style of service and His perfect love. It is necessary that we live out of Him, through Him, and unto Him!

The Lord asks that we come in this faith. This is quite the opposite of what the church of Rome teaches. Rome says that faith is not a necessity for attending the supper,

for the sacrament works by itself. It works on its own strength, regardless of the faith of those who use it. But this is not the language of the Scriptures which speaks of a sincere self-examination and a faithful preparation.

A new covenant demands a new hope and a new lifestyle; it asks that we are filled with a new desire to serve God fully according to His Word. This is how the Reformed confession speaks about those who are to attend the Lord’s table. These are the demands of the new covenant. And the Lord Who is very serious about these demands, asks of us that we are serious about them as well. The new covenant is truly a *holy* covenant because it was sealed in the precious blood of the only-begotten Son of God. I come to the third element in this Lord’s Day.

3. Because the Lord’s table is the table of the new covenant, sealed in the blood of Christ, God wants this table to be well guarded. Not everyone may be permitted to attend, but only those who walk in holiness of life.

The Catechism teaches us in answer 82 that to admit unbelieving and ungodly people to the table would have as result that “the covenant of the Lord would be profaned and [God’s] wrath kindled against the whole congregation”.

Our confession makes an important distinction here. In the previous answer (81) the Catechism has mentioned “hypocrites” and “those who do not truly repent”. These are the people who go in an outward show of piety but do not attend in true faith and with a sincere desire to serve God. Such people, we read, “eat and drink judgment upon *themselves*”. It is God, in the first place, Who Himself watches over the holiness of the table of the new covenant.

The Church is not held accountable for the attendance of hypocrites, for these are not known to the Church. We cannot see into each other’s hearts. God Himself is the ultimate Guardian of the table! We can only try to reach hypocrites with a sincere and forceful preaching. Basically, everyone attends the Lord’s Supper in his own responsibility before God Who alone discerns the depths of our hearts.

But the Church does have a task in this respect to watch properly over the attendance at the table! The Church is called to maintain the holiness of the table. When

there are those who *show* that they are unbelieving and ungodly, when people publicly display their inward hardness of heart, the Church must act!

Since they themselves do not maintain this covenant, such people must be withheld from the table of the covenant. When such people are not withheld, the covenant of God is “profaned”. This means that the congregation does not recognize and uphold the holiness of God’s covenant. Then we all show that we are not really serious about Christ’s holy work of redemption and renewal. The result of this is that God’s wrath comes over the entire congregation. The apostle Paul specifically warns the Church that admittance of known unbelievers or ungodly persons to the table devaluates the celebration and leads to God’s wrath (I Corinthians 11: 27-32).

As the people of the new covenant, the congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ must live according to the demands of this covenant as a holy people. If sin is permitted to permeate this people like leaven, the holy character of the Church is endangered and the entire people is guilty of this sin. Then we allow in the Church a public mockery of Christ’s suffering on the cross.

It is in this light that we may begin to speak of a proper “fencing of the Lord’s table”. The Catechism adds: “Therefore, according to the command of Christ and His apostles, the Christian Church is duty bound to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven until they amend their lives”.

This is a very serious duty and calling which has extreme consequences. The Catechism does not just say that the unbelieving and ungodly are to be withheld from the Lord’s Supper but that they are to be *excluded* by the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom—of which the Lord’s table is a visible expression—is closed to them. Persistent unbelief and refusal to repent will ultimately lead to excommunication from the Church and exclusion from the kingdom of heaven.

Is this so because those who attend the table are so holy? No! They, too, must daily repent from their sins! This is because God is holy and the new covenant is a holy bond! Guarding the holiness of the table, exercising proper church discipline, and fencing the table of the Lord,

are not matters of denominational peculiarity but result from “the command of Christ and His apostles”. Keeping watch over the table is not a human invention, which can be taken lightly, but is a divine ordinance, which must be kept seriously. It is a matter of obedience to God’s own commandment for He Himself considers the covenant and the table of this covenant to be a holy bond and a holy communion.

Therefore, unrepentant sinners are withheld and excluded. It is this holiness of the table of the covenant which has also led the Reformed Churches to admit to the Lord’s Supper only communicant members in good standing of the Church and those who present a good attestation or testimony of doctrine and conduct from sister churches. For the exercising of church discipline, especially when it comes to the holiness of the table of the Lord, is a vital matter for the Church of Christ! In this way the proper exercising of supervision over the table serves the Church, seeks the salvation of the sinner, and upholds the holiness of God’s covenant.

Notice how the Catechism says that this exclusion takes place *until* those excluded amend their lives. There is a way back into the communion of the new covenant. It is the same way for all people—the way of sincere repentance and a demonstration of the fruits of faith. Repentance must be seen in a new life of holiness, and then readmission to the table may be received.

But the table shall be kept holy, just as God is holy. It is not a table for people who are without sin, but for a people who do confess their sins truthfully, turn to Christ in faith, and seek to lead a holy life. The table of the Lord is for people who know that holiness “is fitting to God’s house for evermore” (Psalm 93:4, *Book of Praise*).

The Catechism has now concluded its discussion of the sacraments, particularly of the Lord’s Supper. And a clear transition has been made to the third mark of the Church, namely, the proper exercising of Christian discipline. For the Lord’s Supper as the table of the new covenant requires a people that is holy, sanctified by the blood and Spirit of Christ. There must be a holy people, because God Himself is holy. AMEN.