Lesson 42: Questions 102, 103, and 104

102–104

In our previous lessons, we considered baptism as Christ's appointed sign of a believer's identification with Him and entrance into His visible, gathered people. But entrance is not the whole Christian life. How does Christ nourish those whom He has brought into fellowship with Himself?

The Lord's Supper answers that question. Baptism marks our public beginning; the Supper repeatedly strengthens our continuing communion with Christ and His church. Here we remember His finished sacrifice, proclaim His death, and genuinely receive spiritual nourishment through faith.

Questions 102-104 explain what this ordinance is, who should receive it, and how we must come.

Question 102: What is the Lord's supper?

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A. The Lord's supper is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ; wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, according to his appointment, his death is shown forth, and the worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith, made partakers of his body and blood, with all his benefits, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.

FIRST, the Supper belongs to Christ. An ordinance is a practice He has commanded His church to observe. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus appointed bread and wine to signify His body given and His blood shed for His people. Matthew connects the cup with covenant blood and forgiveness: Christ's death establishes the New Covenant and secures its blessings (**Matthew 26:26-28**). Paul's account preserves Christ's institution for the church.

> *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26, ESV)*

Christ determines ***what*** His ordinance means and ***how*** we administer it. We receive bread and wine according to His appointment, remembering Him and proclaiming His death until He returns. The Supper looks ***backward*** to His sacrifice, ***upward*** to our risen Lord, ***outward*** to His people, and ***forward*** to His return. His sacrifice is never repeated or supplemented here. Its perfection makes repetition unnecessary (**Hebrews 10:10-14**; **2LBCF §30.2**).

SECOND, remembrance does not exhaust the Supper's meaning. Paul describes the cup and bread as participation in Christ's blood and body.

> *The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:16-17, ESV)*

This is the foundation of the Reformed doctrine of Christ's ***Real Spiritual Presence***. Believers do not merely recall an absent benefactor. Through the Holy Spirit, they truly commune with their living Savior and receive the benefits of His finished sacrifice. Christ remains bodily in heaven, yet distance does not prevent the Spirit from uniting us to Him and nourishing us through faith.

The catechism excludes a "corporal and carnal manner"; ***we do not consume Christ's human flesh with our mouths.*** We receive bread and wine ***bodily*** while feeding upon Christ ***spiritually***. Faith rests upon Him as crucified for us, receiving anew the comfort, assurance, and strength supplied by His accomplished redemption. This is not another sacrifice or another justification, but nourishment from the Savior Who has already secured our acceptance.

The confession makes the same distinction. The elements remain bread and wine, although their appointed relationship to Christ's body and blood gives them sacred significance. Worthy receivers nevertheless truly feed upon Christ ***spiritually*** through faith (2LBCF §30.5, 30.7). "Spiritual" identifies the manner of communion, not a lesser degree of reality.

Roman Catholic ***transubstantiation*** teaches that the substance of bread and wine ***becomes*** Christ's body and blood while their appearances remain. Lutheran ***sacramental union*** teaches that Christ's body and blood are received bodily with the bread and wine. We reject both substantial change and bodily reception, but we also reject ***strict memorialism***, which reduces the Supper to remembrance without genuine spiritual participation. The bread and wine remain unchanged, yet through the Holy Spirit believers truly feed upon Christ ***by faith***. Our communion with Him is spiritual, not imaginary: the risen Savior genuinely nourishes His people with the benefits of His finished sacrifice.

THIRD, the Supper is a means of grace — an appointed instrument through which Christ strengthens His people. The Holy Spirit uses these visible signs to confirm the gospel's promises, strengthen faith, deepen communion, and encourage holiness. The confession places this nourishment among the purposes of the ordinance and identifies the Supper as a means by which faith is strengthened (2LBCF §30.1, 14.1).

The elements have no independent power. They are not magical. Neither regeneration nor justification follows automatically from eating and drinking. Spiritual benefit comes through the Spirit's work as believers receive Christ by faith. Nor does benefit depend upon unusual feelings. A believer may feel weak or distracted and nevertheless receive genuine nourishment. Its foundation is Christ's institution and promise, not emotional intensity.

This communion is also corporate. Paul connects participation in the ***one bread*** with our being ***one body*** (1 Corinthians 10:17). We do not gather for separate private encounters with Jesus. Christ nourishes ***a people*** whom He has joined to Himself and one another.

Because the Supper is such a provision, I believe we should ordinarily celebrate it every Lord's Day. Acts 2:42 places breaking bread among the church's continuing devotions. Acts 20:7 describes a first-day gathering for breaking bread, while 1 Corinthians 11:17-26 repeatedly connects the Supper with the assembled church. These passages support its integral place in worship, although they do not establish an unambiguous universal command specifying weekly frequency.

Early Christian writings also bear witness to this pattern. The *Didache* instructs believers, *"But every Lord's day gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving."* (**Didache 14**) Justin Martyr, describing Christian worship in the middle of the second century, writes, *"And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place."* His account proceeds from Scripture reading, instruction, and prayer to the Supper: *"bread and wine and water are brought"*, followed by thanksgiving and distribution to those present (**First Apology 67**).

These witnesses do not carry Scripture's authority, nor do they prove that every early church observed the Supper weekly. They do, however, provide clear evidence that gathering on the Lord's Day to celebrate the Supper was an established early Christian practice. Taken together with the New Testament's pattern of gathered worship and the Supper's purpose as spiritual nourishment, they strengthen my conviction that weekly observance should ordinarily be our practice. This is a pattern I would like us to continue, receiving Christ's provision every Lord's Day with gratitude and faith.

Would weekly observance make it less special? Familiarity can become carelessness, but we do not therefore reduce preaching, Scripture reading, singing, or prayer. These belong to the church's regular worship, alongside the ordinances (2LBCF §22.5). The remedy is attentive participation, not withholding nourishment. Frequent communion should deepen grateful dependence upon Christ.

Question 103: Who are the proper subjects of this ordinance?

Q. Who are the proper subjects of this ordinance?
A. They who have been baptized upon a personal profession of their faith in Jesus Christ, and repentance from dead works.

If Christ nourishes His gathered people here, whom has He authorized to participate? Acts presents the foundational pattern.

> *So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:41-42, ESV)*

Those who received the gospel were baptized, added to the church, and continued in apostolic teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer. Baptism precedes continuing participation in the church's fellowship. The Supper is not detached from that visible, accountable community.

The visible church is Christ's people publicly identified through their profession and gathered life. Baptism is the initiatory ordinance marking identification with Christ and entrance into that community; the Supper is its continuing ordinance of nourishment. As we established in Lessons 40 and 41, the baptism required is baptism upon a credible personal profession of faith and repentance, not merely any ceremony called baptism.

The catechism explicitly names baptism. Our membership requirement applies the broader biblical teaching that the Supper belongs to an identifiable church under spiritual oversight. Members publicly commit themselves to a congregation's worship, mutual care, and discipline (**2LBCF §26.6, 26.12**). In **1 Corinthians 5:11-13**, Paul requires the church to distinguish those inside from those outside and remove an unrepentant professing brother from its fellowship. Admission cannot therefore rest entirely upon individual self-determination.

This explains ***fencing the Table***: stating and maintaining the biblical boundaries of participation in the Lord's Supper. Our practice is to welcome those baptized upon a credible profession of faith who are members in good standing of a gospel-preaching church. Good standing means recognized fellowship under the church's oversight, not simply attendance or a private claim to spiritual maturity. Qualified visitors are welcome; they need not belong to this particular congregation.

These qualifications do not earn Christ's favor or contribute to justification. Nor do we conclude that every Christian lacking believer's baptism is unconverted. We distinguish someone's standing before God from the church's responsibility to administer Christ's ordinance according to His revealed order.

Question 104: What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper?

Q. What is required to the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper?
A. It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience, lest coming unworthily they eat and drink judgment to themselves.

Paul's warning must be heard within his entire correction of Corinthian worship (**1 Corinthians 11:17-34**). Their gatherings displayed ***divisions*** rather than ***communion***. Some consumed their own food selfishly; some became drunk while others remained hungry. They humiliated those who had little and treated God's church with contempt. Their behavior contradicted the meal they claimed to celebrate.

> *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32, ESV)*

Discerning the body therefore cannot mean merely thinking seriously about the crucifixion while disregarding fellow believers. Christ's sacrificed body gives the meal its meaning, while the immediate context places particular weight upon His gathered people. The precise reference of "body" is debated, but Paul's argument joins reverence for Christ with recognition of those united to Him. Participation in His body and blood entails responsibility toward His one body, the church (**1 Corinthians 10:16-17**).

The catechism directs examination toward five connected concerns. ***Knowledge*** asks whether we understand Christ's sacrifice and recognize the meal's sacred and congregational significance. ***Faith*** asks whether we trust Christ rather than our own righteousness. **2 Corinthians 13:5** calls professing Christians to test their profession; its application here concerns the genuine faith necessary for feeding upon Him.

Repentance means acknowledging and turning from known sin rather than defending it. Paul calls for honest self-judgment instead of waiting for divine correction (**1 Corinthians 11:31**). ***Love*** asks whether our conduct honors the fellowship expressed by the one bread. ***New obedience*** means sincerely pursuing a life consistent with Christ's saving work. **1 Corinthians 5:7-8** connects Christ's Passover sacrifice with putting away evil and living in sincerity and truth, not merely performing religious observances.

Examination must therefore include our relationships. Am I nurturing resentment, encouraging division, neglecting a suffering member, or treating poorer believers as beneath my concern? Am I refusing to pursue reconciliation? An imperfect relationship or unsettled emotion does not automatically disqualify someone. The question is whether we submit to Christ and sincerely seek peace, or stubbornly defend conduct that contradicts His communion.

Paul warns against an unworthy manner, not against every sinner approaching. No believer ***deserves*** this meal through personal righteousness. Worthy reception is not sinlessness or an exhaustive recollection of every offense. It is dependent faith, genuine repentance, love, and a sincere desire to obey.

Nevertheless, judgment is real. Paul identifies weakness, sickness, and deaths among the Corinthians as divine judgment. Verse 32 distinguishes the Lord's corrective discipline from condemnation with the world. This is not the loss of a regenerate believer's salvation. Neither may we diagnose illness or hardship today as punishment for improper communion; Paul gives an inspired explanation of that particular situation.

His instruction is to examine oneself and then eat, not discover weakness and remain away indefinitely. Struggling against sin differs from refusing repentance. Stubborn disobedience requires repentance, not reassurance that participation is harmless. But the humble believer should come to Christ for nourishment. Paul's practical conclusion, that they receive one another considerately and stop using the gathering to satisfy selfish appetites, shows that examination must produce changed conduct (**1 Corinthians 11:33-34**).

Christ's Table is neither a ***reward*** for the spiritually accomplished nor ***permission*** to remain unchanged. It is ***nourishment*** for repentant believers.

Conclusion

Questions 102, 103, and 104 have answered three connected questions related to the Lord's Supper.

102. ***What is it?*** Christ's appointed ordinance in which believers remember and proclaim His death and truly feed upon Him spiritually through faith.

103. ***Who is it for?*** Those baptized upon a credible profession of faith and repentance, living as members in good standing of a gospel-preaching church.

104. ***How is it observed?*** With self-examination, discerning the Lord's body and coming in faith, repentance, love, and new obedience.

Take this with you in three ways.

- ***FIRST, come expecting Christ to nourish you.*** The Supper is not merely something we do to demonstrate our devotion. It is something Christ has given for our good. Through the Holy Spirit, He strengthens faith and deepens our communion with Himself. Do not measure its value by the intensity of your feelings or assume that frequent participation must make it ordinary in your affections. Receive His appointed provision gratefully. Weak faith needs nourishment, not distance from the Savior.

- ***SECOND, come according to Christ's order.*** The Table belongs to Him, not to us. Baptism, church membership, and accountable fellowship are not achievements that purchase admission; they belong to the order He has established for His gathered people. And outward qualification does not remove the need for inward examination. Ask whether you are trusting Christ, turning from known sin, and sincerely seeking to obey Him. Do not confuse remaining sin with a refusal to repent. The question is not whether you need grace, but whether you are coming to Christ for it.

- ***THIRD, come loving Christ's people.*** We cannot honor the communion this meal expresses while deliberately nurturing contempt for those who share it. Pursue reconciliation. Notice the member who is suffering. Refuse to encourage division. The people beside you are not incidental to your communion with Christ; they are fellow members of His body.

Come, then, neither carelessly nor fearfully, but reverently and gladly.
Christ does not invite you to display your sufficiency.
He calls you to depend upon His.
Examine yourself, repent, and receive His provision with faith and love.

At His Table:
- Remember His death
- Feed upon Him by faith
- Love the people He has made His own