

Lord's Day 29  
18 April 2010 PM

Beloved, what did our Lord mean when he said, "this is my body" and "this my blood"? Did he mean that the piece of bread is literally his body and the wine is literally his blood? Or did he mean that the bread symbolises his body and the wine symbolises his blood. And it comes down to this: how is Christ present in the elements, literally or spiritually? And because of these questions, the Reformers of the sixteenth century debated and often bitterly and found no consensus. And this disagreement led to the formation to the various denominations until this day. Rome believes that the bread and wine is literally changed into the body and blood of Christ. The Lutherans believe that Christ is physically present in the bread and wine. And the Reformed believes that Christ is spiritually present in the bread and wine. And in this today's sermon, we will deal with the following questions: What did Christ really mean when he said "this is my body" and "this is my blood"? How do we partake of Christ in the Supper? What are the spiritual benefits of partaking of Christ? And the urgency necessity for us to partake of Christ.

The theme is: THIS IS MY BODY. First, a real partaking. Secondly, a spiritual partaking and thirdly, the urgency necessity for partaking.

**A Real Partaking.** In the Lord's Supper, we receive the true body and blood of Christ. This is clearly seen in Question and Answer 79. It asks the question, why does the Lord calls the bread his body and the cup or the contents of that cup, his blood" The answer is: our souls are nourished by his body and blood which are the true meat and drink to our souls. Furthermore in the Scriptures, in Matthew 26.26, 28, our Lord when he instituted the Lord's Supper promised us saying, "this is my body and this is my blood". And in I Cor. 10.16, 17, the apostle say, "this cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? For we being many are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread". Notice the apostle says that in the Lord's Supper, it is the communion of the body of Christ and the communion of the blood of Christ. This means that we are truly partaking of the body and blood of Christ.

We need a real partaking of the body and blood of Christ because we are in great need of spiritual nourishment of our souls. We spend much time in caring for our body. We ensure that we have eight hours of uninterrupted sleep. We make sure that we eat food that is nutritious and we exercise. And we take vitamin supplements for our aching and aging body. But very often we forget that we have a soul that needs nurturing. Our soul needs spiritual nourishment and strengthening. Bread is the staff of life and is so basic that we cannot do without it. Bread is very needful not only does it provide the strength and energy for us to go about our daily work but also to complete the work satisfactorily. Bread also nourishes our bodies. Wine is for exhilaration. Wine makes us energetic Wine gladdens and cheers us. And so spiritually by our eating the body and blood of Christ, our faith is strengthened by remembering Christ in his finished work on the cross. We often lose sight of the work of Christ in our earthly calling and by being so wrapped up in living the Christian life and obeying the Word of God that we do all these in our own strength. And we consciously think that by our striving we become worthy of our salvation. And so it is good that we be reminded that we ought not to trust in filthy rags of our own righteousness but on the perfect righteousness of Christ. And by looking to Christ by faith, our feeble hands are strengthened and our drooping spirit is revived. And by our eating and drinking, we are assured that we are indeed partakers of the spiritual blessings of the forgiveness of our sins, eternal life through the suffering and death of

Christ. These blessings are indeed ours, as if we ourselves in our own persons have suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God. This assurance comes to us through the work of the Holy Spirit, who applies the spiritual benefits to us. And witness in our hearts to assure us that we do receive these blessings as the children of God.

The real partaking of the body and blood of Christ takes place when we are united with his body (Lord's Day 28, QA 76). This is necessary in order to receive the blessing of the Lord's Supper, namely, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and assurance that members of the covenant of grace. Let me illustrate: we receive water into our homes because our water taps are connected to the water tank, which in turn is connected to one of the reservoirs in Singapore. Or, the electric current that brings light into our homes is generated in a sub power station in the vicinity of the place that you live or the gas that you cook your food comes from a storage tank in your home or from some central location and piped into your home. This means that from one water reservoir all our homes are supplied with drinking water and from one power plant, we receive all the electricity that gives light into our homes. And therefore, we can say that Christ is that spiritual power plant from which the current of life flows into our soul. Or Christ is the one and only storage water tank that the water of life flows into our soul. And therefore, in order for us to receive all these spiritual blessings of salvation, we must be spiritually united with him.

How then is this union established? It is not established by us but established absolutely and unconditionally by God in Christ Jesus, by faith. Through faith, Christ indeed feeds and nourishes our souls unto everlasting life. As Christians we continue to live a life in Christ until death. And we are continually fed, nourished and strengthened in this life until we receive the perfect eternal life in heaven in the presence of God. This faith is not passive but active. It is not passive like when a man in hospital who is incapable of taking nourishment by eating and drinking so food is injected into his veins through needles. And this in this case, that man is nourished without any action on his part for he does not eat or drink, he does not even taste the food for he is wholly passive. But this is not the way in which the Christ nourishes us.

Instead, Christ nourishes us through active faith, so that we draw all the blessings of salvation out of Christ, eat his flesh and drink his blood. Faith is that spiritual power whereby the soul sinks its roots into Christ to cling unto him, appropriate him and draws out of him all the glorious blessings of salvation that are in him. What then is the nature of this partaking of the body and blood of Christ? Is this a physical partaking where the bread miraculously turns into the body of Christ or the wine becomes the blood of Christ, as Rome claims or is Christ bodily present in the elements? Our distinctive answer is Christ is spiritually present in the bread and wine and thus, we partake of Christ in a spiritual manner.

A Spiritual Partaking. Rome and the Lutherans deny that it is a spiritual partaking. Rome teaches that at the moment of consecration, the bread changes into the body of Christ, though the bread looks like bread, smells like bread and feels like bread. And at consecration, the wine is turned into the blood of Christ, though the wine looks like wine, smells like wine. And so by this dogma, the Roman Catholic Church believes that the proper partaking of the elements is not spiritual but physical and it consists of the chewing the bread and swallowing the wine into their throats. And on the basis of Scripture, we reject this view. When our Lord says in Matthew 26, "this is my body" and "this is my blood" surely he did not refer to his physical body as he was still present with them in the Last Supper. Furthermore, when Scripture uses the word "is", it does not refer to something literally it is a symbol. Example, Jesus says,

“I am the door” or “I am the vine”. Surely, Christ did not say that he is literally the door or the vine. Instead Christ is using picture language to illustrate a certain aspect of truth that is present in that object. And so when Christ says, “this is my body and this is my blood”, he means to say that the bread symbolises his body and the wine symbolises his blood. And in John 6.48-55, this passage is about eating Christ, who is the bread of life. And the Jews were puzzled, thinking to themselves, how is it possible for Jesus to give them his flesh to eat. And clearly they were thinking of an eating when a piece of bread is put into the mouth and chewed and go through the throat and digested. Did Jesus agree with them? No, it is clear that from the following verses what Jesus was referring to. In verse 54, that the eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God, refers to believing in him because the fruit of that believing is eternal life. For, did not our Lord say in John 3.16, that whosoever believes in him shall have eternal life?

The Lutherans, on the other hand, teaches consubstantiation. This is the view that Christ is physically present in the bread and wine. They do not teach that at the consecration that the bread is miraculously changed into the body of Christ and the wine into the blood of Christ. Instead, they have this peculiar view because Christ in his human nature also possesses divine attributes and so is able to be present everywhere including being physically present in the Lord’s Supper. And according to the biblical understanding of the human nature of Christ, we reject this erroneous view. Our ascended Lord who is in heaven, not only possesses the divine nature but also the human nature. And one of the characteristics of the human nature is that he is unable to be everywhere at the same time. And this also applies to Christ, who is now at the right hand of God the Father (c.f. Lord’s Day 18, QA48).

What is the implication of a spiritual partaking of the Lord’s Supper? Do not commit the error thinking that the partaking of the elements is not real since it is a spiritual partaking. And partaking is real only when it is seen, touched and eaten with the mouth. To eat with the mouth is certainly real but so is eating by faith. For our Lord says in John 6.54, to eat Christ is by faith, that is believes in Jesus Christ, we receive not only eternal life, but also Christ will dwell in us and we in him. Do you not testify that the Spirit of Christ is in you leading you into all truth and witnessing that you are a child of God? Yes, and is this real? Yes, it is as real as Christ standing before us in his flesh. And this is confirmed by the testimony of Christ in verse 55, “for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”.

Spiritual partaking means that we need to prepare ourselves spiritually in order to receive spiritual blessings from the Lord’s Supper. Negatively, we must never think that we receive this blessing of God automatically like an empty container being filled as water is being poured into it. And that we only need to turn up on the day of the Lord’s Supper, eat the bread and drink the wine and I will be blessed. And another danger is that we view the blessing in the physical eating and physical drinking of the wine. Positively, spiritual examination involve three areas: first, our sins how we have grieved God and deserving of His wrath. Secondly, our urgent need of our Saviour: that we believe with all our hearts that he died for my sins and therefore, all my sins are forgiven. And thirdly, that we are so thankful to God for us saving us that we want to live a life pleasing to him.

The Urgent Necessity for Partaking.

And so beloved, firstly, can you afford not to partake of the Lord’s Supper in view that it is the will of God for you to partake? How do I know that the Lord wants me to partaker of it? Did he not institute the Lord’s Supper after eating the Passover with his disciples in the upper room? Yes, he did. Did he not command saying, “take eat, ... drink ye all of it”? Yes, he did command me. Why do you not partake the Lord’s

Supper? Do you not know that every disobedience to the will of God is sin? Why then do you continue to refuse to eat the supper of the Lord? Why are you so complacent in your sin?

Secondly, can you afford not to partake of the Supper of the Lord in view of the wonderful blessings that God will give to you? What are these blessings? You will be spiritually fed, your faith strengthened and finally, you are assured that you are members of God's covenant. You cannot afford not to partake of the Supper unless you are not ready. Children and teens, you ought to look forward to that day that you can take the bread and wine from the hand of the minister. Eating and drinking the elements is a sign of spiritual maturity and it is a mark of spiritual growth. And if you do not partake of the Supper because you are in a backslidden state, do not be complacent in your poor spiritual state, but weep and cry unto the Lord, that He will revive you spiritually and restore unto you the reality of God in your soul. Adults too must look forward to it. It is not abnormal for a Christian not to partake of the Lord's Supper, and worse still, not to partake of many years. The Lord wants to bless you and he wants to bless you in the way of partaking of the supper of the Lord. Jesus says to each one of us, "take, eat this is my body, which is broken for you and drink ye all of it for this is the blood of the new testament which is shed for you for the remission of sins" And our only response must be, "Yes, Lord, I come to eat and drink at your table." Amen.