**DIDACHE:**

**Session 8**

**The Means of Grace—Holy Communion**

**Summary of Session 7**

**\*There are basically two approaches the Christian Church takes as it seeks**

**the presence of God in its midst: one theology is based on the doctrine**

**of justification by grace through faith; the other theology is rooted in**

**the emphasis of the Radical Reformation on individual and group**

**expression and experience of the faith. The first teaches that God**

**has promised to meet His people in the means of grace, where the**

**Gospel and His gifts have been located by His design and so**

**revealed in Scripture. Those means of grace are Word and**

**Sacraments (Baptism and Holy Communion.**

**\*Baptism is a divine institution. Baptism is a miracle. Baptism is not our**

**response to God’s grace and promise—it IS God’s gracious Gospel**

**at work. He is the One who does Baptism for us! It is He who**

**designed it as one of the most ordinary and available things in all**

**His creation—water—joined to His Word to become a divine action.**

**\*Baptism is simple and profound at the same time. It is simple because it**

**is administered by applying water *in the Name of the Father and of***

***the Son and of the Holy Spirit*, the name by which the true God has**

**revealed Himself to us. It is profound because *baptism now saves you***

(1 Peter 3:21)

**\*Baptism is intended for all people, without distinction. All segments of the**

**human population are included; none are excluded in the Scriptures.**

**Infants and babies not only can but should be baptized, since this is**

**the way God has revealed in His Word that they can be saved. Those**

**older who can hear and receive the Gospel cognitively, as the Holy**

**Spirit enables them by the gift of faith, come to believe and then are**

**instructed and baptized. The newborn, infant, and toddler have the**

**promise of Baptism as the way of assurance for our little ones!**

**\*Those who argue for a “believer’s baptism” confuse faith with intellectual**

**ability. According to Scripture all people are conceived and born into**

**sin and need what Baptism gives—forgiveness. Faith is not a human**

**response or decision; it is the gift of God that enables everyone to**

**believe, including children as the Bible teaches in Matthew 18:6.**

**Baptism is not our promise to God; it is God’s promise in action to**

**and for us.**

**\*In Baptism, God gives the gifts of forgiveness of sins, rescue from the devil**

**and death, and eternal life. In Baptism we are adopted into God’s**

**family as His own dear children, made members of the Church, and**

**made heirs of the future new heavens and earth.**

**\*Christians remember their Baptisms through daily confession of their sins,**

**repentance and faith. In remembrance of Baptism we know God is**

**with us always!**

**OUTLINE OF LESSON 8**

**In this lesson we will explore the truths and practices regarding the Sacrament of Holy Communion.**

**The Lord’s Supper is known by multiple names: The Sacrament, The Sacrament of Holy Communion, The Eucharist, The Holy Meal, The Last Supper, The Lord’s Supper, The Lord’s Table, The New Covenant Meal, The New Testament Meal, The Breaking of the Bread, The Agape Feast, and The Great Mystery.**

**The Lord’s Supper is not merely a church custom or ritual, but like the preaching of the Gospel and Holy Baptism, is a divine ordinance, instituted by Christ Himself. It is a means of grace!**

**As with all doctrine and truth, we read and hear what the Word of God has to say to us about these matters. About the matter of The Lord’s Supper, here are all the passages in the Bible that speak directly on this topic:**

**1) Matthew 26:17-20; 26-30**

**\*The context of the institution of The Lord’s Supper is the Passover**

**Meal of the Old Covenant (Exodus 12). In Jesus’ third year**

**of His public ministry, He has come with His disciples to**

**Jerusalem to observe the Festival.**

**--As they were eating, Jesus takes unleavened bread from the table,**

**offers a prayer of thanksgiving to God, and distributes**

**portions of it to His disciples. This was not part of the**

**Jewish Passover liturgy; Jesus is, in fact, doing something**

**new! As He distributes the unleavened bread to His**

**disciples, He also says something new: Take, eat, this is My**

**Body. . .Take, drink, this is My Blood of the New Covenant.**

**Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**

**--After this eating and drinking of the bread and the wine, Jesus**

**makes a remarkable announcement to them; *I tell you I will***

***not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I***

***drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.***

1. **Mark 14:22-25**

**\*Mark corroborates Matthew’s account of the Institution of the**

**Lord’s Supper. It is the character of Mark’s writing to record**

**less of the words spoken and more of the actions of Jesus. For example, Mark records Jesus’ word over the bread as simply, “Take; this is My body,” and His word over the cup of wine as, “This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”**

**3) Luke 22:7; 14-20**

**\*Luke records Jesus’ words in a different order than Matthew and**

**Mark, and while there is not a literal verse in any of the**

**Gospels to explain such details, reading and becoming familiar**

**with each Gospel reminds us that the different writers had a**

**variety of purposes and anticipated audiences. Matthew’s**

**extensive quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures reflect the**

**Jewish majority in the Church of the first few decades. Luke**

**is himself a gentile and writes for a broader audience. Mark,**

**who was an assistant to Peter, is a more concise writer relating**

**the facts and action. John’s work is theological and in places written to show the superiority of the Christian world viewpoint over Greek culture and thought.**

**--Jewish historical sources give us some idea of what the Passover**

**liturgy looked like in the centuries after Jesus’ ministry;**

**Each household celebrating the meal followed this order.**

**It is possible four “official” cups were shared during the**

**evening. Menu included lamb (qualified and certified),**

**unleavened bread and probably regular bread with the meal,**

**a sauce of bitter herbs, plus other non-required staples.**

**The liturgy included prayers of thanksgiving, hymns, and**

**the narrative of the Exodus, triggered by the question of the**

**youngest speaker in the household’s question, “why do we**

**celebrate this night?”**

**--Jesus distributes the bread with the same words, including a**

**command for them to “do this in remembrance of Me.”**

**--And the cup (probably the Third Cup of the Passover Liturgy, the**

**one not watered down) with the same words as in Matthew**

**referring to the New Covenant, a direct reference to**

**Jeremiah 31:31-34**

[Note: best scholarly guess, four cups, the final being a cleansing

cup with the Benediction before dismissal. There is no record in

any of the Gospels that Jesus and His disciples drank the fourth

cup, as Jesus had implied. . .the Fourth Cup He will drink with

them and all of us in heaven!]

1. **Acts 2:42**
2. **1 Corinthians 10:14-22**

**\*Paul addresses the Church at Corinth because they are guilty of false**

**teaching and dangerous practice when it comes to the doctrine**

**and administration of the Lord’s Supper. His is a commentary**

**on the centrality of this sacrament in the life of the Church,**

**as well as a corrective on what it is and how it is to be used.**

**One issue in Corinth is that there are other “holy meals” in**

**town, the dinners and festivals at various pagan temples in**

**the city. Many of the Christians perceived that since they had**

**been taught these idols were not really gods, had no power, and**

**were the inventions of unbelieving minds, that it didn’t matter**

**if they ate and bought the meat sacrificed in these pagan**

**services. In verse 20, Paul assures them these idols are**

**nothing, but that the worship and ritual that happens in their**

**temples is connected to the worship of a real entity—Satan!**

**For this reason should the members of the Corinth Church**

**attend these festival or not? No is Paul’s answer; it is a sin**

**against the very first commandment!**

**In verse 16, Paul makes the strongest case for not giving any**

**indication or sense that The Lord’s Supper is anything like the**

**Temple rituals. The Bread and Wine is a participation, not in**

**a ritual, symbolic action—it is the Body and Blood of Christ!**

1. **1 Corinthians 11:17-29**

**\*Paul returns in this chapter to the administration of the Lord’s**

**Supper. Let it never be that in our churches it would ever**

**be said about us what Paul says about the Corinthians—when they assemble together, because of their false teaching and**

**dangerous practice, they may be doing more harm than good!**

**In verse 20, he teaches that a supper ritual potentially can be**

**held that looks, sounds, tastes, and feels like the genuine Holy**

**Meal, but isn’t at all.**

**It appears that the Corinthians conducted their worship**

**service and then immediately following celebrated an Agape**

**Feast (something akin to our potluck dinners at church, but**

**considered part of the ritual). Perhaps this was the model of the pagan festival, where rituals, ceremonies, and dramas were conducted throughout the eating and drinking, which was mostly revelry. At the dinner is where the Lord’s Supper was being conducted. Today we would say simply, “What a mess!”**

**Paul will correct this serious problem by taking them back to**

**Scripture, to the very institution of the Lord’s Supper by the**

**Lord Himself.**

**--Both bread and wine (as Body and Blood) are to be eaten and**

**drunk in remembrance of Christ and done often or**

**frequently. It is under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that**

**Paul has written these words, “for as often as you eat this**

**bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death**

**until He comes**

**Having lifted The Lord’s Supper out of the noise and mess of**

**the Corinthian’s Agape Feast, Paul goes on to give them and all of us further instructions on receiving this holy gift. In verse 27 a shocking reality is revealed; it is possible to receive this**

**holy meal in an unworthy manner! That means that it is not some automatic ritual benefit that happens to just anybody who might be present and joins in this eating and drinking!**

[Note: imagine the impact upon reading this as a member of

the Corinthian clergy or membership] [Note: analogy of a

physician prescribing a cure-all medicine]

**To remedy this reality and possibility, Paul tells them and us**

**that the faithful, careful, reverent us of this divine gift requires**

**an examination before receiving it. The basis for this**

**evaluation is discernment of the body of Christ present in the**

**Sacrament (and with it implied the blood of Christ)**

**APPLICATIONS AND PRACTICES OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

**Three radically different beliefs concerting the Lord’s Supper dominate the various denominations (groups) of Christian churches:**

**A) The bread and wine are transformed and converted into Christ’s flesh**

**and blood in such a manner that only the body and blood of Christ**

**are received in the Sacrament (Roman Catholic definition of**

**transubstantiation and real presence)**

**B) The bread and wine and the body and blood of Christ are all present in**

**the Sacrament, so that with the bread the Body of Christ is received,**

**and with the wine, the Blood of Christ is received, all four elements**

**being truly present and received (Lutheran real presence)**

**C) Only bread and wine are received in the Lord’s Supper in any real and**

**true way; they stand as symbols or representations, signifying the**

**flesh and blood of Christ. The Catholic and Lutheran interpretations**

**are viewed as preposterous (Reformed, Arminian, Pentecostal, etc.)**

**To analyze these differences in doctrine and practice, we depend solely upon the Scriptural testimony we surveyed above, applying them to the issues of difference.**

**What constitutes The Lord’s Supper? Is it the ordained priest with his indelible character acquired in ordination, his words and ministrations, that literally effect transubstantiation? (This is the Roman Catholic teaching with which Luther took issue; it says the priest is a means by which the earthly elements of bread and wine are transformed physically into flesh and blood; in Luther’s time, surgeries were conducted shortly after death and last rites where one had taken communion to**

**physically locate and prove bread was gone and human flesh was discovered. . .)**

**At the time of the Reformation, humanism is a dominating force in higher education, and its tools in many ways made possible the return to the Bible as the primary and sole authority for doctrine and teaching** [Note: Erasmus, Reuchlin] **Is the definition and interpretation of The Lord’s Supper the reasonable domain of human reason at all, so that various theologians may give their various interpretations? Or is it the Lord’s own words alone that must deliver the reality and the blessings of The Lord’s Supper? Luther’s theological principle of *sola Scriptura* contended that only His Words actually have power to bring into existence and reality what is spoken and commanded?**

**So what did Jesus say? *Take, eat, this is My body. Take, drink, this is My***

***blood. This is for you. This is the New Covenant.* [Jesus’ reference to the**

**promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34] *Do this. . .often. . .in remembrance of me. . .***

***for the forgiveness of your sins.***

**Doctrine determines practice. Here are some of the substantive issues**

**concerning this Sacrament:**

**In defining the purpose of The Lord’s Supper?**

**+Is it merely Ritual?**

**+Is it merely about Tradition?**

**+Is the main benefit the forgiveness of sins?**

**In consecrating the bread and wine, i.e. in separating it out from**

**ordinary bread and wine, for sacramental use:**

**+should we worship the visible elements?**

**+should we use grape juice?**

**In administering The Lord’s Supper, who is to receive it?**

**+Unbelievers?**

**+Those not able to examine themselves?**

**+Those not baptized?**

**+Those who do not believe the doctrine of the real**

**presence and the purpose of the sacrament?**

**+What about a member who is living in un-repentant,**

**public, known sin? (1 Corinthians 5:11-13;**

**1 Corinthians 10:20-21; Matthew 5:23-24)**

**[How does a congregation and its Pastor**

**make this determination, then?]**

**Should you take The Lord’s Supper in another church that teaches**

**and/or practices contrary to the Scriptures?**

**+A church that believes the bread and wine are only**

**symbols? A church that uses only grape juice?**

**+A church that teaches we are saved and converted by**

**our good works, decision to follow Christ, and/or**

**obedience to the Gospel?**

**+A church that teaches that the Bible is a human book**

**full of many problems and errors, much of which**

**is not relevant in our day, and that it is up to**

**pious, human reason and scholarship to discover**

**what in the Bible is the truth to be proclaimed in**

**the contemporary age? A church willing to**

**reinterpret the meaning of one or more of the 10**

**commandments to be more “relevant” with**

**contemporary culture?**

**+Others?**

**How do fellow Christians in other denominations justify their rejection of the doctrine of the Real Presence?**

**1) They quote Scripture!**

**\*John 6:63: *It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all***

**\*Romans 14:17: *For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and***

***drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy***

***Spirit.***

**\*Colossians 2:16 *Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in***

***questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new***

***moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come***

**How are such Scriptures be used as proof passages that the bread**

**and wine must be symbolic?**

1. **They interpret Scripture with the use of human reason, and it does make**

**more sense to our fallen, human reason to reject miracles we cannot**

**understand; it’s just interesting such theologians who lead whole**

**denominations of people in this direction, often do not reject other**

**miracles of Jesus, such as His changing water to wine!**

**“The breaking of bread by Christ with His disciples was a figure, namely of the**

**spiritual and inner reception of Christ’s body and blood, which they who received**

**the symbolized thing at times used in the Church because of the weak, just as they**

**practiced abstaining from meat strangled or bloody, washing one another’s feet, or**

**anointing the sick with oil. These things, along with Baptism and the Lord’s**

**Supper, were no more binding on Christians than any other ritual or ceremony,**

**especially for the mature who has attained the substance of things in the heart.”**

**How do you discuss by Scripture such a denial of the real presence?**

**The Practice of Closed Communion**

**Let Luther himself speak about faithful administration of the Sacrament as**

**he instructs the preachers of the Reformation:**

**Now it must be said that closed communion is not taken all that seriously by those**

**who now teach that the bread and wine only signify Christ; it is of no great concern**

**to them who receives these things, nor what they believe or how they live, since it**

**is only the true believer who comprehends the heavenly thing anyway. But since**

**God’s Word says and we believe that it is Christ’s body and blood that are given**

**to us in the Sacrament, we neither will nor can give such Sacrament to anyone**

**unless he is first examined. Does he believe God’s Word about the Sacrament?**

**Does he confess his sins and intend to forsake the sins which he has again**

**committed? We will not make Christ’s Church into a pig pen letting anybody**

**come without faith, lest we do invite people as pigs to a trough, when it is the most**

**excellent food we can ever receive. Such a church we will leave to the fanatics.**

[Luther, 1532 Admonition to Frankfurt am Main]

**Contemporary Objections (and sample responses) to Closed Communion:**

**\*It is judgmental, unloving, and arrogant for a church to exclude people who have come to their worship service to worship God, from their participation in The Lord’s Supper. Their decision to partake of The Lord’s Supper is their own choice, and is between God and each of them.**

**Closed Communion sincerely shows a loving concern for those who would**

**receive the Sacrament in an unworthy manner, perhaps to their judgment. In the objection itself are at least three errors in understanding what the Bible teaches about The Lord’s Supper, the doctrine of the church and ministry, and faith.**

**Does not participation in Holy Communion reflect and create fellowship among Christians? To refuse to give The Lord’s Supper to someone or an entire church body is to put a roadblock on unity.**

**It is true that when we participate together in The Lord’s Supper we publicly**

**acknowledge that we believe the same things and are one in the faith. But we**

**do this as members of a particular confession of doctrine and faith. The Lord’s Supper is a profound expression of the unity of faith and of the Church. That witness to unity is a false witness if major doctrinal disagreements exist between church bodies and those who commune together. When we allow open communion, we witness in fact that these doctrinal differences do not matter—which they don’t or don’t as much to those churches who practice open communion—that they are unimportant, and may be safely overlooked. This message of doctrinal indifference contradicts Scripture. (Matthew 7:15; John 8:31-32; Romans 16:17; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17; Galatians 5:0; 2 Timothy 2:17; Titus 3:10; 2 John 10-11 to name a few)**

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**If you have questions and thoughts to share, email:**

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