

DAILY MEDITATIONS ON THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM

by Pastors of the Protestant Reformed Churches of America

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JUL
Lord's Days 27 - 31

The Second Part - Of Man's Deliverance

Of Holy Baptism

Lord's Day 27

Question 72. Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

Answer. Not at all: for the [\[a\]](#) blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all [\[b\]](#) sin.

Question 73. Why then doth the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins"?

Answer. God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, not only thereby to teach us, that as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are [\[c\]](#) removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but especially that by [\[d\]](#) this divine pledge and sign he may assure us, that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really, as we are externally washed with water.

Question 74. Are infants also to be baptized?

Answer. Yes: for since they, as well as the adult, are included in the [\[e\]](#) covenant and [\[f\]](#) church of God; and since [\[g\]](#) redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the [\[h\]](#) Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adult; they must therefore by baptism, as a sign of the covenant, be also admitted into the Christian church; and be distinguished [\[i\]](#) from the children of unbelievers as was done in the old covenant or testament by [\[j\]](#) circumcision, instead of which [\[k\]](#) baptism is instituted in the new covenant.

[a]: [Mat. 3:11](#); [1Pet. 3:11](#)

[b]: [1John 1:7](#); [1Cor. 6:11](#)

[c]: [Rev. 1:5](#); [1Cor 6:11](#)

[d]: [Mark 16:16](#); [Gal. 3:27](#)

[e]: [Gen. 17:7](#); [Acts 2:39](#)

[f]: [1Cor. 7:14](#); [Joel 2:16](#)

[g]: [Mat. 19:14](#)

[h]: [Luke 1:14,15](#); [Psa. 22:10](#); [Acts 2:39](#)

[i]: [Acts 10:47](#); [1Cor. 12:13](#); [1Cor 7:14](#)

[j]: [Gen. 17:14](#)

[k]: [Col. 2:11,12,13](#)

July 2 – LD 27, Day 1: The Sign and Reality of Baptism
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Romans 4:1 – 12

The sacraments are visible signs and seals of the invisible grace of God to us in Christ Jesus. The sign does not by some mysterious change become the reality. It always remains only a sign. However, those who receive this God-ordained sign by faith are also blessed by the reality to which it points. The sign of baptism, which is the water of baptism, does not at any stage become the reality of the blood of Christ.

During the time of Jesus, some of the false teachers of the Jews committed the error of boasting in the mere sign of circumcision. The Scribes and the Pharisees, as they were called, boasted in the Old Testament covenant sign of circumcision. Because they were circumcised, they imagined themselves to have a special standing with God. They boasted among themselves “we be the circumcised.” They imagined that those who were not circumcised could not be in the same spiritual class as they were. In fact, many of them thought that without circumcision no one could be saved.

Against this error, the Word of God teaches that circumcision is nothing, neither is uncircumcision, but a new heart is everything. “For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God” Rom 2:28 - 29. In the next chapter of Romans, the same apostle speaks these words, “Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and the uncircumcision through faith.” Rom 3:30.

The Bible does indeed sometimes speak of the reality of baptism using the wording of the sign. So people in the New Testament time, when they came to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, were exhorted to be baptized and washed of their sins. See Acts 22:16. There is a resemblance between the sign and the thing which it signifies. As water washes away the filth of our bodies, so the blood of Christ washes away our sins. However, this does not mean that the mere rite of baptism itself could wash away sins.

When believers receive baptism by faith, they may be assured of its blessed reality of the washing away of all their sins, being incorporated into the body of Christ and receiving all the blessings of salvation in Him.

There have also been those who wrongly place their confidence in their outward baptism, and afterwards were careless about Christian living. Yet, somehow they imagine that they have standing with God just because they were baptized at some point in their lives. Some even go so far as to falsely imagine that because they were baptized, they will be saved even though they live a life of impenitent ungodliness.

There will indeed be those who received the sign of baptism, but nevertheless go eternally lost. Our concern must be that we have the spiritual reality which baptism signifies, namely the forgiveness of sins through the cross of Jesus Christ, and the new heart which the Spirit of Jesus Christ alone can and does give us.

When we know that we have these spiritual realities through lively faith in our hearts, we have continual comfort and assurance in our baptism. Furthermore, the spiritual reality of our baptism will be both the power and the incentive for serious Christian living. The spiritual reality of baptism requires daily repentance. Then, our boasting will not be in ourselves but in God only.

July 3 – LD 27, Day 2: The Blood of Jesus Christ Alone Cleanses us From All Sin
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: I John 1

The opening question and answer of Lord's Day 27 addresses the main error of the church of Rome with regard to its teaching about baptism. It also teaches us how serious this error really is. And finally it teaches us the blessed positive truth that the blood of Christ alone cleanses us from all sin.

When one believes that the external water of baptism itself cleanses us from sin, this means that there is another power besides the blood of Christ that cleanses us from sin. This is a denial of the perfection of the wonderful sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

We are all subject to falling into this kind of error. How easy it is for us to imagine that the mere going through a religious ritual and ceremony has some kind of spiritual value. We can also be superstitious about the external power of the sacraments. There are those who believe that somehow they have been saved simply because they were baptized.

The purpose of the sacrament of baptism is to teach us that nothing else but the blood of Jesus alone can wash away our sins. The term 'blood of Jesus Christ' is used often in scripture. I Pet 1:19 speaks of our being redeemed by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:"

We must remember that the scriptures are using figurative language. The 'blood of Jesus Christ' refers to the sacrifice of obedience and suffering which Jesus endured in order to atone for all of our sins and merit for us perfect righteousness before God. This sacrifice was the demonstration of the amazing greatness of God's love for us. The reason why this blood is by Peter called 'precious' is because it was the blood of the Son of God in our flesh, who is in Himself infinitely precious, not only to us. Even more significantly, He is infinitely precious before God, His Father. The preciousness of the blood of Christ indicates further that His sacrifice on the cross involved the deepest misery, agony, shame and humiliation on the part of our Savior. The preciousness of the blood of Christ is also in that He offered Himself for us to God in perfect obedience and love. The sacrifice of Christ on the cross is therefore of infinite worth in the sight of God, abundantly sufficient to cover the guilt of the sins of all of His people for whom He died. Because of the infinite worth of the sacrifice of Christ, He was able to merit perfect and everlasting righteousness and life for His people.

Our baptism must lead us to trust in and glory in none other than in the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Receiving baptism with proper understanding involves a great exercise of our faith. Whenever we remember our own baptism, we must do so by meditating on the cross of Jesus Christ and all that it means for our salvation.

All our sins were atoned for at the cross because of the infinite worth of the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ. We therefore must not add any work of our own, nor trust in and glory in any mere ritual or ceremony, not even in the power of the sacraments themselves. The whole meaning of our baptism is Christ alone, all sufficient and all glorious, the only hope of our righteousness before God, and all our hope for favor and blessing, and life eternal in the presence of God.

July 4 – LD 27, Day 3: Infant Baptism
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read Acts 2: 39 - 47

The Reformed Church practices infant baptism. Since the time of the Reformation, there has been considerable dispute concerning this practice. At the time of the Reformation, a group arose called the Anabaptists who denied baptism for all infants. They insisted that baptism should only be administered to adult confessing believers. They argued that it is impossible for infants to confess faith. Some even argued that God could not be said to work in the hearts of infants at all. All children were to be considered ungodly until they could show evidence of faith and repentance.

Some Protestants who do not go so far, maintain that even if God does work in the hearts of little infants, they should not be baptized until they are old enough to show evidence of repentance and faith in their lives. These insist that there are no examples of the baptism of infants in the New Testament. They maintain that this practice is based on nothing more than human sentiment, perhaps the sentimental affection of parents for their own children.

Indeed, most of the examples of baptism given in scripture were those of adults. The scripture records for the most part only the history of the preaching of the gospel to first generation Christians and these must indeed first confess their faith in the Lord Jesus and repent of their sins before they are baptized. It is true that in scripture, there is no specific example of the baptism of infants. The question is a bit more involved than this however.

The Heidelberg Catechism sets forth what the Reformed Churches believe about infant baptism. Infants, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and church of God. Redemption from sin through the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, are promised to them as well as to adults.

The basis for the baptism of infants is the truth of God's covenant. See Gen 17:7. According to the truth of the covenant, God gathers His church in the line of continued generations with believers and their children. According to the promise of God's covenant, the blessings of salvation belong to covenant children. While we cannot determine this for certain from scripture, we believe that covenant infants are usually regenerated in infancy. There is mention of covenant infants being known of God from birth in Jer 1:5, Psa 71:6, Luke 1:15, and Gal 1:15. Significantly, the catechism says that gift of faith is given by the Holy Spirit, the author of this gift also to covenant infants.

In the Old Testament, children were circumcised 8 days after they were born. Circumcision, according to Rom 4:11 was 'a sign and seal of the righteousness of faith.' It was not merely an outward sign of belonging to the nation of Israel. If infants were included in the covenant in the Old Testament, they surely are not excluded when the promises of the covenant were all fulfilled in the coming of Jesus Christ. In the New Testament the truth of the covenant was revealed in richer and broader realization. It would hardly follow then that children would be excluded after they had been included in God's covenant before. The day of Pentecost marks the opening of the New Testament Age. Peter, preaching the gospel on the day of Pentecost, proclaimed, "For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the LORD our God shall call." Acts 2:39

July 5 – LD 27, Day 4: The Baptism of Covenant Infants
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Acts 10:34 - 48

Our Lord Jesus considered covenant children to be the children of God. Therefore He took them into His arms and blessed them. He even made them examples of the child-like faith that is necessary for entrance into the kingdom. He warned everyone of the severe judgment of God should they hurt one of these little ones. He said concerning these little ones 'of such is the kingdom of heaven.'

The truth of God's covenant way of saving His people in families, including believers and their children, is the reason why after Pentecost, whole families were at once brought to faith in Jesus Christ and saved. Properly, whole families were then baptized. Whether or not the family baptisms mentioned in the scripture included infant children, cannot be proven either way. We would expect that, of the several examples of family baptisms mentioned in scripture, at least some of them included infants.

Infant baptism does not mean that the grace of salvation is somehow inherited by the children through the genes of their parents, somewhat like physical characteristics are inherited by children. The truth of the covenant means that God, by His sovereign grace, according to the promise He makes throughout scripture in both the Old and New Testament, is pleased to bestow His grace upon the children of believers. See Acts 2:39.

Church history abundantly proves that God continues His church with believers and their children. This is simply the wonderful way of the working of God's grace. No Christian ought to ignore or refuse to acknowledge this wonder of God in His church.

Covenant children are to be brought for baptism by their parents. At the time of the baptism of these children in the Reformed Church, parents are required to solemnly vow to raise their children in the knowledge and fear of the Lord. They are made to promise that they will do this to their utmost power. There are many admonitions in the letters of the apostles instructing parents to bring up their children in the fear and nurture of the Lord.

When covenant children come to mature adulthood, they are admonished to make public confession of their faith in the Lord before His church. Covenant children are all the days of their lives exhorted to faith and repentance in Jesus Christ, without which there is no salvation.

In the Old Testament, not all those who were circumcised in infancy later showed themselves to be children of God. Scripture has the example of the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca, concerning whom God said, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.' See Rom 9:10 - 13. Both Jacob and Esau were circumcised as God commanded for all children of believers.

In the New Testament times, all children of believing parents are to be brought to church for baptism. Parents must believe the promise of God's covenant concerning these children. It is in the hope of the promise of the covenant, that godly parents are to raise their covenant children in the fear and admonition of the Lord, always depending completely on the grace and Spirit of the Lord to make the instruction of their children effective unto their salvation. In fact, if God does not work in the hearts of children, they cannot receive and benefit from the godly instruction of their parents.

**July 6 – LD 27, Day 5: Understanding the Unity of the Covenant
by Rev Arie den Hartog**

Read: Ephesians 2: 11 - 22

Some reject the practice of infant baptism. They say that scripture speaks of two covenants, one in the days of the Old Testament with the Jews, and another in the New Testament age with the Gentiles. So they would maintain that even though children in the Old Testament were circumcised, it does not follow that children of covenant parents in the New Testament should be baptized.

The Reformed church maintains that the covenant in the Old and New Testament is one. God has one covenant people. There is only one way of salvation and that is through faith in Jesus Christ. God established an everlasting covenant with Abraham who is the father of all the faithful from both the Jews and the Gentiles. Eph 2, which you were asked to read, as well as other passages of scripture speak of Jews and Gentiles being made one in Christ. The middle wall of partition has been broken down. The Gentiles who were once aliens and strangers to the covenant of God are now one with the Jews in the household of faith. The same promises that were made in the Old Testament to the Jews are in the New Testament given to the Gentiles, who are now gathered from all the nations of the world.

Baptism is a sign of God's one everlasting covenant with believers and their children, even as many as the Lord would call. It therefore follows that if children of believers in the Old Testament were distinguished from children of the heathen by the covenant sign of circumcision, this ought also to be done in the New Testament by the covenant sign of baptism. For this reason, when the Spirit of Christ was poured out upon the church on the day of Pentecost the apostle Peter declared to those who repented and believed that they should be baptized because of God's covenant promise to them and also amazingly, to their children. See Acts 2:39. Children were not suddenly for some strange reason excluded from the covenant.

In the book of Acts, we find a number of examples of the baptism of whole families at once. The important thing about these examples is not whether or not at the time of baptism there were infant children in these families. The important thing is that whole families were baptized at once because of the truth of God's covenant which is with believers and their children.

The practice of infant baptism does not imply that all the children of believers are God's elect. History has indeed shown that this is not the case. In the Old Testament times, Esau and Jacob had the same covenant parents. Jacob was loved of God. He was a child of the covenant, but Esau was a reprobate. Both of these sons of Isaac and Rebecca were circumcised. So are all children of believers to be baptized. God's election of grace alone determines whether one belongs truly and spiritually to the covenant of God.

Exactly because salvation is by grace alone, covenant children can and ought to be baptized on the basis of the covenant promise of God. Even though some of these children might in later life show that they are not truly children of God, it was not wrong to baptize them. All children born of covenant parents must be instructed in the truth of the promises of the covenant and be exhorted and admonished to repent and turn to the Lord Who is the only hope of salvation. God will realize His covenant purposes in the lives of children of believers by His Spirit of grace according to His purposes of election.

July 7 – LD 27, Day 6: Covenant Children Are Included in the Church
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Ephesians 6: 1 - 9

The Reformed Church believes that children of covenant parents belong to the Christian Church. This is one of the reasons for the practice of infant baptism in the Reformed Church. The meaning of this is not merely that their names are found on the rolls of the Reformed Church but that they are really and spiritually part of the church of Jesus Christ. No one is ever included in the church except by God Himself. God includes covenant children in His church. They must be given special instruction by the church and they must be recognized and treated by the church as true members of God's church.

That children are part of the church is evident from the fact that children are at times even directly mentioned. They are pointed to their Christian calling. The passage from Paul's letter to the church of Ephesus that we asked you to read before reading this meditation is an example of this. When the letters of the apostles were read in the apostolic churches, children were there as part of the worship services.

So the Reformed Church does not exclude children. She does not treat them as though they are not, and even cannot be truly children of God, because they are not yet old enough to understand the truth and confess faith in Jesus Christ.

In most cases, children of covenant parents are regenerated in their infancy. The Psalms speaks of God knowing His people from their mothers' womb. See *Psa 71: 6*, and *139:14 - 16*. There are examples of the same teaching in the Old Testament prophets. See *Isa 46:3* and *Jer 1:5*. This same truth was spoken of in connection with the announcement of the birth of John the Baptist. *Luke 1:15*

'Covenant children' is the name which Reformed believers love to call their children. Because these children are covenant children, they are distinguished from the world. They are regarded as being very precious in the church. They are not little devils, as one theologian characterized them, or even unregenerate unbelievers, as others assume.

One of God's purposes for Christian marriage is the purpose of bringing forth covenant children. This is one of the many reasons why marrying in the Lord is so very important. In the Old Testament days, the patriarchs were very concerned that their children married God-fearing partners and fellow members of the covenant nation. They would even go to great lengths to see that this would happen, such as when Abraham went to great lengths to find a God-fearing wife for his son Isaac. The prophet Malachi admonished men in Israel not to deal treacherously with the wives of their youth whom the Lord had given to them. They must not put away their covenant wives. It is the Lord's purpose in marriage that a godly seed should be brought forth. *Mal 2:16*.

In *I Cor 7:14* Paul states that a godly woman is not to put away her unbelieving husband for the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and even if only one of the partners in marriage is a believer, yet the children are holy.

The truth that is the basis for the practice of infant baptism is a very significant one. It impresses on a believing and God-fearing couple the urgency for them to devote themselves to the important task of raising their covenant children in the fear of the Lord. An important part of this task is raising our covenant children to know their place in the church and to have proper love for the church. When the Word of God is being preached in the church, it is also addressed to them and they must be taught to listen carefully to it.

July 8 – LD 27, Day 7: The Covenant Responsibility of Parents
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Colossians 3: 16 - 21.

No doubt not all who read the meditation today are married and have children. Even the unmarried, and those to whom God has not given covenant children by God's grace, should still be interested in the subject of this meditation. As members of the church, even if we are single or married without children, we should be concerned about the proper nurture of covenant children. In one of our meditations, we emphasized that these children are members of the church. They must be so regarded by all members of the church. Parents in particular, should be given support and encouragement to raise their children in the fear of the Lord.

The practice of infant baptism in the sphere of the church does not at all eliminate or minimize the need for the serious instruction of children in the church. The practice of infant baptism does not mean that repentance and faith are not necessary for these children. In the case of adult baptism, none ought to be baptized by the church, except those who demonstrate repentance in their lives and who confess faith in Jesus Christ. In the case of covenant infants, this repentance and faith will not evidence itself until later in their lives. God uses covenant parents and the church to work and develop this faith in the hearts of children.

The Reformed Church teaches that we conceive and bring forth our children in sin. These children are born in spiritual depravity. This depravity is passed down from parents to their children. Grace is not inherited by covenant children through the genes of their parents. The grace of God alone can and will deliver these children from this depravity.

When covenant parents bring their children to be baptized in the Reformed Church, they are admonished and exhorted to do their utmost in raising their children in the fear of the Lord. Parents of covenant children must teach them the knowledge of the true God and the reality that there is no hope of salvation except through faith in Jesus Christ and His death on the cross. Parents are bound by their covenantal responsibility to admonish their children, to call them to repentance and faith, even daily.

This is a mighty responsibility for those to whom the Lord gives children. The true church of God takes a great interest in this as well. The children of the covenant are the hope of the church of the future. The task of raising children is a very difficult one and takes a lot of sacrifice, diligence and steadfastness on the part of parents.

No amount of labors on the part of parents, however, can make any of their children God-fearing. God Himself must do this. He must give His Holy Spirit to the hearts of these children to work faith and repentance in their hearts. Covenant parents are wholly dependent on the Lord. In all their labors, they must pray for grace to be able to properly train their children. They must pray most earnestly, clinging to the promises of God's covenant.

Those who oppose the practice of infant baptism in the Reformed churches, falsely imagining that it implies that covenant children do not need to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus, simply have a wrong understanding of the practice of infant baptism. In fact, the practice of infant baptism and its covenantal basis should be the strongest imaginable motive for parents to labor earnestly and prayerfully in the raising of their children.

The Second Part - Of Man's Deliverance
Of The Holy Supper Of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Lord's Day 28

Question 75. How are 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?

Answer. 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, [a] 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.

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

Answer. It is only to embrace with a believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ, and thereby to [b] obtain the pardon of sin, and life eternal; but also, besides that, to become more and more [c] united to his sacred body, by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; [d] so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding "Flesh of his flesh, and bone [e] of his bone"; and that we live, [f] and are governed forever by one spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

Question 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?

Answer. In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed: [g] "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 [h] cup is the new testament in my blood; [i] 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: [j] "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; for we are all partakers of that one bread."

[a]: [Mat. 26:26,27,28](#); [Mark 14:22,23,24](#); [Luke 22:19,20](#); [1Cor. 10:16,17](#); [1Cor 11:23,24,25](#)

[b]: [John 6:35,40,47,48,50,51,53,54](#)

[c]: [John 6:55,56](#)

[d]: [Acts 3:21](#); [Acts 1:9,10,11](#); [1Cor 11:26](#)

[e]: [Eph. 5:29,30,31,32](#); [1Cor. 6:15,17,19](#); [1John 3:24](#)

[f]: [John 6:56,57,58](#); [Eph. 4:15,16](#)

[g]: [1Cor. 11:23](#); [Mat. 26:26](#); [Mark 14:22](#); [Luke 22:19](#)

[h]: [Ex. 24:8](#); [Heb. 9:20](#)

[i]: [Ex. 13:9](#); [1Cor. 11:26](#)

[j]: [1Cor. 10:16,17](#)

**July 9 – LD 28, Day 1: The Institution of the Lord’s Supper by the Lord Himself
by Rev Arie den Hartog**

Read: I Corinthians 11: 18 - 34.

This Lord’s Day of the Heidelberg Catechism begins a very extensive discussion of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is the second sacrament which the Lord gave to His church for her comfort and the strengthening of her faith.

In our first meditation on this Lord’s Day, let us think about the truth that this sacrament was given to us by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The Lord’s Supper is not a mere invention of man. It is not even a mere tradition begun by the church many years ago. This is the Lord’s own sacrament. It was given to us in the greatness of His love to help us to remember His greatest work, accomplished for our salvation, namely His sacrifice on the cross.

We should be deeply impressed by the fact that our Lord instituted this sacrament on the very night in which He would be betrayed into the hands of His enemies. The next day, He would be condemned to be crucified. This would be the most wicked deed that man has ever committed. But all this would happen according to God’s sovereign plan for our salvation. By means of His suffering and death on the cross, amazing as this truth is, Christ redeemed His people and fully accomplished their salvation. Through the death of the cross, our Lord would show us His own great love for us.

Christ Jesus Himself was gathered with His disciples in the upper room in intimate fellowship with them to celebrate the last Passover with them. Concerning this fact, Jesus was deeply conscious. So Jesus said to His disciples in words recorded in Luke 22, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer:” The reason why this passover would be the last passover is because Jesus on this night would fulfill the passover. Jesus would be the passover Lamb. Jesus would not only be the high priest who would offer this sacrifice, but he would also offer Himself as the sacrifice.

At the time of this intimate profound meeting with His beloved disciples, He gave the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Our Lord desired that His suffering and death on the cross would be constantly remembered by them and meditated on again and again. This remembrance must be the source of comfort, hope and joy for all those who believe in Jesus. Jesus intended that the holy ordinance of the Lord’s Supper be continually observed in the church. For that reason, at the time of His institution of the Supper, Jesus said “This do in remembrance of me.”

That the Lord Jesus intended this ceremony to be continually observed by the church is clear also from the words of the inspired apostle Paul in I Cor 11. There, Paul speaks of having received special instruction regarding the Lord’s Supper directly from the Lord Himself. “For I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you,” We believe that Paul received this special instruction while Paul was in Arabia, being prepared by the Lord for the work that the Lord had called Paul to do as an apostle.

Paul states in I Cor 11 that by celebrating the Lord’s Supper, the church of Jesus Christ “proclaims the Lord’s death” until the final and blessed return of the Lord. So, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper must cause us to look more and more earnestly for the return of the Lord Who so loved us that He gave Himself for us. Whenever you celebrate the Lord’s Supper, think of the fact that this sacrament was given to His church by the Lord, and think also of the circumstance in which it was given.

July 10 – LD 28, Day 2: The Lord’s Supper and the Passover
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Luke 22:7 - 20

Jesus purposely instituted the Lord’s Supper at the time when He was celebrating the last passover with His disciples. Jesus knew that He would fulfill the passover. He would sacrifice Himself as the great passover lamb.

It is significant that the passover was a meal. It was a covenantal meal in which God was spiritually present with His people. There were other ceremonies like that in the Old Testament, combining a sacrifice and a meal. The main part of the passover was the eating of the passover lamb, which in the days of Jesus, had first been slain and offered in the temple. It then was brought to the upper room where Jesus and His disciples were gathered. The sacrifice lamb was a type of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Without the sacrifice of the lamb which testified of the necessity of atonement for sin, God’s people could not have fellowship with God. God is holy and His people are sinners. In order for the people of God to have fellowship with God, first of all their sins must be removed by the death of the lamb. God is the absolutely Holy One. No sinner can have fellowship with this God without being consumed because of his sins.

After the lamb had been sacrificed, it was eaten by a family or a group of God’s people together. That this ceremony was a meal was a sign of the blessed reality of God’s covenant fellowship with His people. The lamb of the passover was not merely to be looked at, but also to be eaten by those who were celebrating together. In this celebration, there was also bread and wine. This whole ceremony depicted the beautiful truth that we have covenant fellowship with God through the sacrifice of the lamb. This covenant fellowship involved partaking of the spiritual blessings of the covenant, symbolized by eating the lamb, eating the bread, and drinking the wine.

At the time of Jesus, the passover was an elaborate and solemn ceremony. Every part of this ceremony also had great spiritual meaning. There was expressing of thanksgiving to God. It included the singing of a hymn or a psalm. This hymn was one of the Old Testament Psalms which end with the words, “Hallelujah praise ye Jehovah.” Psalms 113 or 118 may have been sung during the ceremony.

At the end of the passover meal, Jesus took the bread that was commonly part of this meal, broke some of it, passed it to His disciples, and commanded them to eat of it. He also took the cup of wine which was passed around several times during this celebration, blessed it and passed it to His disciples, and commanded them to drink of it. Jesus commanded that this simple ceremony be repeated over and over again in the church until the day when He would come again at the end of the world. The broken bread of this ceremony was a simple sign of the body of Christ which would be broken on the cross. Even though scripture prophesied that not a bone of Jesus would be broken in sacrificing Himself on the cross, Jesus suffered the agony of the piercing of His hands and feet. Later, after His death, one of the soldiers attending the crucifixion pierced His side with a sword. The wine symbolized the precious blood of Jesus’ great and precious sacrifice, and all the agony and suffering this involved for Jesus. In the Lord’s Supper, we are to remember by the broken body and shed blood of Christ, all of this suffering and agony of Christ and the great salvation which it accomplished for us. By the suffering of Jesus Christ, all the benefits of salvation become ours through our faith in Him.

July 11 – LD 28, Day 3: Remembering the Suffering and Death of Our Savior
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read Isaiah 53

The chief purpose of the celebration of the Lord's Supper is in order that the church might remember the suffering and death of our beloved Savior. This should be the most prominent of all the aspects of our celebration of the Lord's Supper. There are so many dimensions to this remembrance. So much of scripture speaks of it.

The suffering and death of our Savior on the cross was absolutely necessary. The justice of God required it. Our sins were so dreadful in the sight of God that they could not be atoned for in any other way than by the death of the Son of God on the cross. Rather than allowing our sin to go unpunished, God punished our sins by offering up His own dear Son to the death of the cross. The cross speaks of the awful reality of our sin and the justice of God in punishing that sin. Jesus bore the punishment that our sins deserved on the cross. He died in our place and for us.

Jesus gave Himself as an offering and perfect sacrifice to make atonement for our sins. "Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed." Isa 53:4-5

The death of Jesus on the cross involved suffering far greater than we can ever understand. It caused Jesus, in the darkness of that suffering, to cry out in bitter anguish: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?"

By His death on the cross our Lord Jesus fulfilled all obedience to the law of God for us when we were wholly incapable of doing this ourselves. By His active obedience and willing sacrifice on the cross Jesus fulfilled all righteousness for us. This righteousness is not imputed to us freely by the grace of God. It becomes ours through faith in Jesus Christ and His sacrifice. The celebration of the Lord's Supper must be an act of faith.

The death of Jesus Christ on the cross was the most amazing demonstration of the love of God. For when Christ died, we were yet the enemies of God. We are hopelessly guilty and depraved sinners. We all deserve the judgment of hell. We can do nothing of ourselves to make atonement for sin. We have no strength in ourselves to deliver ourselves from the power and destruction of sin. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins." 1 John 4:10

No one can ever measure the breadth, length, depth and height of the love of Christ who gave Himself for us to the suffering and death of the cross. Every time we stand before the cross of the Son of God we are filled with awe and amazement.

The Lord's Supper was given to us in order that we might remember the suffering and death of our Savior. There is no greater power to sanctify us and inspire in our Christian life to love God and give Him humble thanksgiving, than the remembrance of His Love in Jesus Christ.

The celebration of the Lord's Supper must again and again engage us to meditate on the wonder of the sacrifice of Christ. Never should we forget it!

July 12 – LD 28, Day 4: Eating the Flesh and Drinking the Blood of Jesus
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: John 6:51 - 59.

Jesus does not in John 6 speak directly about the Lord's Supper. He does however definitely speak about the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

In partaking of the Lord's Supper, we 'eat the flesh and drink the blood of Jesus'; a very striking expression. However, this is not to be understood literally. Jesus Himself makes this plain when the multitudes that were listening to Him were offended by His words. He says in verses 61 - 63. "Doth this offend you? What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before? It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." This explanation of Jesus very definitely excludes the false idea that in the Lord's Supper, when we eat the bread and drink the wine, we are literally eating the body of Christ and drinking the blood of Christ. The very thought of this is a gross abomination. This would not profit at all. We say this reverently, and because Jesus Himself said it.

There are several aspects of the meaning of the discourse of Jesus in John 6. First of all, Jesus emphasizes the necessity of His incarnation. It was necessary for Jesus to take on Himself our flesh and blood, that which composes our human nature. Jesus had to take on our flesh and blood in order that He could sacrifice Himself on our behalf on the cross. It is not wrong to say that the Son of God died on the cross. But it would be wrong to say that Jesus suffered and died in His divine nature. The divine nature of God cannot suffer and die. Jesus suffered and died very really in His human nature. But at the same time, because of the amazing greatness of this suffering, Jesus was sustained by His divine nature. Only the Son of God could bear the wrath of God that our sins deserved.

Jesus had to give His flesh and blood, His own life for us, by sacrificing Himself on the cross. Many are offended at the cross. They cannot imagine that the suffering and death of Christ on behalf of His people was necessary. They consider the cross to be foolishness. They also cannot imagine that our sins are so serious in the sight of God that they could only be atoned for by the suffering and death of the Son of God.

Eating and drinking Christ means that we must by faith appropriate the suffering and death of Christ. This begins with the humble realization and confession that the suffering and death of Christ on the cross was made necessary by the awful reality of our sins.

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus commanded His disciples and us to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ. As we said in an earlier meditation, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is in the form of a meal. At this meal, Jesus provides for us all the blessings of salvation which He has merited for us and for our salvation. We appropriate these blessings through faith in Him. We do not merely look at the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper. We eat the bread and drink the wine.

When we eat the bread and drink the wine, Jesus feeds and nourishes our souls unto life eternal. Jesus is the living bread that is from heaven. In the Lord's Supper, we acknowledge that Jesus is the bread of life. By receiving through faith the benefits of Christ's cross, we have the blessings of life eternal already now. We have the hope that He will raise us up also in the last day and give us eternal life in heavenly glory.

July 13 – LD 28, Day 5: Communion with Christ
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: John 6:47 - 56

The Lord's Supper is indeed rich in its meaning. One of the names given by scripture to this sacrament, and commonly used in the Reformed church, is the name "Communion." In the Lord's Supper, we have communion with Christ, and are made partakers of all of His benefits. It is exactly because of this truth that the Lord made this sacrament in the form of a meal around a table. This truth of the Lord's Supper should be preserved when the church celebrates this sacrament. In the Lord's Supper, Christ is present with His Church. He is the host at the table, and we who join the Lord's table receive by faith the spiritual food which He provides.

The Reformed church believes that Christ is truly present in the Lord's Supper. He is not bodily present. After His ascension, Christ is now bodily present in heaven, sitting at the right hand of the majesty of His heavenly Father. The human nature of Christ, like our human nature, can only be present in one place at one time. Until the Lord returns bodily at the end of the ages, He remains bodily present in heaven, and not on earth.

Following the teaching of God's Word, the great reformers, especially John Calvin, and the Reformed Church, restored through this great Reformer, , believe that Christ is really spiritually present in the church. The Lord Himself promised that where two or three are gathered together in His name, there He is in the midst of them. He also promised that He would be with His Church to the end of the world.

Jesus is not only spiritually present with His church when she celebrates the Lord's Supper. He is at all times present with His beloved Church through His Word and Spirit. The Lord's Supper is a sign and seal of the presence of Christ with His church.

In the Lord's Supper, Jesus reminds us of all the blessings of salvation which He merited for us through His suffering and death on the cross.

That we have communion with Christ means that He is invisibly, though really and spiritually present with us. God's people through faith in Christ, have living fellowship with Christ. Christ is truly with us and we know that by faith. He is with us to bless us with all spiritual blessings of salvation.

In this sense, Christ feeds and nourishes our souls with His body and blood. He is to our souls the bread of life. Those who eat only earthly bread shall finally die. Jesus is the bread of life. Whosoever eats of this spiritual bread by faith will live forever. Read again the above passage.

If we have a right understanding of the Lord's Supper, we realize that our fellowship with Christ is not limited to the few times in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated in the church. Rather, by the Lord's Supper, we are assured of the blessed reality of our communion with Christ, and this communion is more and more strengthened. It is enjoyed throughout our Christian life. It can be rightly said that the heart of true Christian living is fellowship with Christ. In this fellowship, we have a living, personal, experiential knowledge of Christ with us, and we with Him. In this communion with Christ, we have the hope and joy of everlasting and perfect salvation which is yet to come. In heaven, there will be an everlasting and blessed feast of communion with God and with His Son Jesus Christ.

July 14 – LD 28, Day 6: United to the Sacred Body of Christ
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Acts 2:41 – 47

The church is the living spiritual body of Christ. The members of the church are the members of His body. The true church of Jesus Christ is united together by the Spirit of Christ through faith, as one body, having one Lord and Savior, one God and Father. See the first three verses of Eph 4. This is also celebrated in the Lord's Supper. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of this in Lord's Day 28 when discussing the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Our spiritual union with Christ's body is often called a mystical union. It is called by this name because the reality of this is a great mystery. It cannot be understood by those who have no faith and are not partakers of the body of Christ. The reality of this truth is known only by the child of God through the work of the Spirit of Christ in his heart and by His indwelling Spirit in His church, uniting the members of the body to one another.

The apostle John speaks of this spiritual mystery in I John 3:24a. "And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him."

The blessed spiritual reality of this is strengthened through the proper understanding of, and observance of the Lord's Supper in the church. The Lord's Supper is a supper of fellowship with Christ and with one another. In New Testament times, a love feast was often celebrated in connection with the Lord's Supper. At this feast, the members of the church expressed their love for one another when those who had an abundance of earthly things brought food for the poor and hungry, especially during times of famine. Widows were also taken care of through this practice. Out of this practice arose the office of deacons in the church.

So close is our spiritual union with Christ that in Eph 5, it is said that we are "bone of His bone and flesh of His flesh." Christian marriage is a picture of this blessed mystical union. The love of Christ for His church is the bond of this fellowship. This love was demonstrated in the highest imaginable way in the cross of Jesus Christ. There, Christ gave Himself for the church, that He might sanctify and cleanse her by His Word and Spirit. This reality is signified and sealed in the Lord's Supper.

Christ is spiritually present in the church when His Spirit dwells among her members. They are built up 'into Christ' through the hearing of the preaching of the Word and through the celebration of the sacraments.

We have a beautiful picture of the church as the body of Christ, living in communion with Christ, and the members with each other, in the description of the church in Acts 2:42 "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." The "breaking of bread together" spoken of in these passages was most likely the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

This description is continued in verse 46 of Acts 2. "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,"

These blessed spiritual realities are seen in the true church of Jesus Christ even today, when with proper understanding and unity of faith, she celebrates the Lord's Supper together.

July 15 – LD 28, Day 7: Governed by One Mind and One Spirit
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Ephesians 4:11 - 16.

For our last meditation on Lord's Day 28, we consider one more phrase in its beautiful discussion of the meaning of the Lord's Supper, "and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul."

The whole of the first part of Eph 4 speaks of this truth. No doubt, Paul is not speaking in this passage about the Lord's Supper directly. Yet the catechism is correct when it makes reference to what Paul says in this passage, in explaining the rich and blessed meaning of the Lord's Supper.

The church as the body of Christ, is united by the Spirit of Christ in the bond of peace and unity. In that bond, she confesses together one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, in all, and through all, and in all the saints who are members of the church. The reality of this is celebrated in the Lord's Supper.

The church is, and must be united together in the truth. She may not tolerate heresies and divisions among her members. Paul admonished the church of Corinth concerning this in I Cor 11:18 - 19. "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." Paul admonished the church of Corinth because of this situation. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the unity of the members of the church.

In I Cor 10, Paul speaks of the unity that must characterize the church, with explicit reference to the celebration of the Sacrament of Communion. "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: for we are all partakers of that one bread." I Cor 10: 16 - 17.

The church grows up into this unity through the preaching of the Word in her midst, and this unity is also strengthened by the proper celebration of the Lord's Supper. In Eph 4, Paul speaks further about this. "But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working of the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Eph 4:15 - 16.

The application of the truth of the Lord's Supper in the lives of the members of the church is that they must live together in the unity of faith and love in Jesus Christ. When this is not the case because of sin and division among the members of the church, the Lord's Supper is desecrated and the name of the Lord is greatly dishonored.

In the church, and in connection with the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the members of the church must endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. The members of the church must live together in humility with one another and in unity in the love of Christ for one another.

The Second Part - Of Man's Deliverance
Of The Holy Supper Of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Lord's Day 29

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

Answer. Not at all: [a] 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 [b] body of Christ; though agreeable to the [c] nature and properties of sacraments, it is called the body of Christ Jesus.

Question 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"?

Answer. 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 [d] 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 [e] receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings [f] and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.

[a]: [1Cor. 10:1,2,3,4](#); [1Pet. 3:21](#); [John 6:35,62,63](#)

[b]: [1Cor. 10:16ff](#); [1Cor. 11:20ff](#)

[c]: [Gen. 17:10,11,14](#); [Ex. 12:26,27,43,48](#); [Acts 7:8](#); [Mat. 26:26](#); [Mark 14:24](#)

[d]: [John 6:51,55,56](#)

[e]: [1Cor. 10:16,17](#); [1Cor 11:26,27,28](#); [Eph. 5:30](#)

[f]: [Rom. 5:9,18,19](#); [Rom. 8:4](#)

Q&A 80 of Lord's Day 30

Question 80. What difference is there between the Lord's supper and the popish mass?

Answer. The Lord's supper testifies to us, that we have a full pardon of all sin [a] 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 [b] into Christ, who, according to His human nature is now not on earth, but in [c] heaven, at the right hand of God His Father, and will there [d] be worshipped by us: - but the mass teaches, that the living and dead have not the pardon of sins though 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 worshipped in them; so that the mass, at bottom, is nothing else than a [e] denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry.

[a]: [Heb. 7:27](#); [Heb. 9:12,26](#); [Mat. 26:28](#); [Luke 22:19,20](#); [2Cor. 5:21](#)

[b]: [1Cor. 6](#); [1Cor 17](#); [1Cor 12:13](#)

[c]: [Heb. 1:3](#); [Heb 8:1ff](#)

[d]: [John 4:21,22,23](#); [Col. 3:1](#); [Phil. 3:20](#); [Luke 24:52,53](#); [Acts 7:55](#)

[e]: [Isa. 1:11,14](#); [Mat. 15:9](#); [Col. 2:22,23](#); [Jer. 2:13](#)

July 16 – LD 29, Day 1: Truth Versus Error in Understanding the Meaning of the Lord’s Supper
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Galatians 1

It is tragic that false teaching soon appeared in the church regarding the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. This false teaching soon corrupted the observance of the Lord’s Supper. One of the reasons why the church had to be ‘reformed’, ‘formed anew’, or ‘formed again’, was because the Roman Catholic Church had corrupted the Lord’s Supper. This corruption was so serious because it led to all sorts of superstition and even idolatrous ideas of the sacred ordinance of the Lord’s Supper.

It is never a pleasant thing in itself to have to condemn error. However when the great truths of God are involved and the glory of the name of Jesus Christ is involved, the church must be faithful to condemn errors, and if necessary, even separate herself from them. The prophets of the Old Testament had to condemn error and they did this courageously. Our Lord Jesus condemned the false teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees of His time. He even pronounced woes on these false teachers for their hypocrisies and their self-righteous attitude. The apostle Paul, the apostle of our Lord Jesus Christ, felt compelled to condemn errors. In the book of Galatians, for example, he condemned the teachers of salvation through the works of the law who insisted on the necessity of circumcision for salvation. So serious did the inspired apostle consider the errors of these false teachers, that he called them another gospel, which is no gospel. He went so far as to pronounce the curse of God on the teachers of this false doctrine in the church of Galatia.

So, believing the truth of the Lord’s Supper as being of greatest importance for the proper worship of the church, the leaders of the Reformation condemned the false teaching of the church of Rome. The name that is given to the corrupted celebration of the Lord’s Supper in the church of Rome is the name ‘the mass.’ Over time, the observance of the mass became central to the worship service. The celebration of the mass was exalted wrongly above the preaching of the Word. In many churches of Rome, there is hardly any preaching at all. The members of this church are admonished to attend the mass regularly. Simply by the superstitious partaking of the mass, the members of the church of Rome are wrongly assured that they can receive Christ.

The errors concerning the mass (called by the Reformers ‘the popish mass’) continue to our modern times. It is called the popish mass because of the regulation of the Pope with respect to the administration of the mass. The church has not turned from its false teaching, but only confirmed its erroneous teachings at several church councils over time. The church at Rome also officially pronounces the curse on anyone who disagrees with it, whereby it really condemns all of Protestantism.

For all of these reasons, the Reformed Church in the Heidelberg Catechism takes great pains to distinguish truth from error with regards to the proper understanding of the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. We should not be offended by this. If we love the Lord, we should be concerned about maintaining the truth of the sacraments which He Himself ordained in the church. Only then can this sacrament serve for the encouragement of the faith of the church and the glory of the name of the Lord presented in this sacrament.

July 17 – LD 29, Day 2: The Bread and Wine Do Not Become the Literal Body and Blood of Christ
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 26:26 - 29

The church of Rome teaches that during the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine are changed into the literal body and blood of Christ. This change is termed 'transubstantiation,' literally "change of one substance into another". In the language of the debate about the meaning of transubstantiation, the church of Rome states that even though the bread and wine continue to look like, feel like, and taste like bread and wine, they are in fact really the body and blood of Christ. The change of the elements takes place when the priest in the mass repeats the words of consecration. The church of Rome teaches that the word 'is' used by Jesus when He said, concerning the broken bread in the Lord's Supper: 'this is my body,' and concerning the wine: 'this is the new testament in my blood', must be taken literally.

The errors that followed from these teachings of the church of Rome are that in the mass, communicants must imagine that Christ is literally present and being consumed. Rome teaches that the transubstantiated elements are even worthy of being worshiped as though they are Christ Himself. Furthermore, the elements of the sacrament have in themselves the power to save and bless those who receive them. Christ can be taken and received by the physical hand and mouth of the communicants. Also in the church of Rome, the cup of wine was taken away from the ordinary members of the church. It was feared that there was a danger of sacrilege should a drop of wine, which had been transubstantiated into the blood of Christ, accidentally fall to the ground from the lips of a communicant. So in the church of Rome, only the priest drinks the wine, and he is said to do this on behalf of the whole church. Also, a debate was held that led to the teaching that the whole Christ is in each one of the elements and even in every single consecrated wafer of the Lord's Supper.

The Reformed Church maintains the truth that the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper always remain ordinary bread and wine even though in a sacramental way, these elements are signs and pledges of the sacrifice of the body and blood of Jesus on the cross.

It is quite obvious that when Jesus first instituted the Lord's Supper, He could not have meant by the words of consecration, that the bread and wine were changed into His body and blood. In fact, at the time of the institution of the Supper, the Lord was present with His disciples in the wholeness of His body. He did not pluck off his flesh and give it to the disciples nor drain some of his blood to give to them. Jesus did not say concerning the elements of the Supper, that they change into something which they quite obviously do not appear to be. Such a gross misunderstanding and superstitious ideas of the Lord's Supper confuse the simplicity of its teaching as intended by the Lord.

The meaning of the word 'is' in scripture often is "this signifies". This is true also in common language today. Jesus Himself used the language "I am the way", "I am the door", "I am the bread of life", "I am the living water". In none of these expressions did Jesus mean that there is the change of substance of the sign into reality.

Communion with Christ is nowhere in scripture presented as a matter of mere physical and carnal contact with Him. Our communion with Christ is definitely a spiritual act and not a carnal one. We receive the blessings which Christ has merited for us by His sacrifice on the cross only in the spiritual way of faith.

July 18 – LD 29, Day 3: The Language of Scripture Regarding the Lord’s Supper
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: I Corinthians 11:23 - 29

The church of Rome tries to argue from the language of scripture to support its false teaching of transubstantiation. According to this teaching, the elements of the Lord’s Supper turn into the literal body and blood of the Lord and are literally and physically consumed by those who receive the sacrament.

This language is used in several places in scripture, including the one we asked you to read. Also, in I Cor 10, Paul speaks of the cup of blessing which is received in the Lord’s Supper as the communion of the blood of Christ.

The Heidelberg Catechism answers the arguments of the church of Rome that the Bible uses sacramental language in which the sign is said to be the reality for good reasons. The first reason is that sign and seal of the sacrament bear a definite resemblance, otherwise it could hardly be a sacrament. As earthly bread and wine support this temporal life, so the crucified body and shed blood of Christ are the true spiritual meat and drink whereby our souls are nourished and fed to eternal life. This is simple comparison, and by no means implies a change of substance of the elements. According to the word of God, the physical creation is full of signs and symbols of spiritual truths of God. The sacrament is simple in its meaning, using the simple signs of bread and wine to impress upon us more clearly the truths of the cross of Christ.

Jesus intends that by these visible signs and seals, we can in a better way understand the invisible mysteries of our salvation. The purpose of the sacrament is the confirmation and strengthening of our faith. The Spirit of Christ in the sacraments uses these signs and pledges for this purpose. So, as surely as we by faith receive the outwards signs and pledge with our physical hands and mouths, so certainly by the Spirit of Christ, the spiritual realities of the sacrifice of Christ become ours. We appropriate the spiritual verities of the sacrifice of Christ through faith in Jesus Christ. We have through faith the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins and the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us as certainly as if we had in our own person suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.

In John 6, Jesus uses the kind of language referred to in the above mentioned debate. He speaks of the necessity of eating His flesh and drinking His blood. But when He has declared this, He immediately excludes any false carnal understanding when He says that the words He speaks are spirit and life, the flesh profiteth nothing.

The right understanding of the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper will maintain the right understanding of the spiritual relation we have with Christ and the spiritual way in which we receive from Him the blessings of salvation. It is therefore very important to maintain the truth with respect to the Lord’s Supper. The false teaching of Rome has led to all sorts of superstition which leads away from true faith in Christ.

July 19 – LD 29, Day 4: The Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: John 14:15 - 26

Chapters 14 - 17 of the gospel of John record the discourses Jesus had with His disciples at the time when He was in the upper room and at the time when He instituted the Lord’s Supper among them. These chapters therefore also give rich instructions concerning the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.

The Reformers, especially John Calvin, taught the truth that Christ is indeed present with His church in the Lord’s Supper. The church of Rome insisted that Jesus is bodily present in the elements of the Lord’s Supper. According to this teaching, Christ is present only where He is both in His human and divine nature. Even the great Reformer Martin Luther who restored to the church the most glorious and blessed truths of the gospel, was confused in his teaching about the Lord’s Supper. He taught that Jesus is bodily present ‘in’, ‘with’ and ‘under’ the elements of the Lord’s Supper, though in a mysterious and invisible way.

The confusion of Luther with regards to the presence of Christ in the Lord’s Supper, caused Luther to defend a teaching that confused the human and divine natures of Christ. We believe that Jesus as the Son of God has both a divine and a human nature after His incarnation. The human nature of Christ is like ours, limited and confined to one place. After the ascension of Jesus Christ, He is now bodily in heaven and no longer on earth. It is therefore wrong to teach that Christ is in any way bodily present with the church when she celebrates the Lord’s Supper. Christ, according to His human nature, cannot be present everywhere on earth where the Lord’s Supper is being celebrated.

Though Christ is now bodily in heaven, according to His divine nature and by His Spirit, He is present with His church. This presence is not limited to the times when the church celebrates the Lord’s Supper. Jesus promised always to be with us even to the end of the world. This is a great comfort for the church while she is still on earth.

The Lord’s Supper in its true meaning is a sign and pledge of the real abiding spiritual presence of Christ with His church. When the Lord’s Supper is celebrated by the church, Christ is present. He is the divine host at the table of the Lord’s Supper. He imparts His heavenly and spiritual blessings to those who partake of the Lord’s Supper by faith.

The Lord’s Supper is not merely an outward memorial feast. The blessed reality of celebrating the Lord’s Supper is the reality of communion and fellowship with Christ. In the celebration of the Supper, we rejoice in the blessings He gives as the living Lord in the midst of His Church.

When we celebrate the Supper, we should think of Christ being both in heaven and on earth. Jesus is in heaven according to His human nature, now as the exalted glorious Lord, and according to His everywhere present divine nature Jesus is now both in heaven and earth. According to His ever present divine nature, He is never absent from us. What a blessed mystery.

July 20 – LD 29, Day 5: Celebrating the One Sacrifice of Christ in the Lord’s Supper
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Hebrews 9:22 - 28

I am going to consider question and answer 80 of the Heidelberg catechism with Lord’s Day 29. This question and answer was added later to the catechism to distinguish the serious errors of the church of Rome from true understanding of the Lord’s Supper. We have in an earlier meditation already made mention of this. In the sovereign providence of the Lord, when the church must defend the truth of God’s word against error, she often enriches her understanding of the positive truth of God’s word at the same time. Question and answer 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes the serious errors of the church of Rome with regards to her doctrine on the Lord’s Supper. Be sure to read this question and answer before you continue with this meditation.

The most serious error of the church of Rome is her belief that in the mass, the priest must offer Christ again under the elements of the transubstantiated bread and wine. The communion table in the church of Rome has been changed to an altar. This re-offering of Christ under the elements of the bread and wine is being performed daily in the church of Rome by the Roman Catholic priest in the ceremonies of the mass when he places the bread and wine on the ‘alter.’ Further, it is maintained that the sacrifice of Christ will not benefit those who come to the mass unless it is offered again by a human priest in the mass. The church of Rome pronounces a curse on all those who do not agree with this false teaching.

The Reformed Church considers this to be a very serious error. It maintains that this re-offering of Christ by the priest is a denial of the once and for all perfect sacrifice on the cross. What an affront that is to our Lord!

In the Reformed Church, the Lord’s Supper is a celebration of the once and for all perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This sacrifice was made by the Lord Jesus Himself, who is God’s own Son. This sacrifice involved the sacrifice of His own blessed body. It was perfect and therefore never again needed to be repeated. How can a repeated offering by a mere human priest who is a sinner just like all of us are, add anything to the perfect sacrifice of Christ Himself?

The sacrifice of Jesus was absolutely perfect. It was infinitely precious in the sight of God. It made atonement for all the sins of all of God’s people. It merited perfect and everlasting righteousness for all of the elect of God. It obtained for all those who belong to Christ and believe in Him all the blessings of salvation and the hope of life eternal.

In Heb 9:12 we read “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.” In verse 28 of the same chapter we read, “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation.”

We look for no repetition of this offering. To repeat this offering is implying that the sacrifice of Christ was not perfect, there is a need for another offering.

As Reformed believers, we say with the inspired apostle Paul, “...God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ...” Gal 6:14

July 21 – LD 29, Day 6: Worshiping Christ in Heaven and Not on Earth
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Colossians 3:1 - 11.

The church of Rome believes that in the Lord's Supper, the bread and wine are changed into the literal body and blood of Christ. Because of this imagination, it is the practice of the church of Rome to worship Christ in the elements. When a person comes to the communion rail and receives the wafer from the hands of the Roman Catholic priest, he or she is taught to bow before the consecrated wafer. Wherever the remains of the consecrated elements of the mass are kept in the church, the members of the church are taught to bow in worship. There have been times in church history when the transubstantiated elements of the Lord's Supper have been paraded through the streets and Roman Catholic devotees lining the streets have bowed before them in adoration. There were also times when the consecrated elements were kept under glass some where in the church and people came to worship before them.

There are statements in the decrees of the council of Trent that emphatically declare that the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper are supposed to be worthy of the same honor and worship as Christ Jesus Himself.

The Reformed Church declares the practices of the church of Rome to be accursed idolatry. Idolatry is giving honor to someone or something other than God. The honor of worship is only due to God. It is idolatry to worship the elements of the Lord's Supper for they are in fact ordinary bread and wine and they are in no sense God or Jesus.

Christ Jesus is now not bodily on earth. The church of Rome is wrong in its teaching on the Lord's Supper to insist that Christ's literal body and blood are present in the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper and there to be worshipped.

We know from God's Word that Christ is now in heaven. He is there as the glorified Lord sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high, even God the Father.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we do not worship the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, nor do we have any superstitious regard for them. They are but ordinary bread and wine. They have no power in themselves to bless.

Rather, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we lift up our hearts through His Spirit in our hearts. We lift up our hearts to worship Christ who is now enthroned in glory in heaven. He alone is worthy of our worship. He appears now in heaven as the Lamb of God who by His sacrifice atoned for all of our sins. We worship and adore Him, giving Him all the thanks of all our hearts for His loving sacrifice and perfect obedience whereby we have the forgiveness of sins and righteousness and eternal life. We look by faith to Christ as He is now in heaven as the source and fountain of all the blessings of salvation. No one else, nothing else beside the blessed Triune God is worthy of worship. Jesus along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is worthy of our worship because He is the Son of God in our human nature.

Think about these great truths every time you celebrate the Lord's Supper!

July 22 – LD 29, Day 7: Christ in Heaven, His Church On Earth
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Luke 22:14 - 20

There is one more beautiful truth concerning the Lord's Supper referred to in the Heidelberg Catechism that we want to meditate on. Christ gave the Lord's Supper to His church to celebrate on earth knowing that He Himself would soon go to heaven. Ever since His ascension, Christ is now bodily in heaven and His church is on earth.

In Luke 22:15-16, we find one of the records of the institution of the Lord's Supper. Jesus said to His disciples, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

If the church imagines that Christ is still bodily on earth when she celebrates the Lord's Supper, she becomes confused as to why she must still look for His coming again in glory. The true understanding of the Lord's Supper teaches that Christ is in heaven and His church is on earth. The church is comforted by the spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper and the continual remembrance of the blessings of salvation He merited on the cross and continues to pour out on His church.

However, the joy of the church is not yet perfect. The church looks with eager expectation and longing for the glorious and blessed return of the Lord. Only then will she have perfect fellowship with her Lord. Only then will her joy be made perfect in the presence of her Lord in heaven.

The apostle Paul, in teaching us about the Lord's Supper in I Cor 11, states that in celebrating the Lord's Supper, the church must "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." As long as the church is on earth, she must preach the gospel. The truth of the suffering and death of Christ on the cross is to be central to this preaching. The church also preaches the truth of the resurrection and ascension of Christ and the blessed hope of His coming again, all of which follow from what Christ accomplished on the cross.

The proper celebration of the Lord's Supper also includes an earnest longing for His coming again. The church celebrates the Lord's Supper with the view to His coming again.

She is as a bride waiting for the coming of her bridegroom.

The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the fact that Christ is not now on earth but in heaven. We are however engrafted into Christ. We are members of His body. Christ is our head. The body of Christ, which is the church, longs to be finally with Christ, her head in heaven. This longing is worked in the hearts of the members of the church by the Spirit of the exalted Christ.

Only when the church is in heaven with Christ will she be able to have perfect communion and fellowship with Him. Phil 3:20 speaks of the truth that even presently "our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ:" Properly, the celebration of the Lord's Supper encourages us to look to Jesus in heaven, and stirs up the hope that we have in our hearts by the Spirit of Christ.

Interestingly, according to the prophecy of Rev 19, we look for another feast which is even more wonderful than the Lord's Supper, which we will celebrate together with all the saints in heavenly glory. This feast will be the great heavenly marriage feast of the Lamb. "Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor unto Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready." Rev19:7

**The Second Part - Of Man's Deliverance
Of The Holy Supper Of Our Lord Jesus Christ
[Remainder of] Lord's Day 30**

Question 81. For whom is the Lord's supper instituted?

Answer. For those who are truly sorrowful [g] for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities [h] are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly [i] 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 [j] drink judgment to themselves.

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

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

[g]: [Mat. 5:3,6](#); [Luke 7:37,38](#); [Luke 15:18,19](#)

[h]: [Psa. 103:3](#)

[i]: [Psa. 116:12,13,14](#); [1Pet. 2:11,12](#)

[j]: [1Cor. 10:20ff](#); [1Cor. 11:28ff](#); [Tit. 1:16](#); [Psa. 50:15,16](#)

[k]: [1Cor. 10:21](#); [1Cor. 11:30,31](#); [Isa. 1:11,13](#); [Jer. 7:21](#); [Psa. 50:16,22](#)

[l]: [Mat. 18:17,18](#)

July 23 – LD 30, Day 1: Careful Observance of the Lord’s Supper
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: I Corinthians 11:17 - 34

In the last few meditations on the truth of the Lord’s Supper, we shall focus on the question of who may come to the table of the Lord. The Lord’s Supper must be carefully observed. This follows from its holy meaning and significance. In this sacrament, we remember the amazing wonder of the suffering of our Savior in His death on the cross, and what this sacrifice accomplished for us. We believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is spiritually present with His church when the Lord’s Supper is properly observed. We have communion and fellowship with Him, and through faith we partake of the blessings He has merited for us on the cross. This requires a certain sincere spiritual attitude and worship of Christ.

Lord’s Day 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism gives us a very significant instruction. This instruction can be divided into two parts. Question and answer 81 deals with the personal question of examining ourselves and impresses on us the importance of coming in humble repentance and faith to the Lord’s Supper. Question and answer 82 deals with the responsibility of the church, through her elders, to supervise the administration of the Supper so that no ungodly person is allowed to come to the Supper.

The passage I asked you to read from I Cor 11 gives us important instruction. This passage is part of the special revelation concerning the Lord’s Supper that Jesus personally gave to the apostle Paul while Paul was being prepared for his office and work as an apostle of the Lord. In the next few meditations, we will refer often to this passage.

In the Reformed Church, it is common that two important activities are practiced whenever the Lord’s Supper is administered. First, there is a week of spiritual preparation before the Lord’s Supper is celebrated. During this week, the members of the church who are going to celebrate the Lord’s Supper together are admonished to examine themselves.

Self-examination is a personal and spiritual exercise.

Secondly, the Reformed church believes that the church must supervise those who come to the table of the Lord. Those who are members of the church are under the regular supervision of the elders of the church who are appointed by Christ, we believe, to take spiritual oversight over the lives of the members of the church. Members in good standing are exhorted to join the celebrations of the Lord’s Supper. Visitors from other denominations which have not been under the oversight of the elders are interviewed and questioned concerning their confession of the truth and their life as Christians. This practice is given various names in the church, such as ‘close communion’, ‘supervised communion’, or ‘restricted communion’. There are some differences regarding this practice among Reformed Churches. Some do not allow anyone who is not a member of the particular local church to join the communion table. Others allow visitors who express agreement in faith and testify of a sincere godly walk to join the table.

Those who do not understand this practice might be offended if they are questioned with regards to their faith and Christian living before they are allowed to come to the Lord’s Table. What everyone must understand, however, is that the holiness of the Lord’s Supper must be regarded. The glory of our Lord, and proper regard for the sacredness of His sacrifice for us on the cross, is most important.

July 24 – LD 30, Day 2: For Whom Was the Lord’s Supper Instituted?
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: I John 1

The question posed above is beautifully answered by the Heidelberg Catechism. Be sure to read Lord’s Day 30 again if you have not already done so. Before anyone comes to the Lord’s Supper, they should carefully examine themselves. This requirement is spoken of in the passages you were asked to read yesterday from I Cor 11.

The Lord’s Supper was instituted for those who are truly sorrowful over their sins. This sacrament is not for those who imagine that they are righteous in themselves. We do not come to this sacrament to boast that we are without sin. If we indeed were without sin, there would be no need for us to come to the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper presents to us the amazing sacrifice Jesus made on our behalf to atone for our sins. The whole reason for all the shame, agony and suffering of Jesus on the cross was the greatness of our sins, your sins and my sins. We certainly cannot have proper regard for the Lord’s Supper if we are not conscious of the seriousness of our own sins. The Lord’s Supper was instituted for those who sincerely and heartily repent of their sins.

We do not come to the Lord’s Supper to testify that we have arrived at some high spiritual state of holiness above the other members of the church. Every true child of God will confess concerning himself that he is still a great sinner. John says in I John 1 that if we say that we have no sin, we lie, and the truth is not in us.

We must know our own sins and the seriousness of these sins against God. The seriousness of our sin is not merely that we have done evil against our fellow men or because we are in trouble and distress in our lives as a result of our sin. Our sins are so very serious because they were committed against the most high majesty of God. When David confessed the grievous sins of his adultery with Bathsheba and his murdering of Uriah, he confessed before God in deep sorrow of heart, “Against thee, only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest.”

To be sorry for our sins, we must understand that our sins are very many, and they have grievously offended the holy majesty of God. In order to understand the reality of this, we need to remember that according to the Word of God, our sins are not merely a matter of the words we have spoken and the evil deeds we have done. Our sins involve the secret thoughts, desires, and purposes of our hearts as well. God knows all of these. He judges our heart. He requires perfection in our inward being as well as in our outward walk.

Every unclean thought, every inclination to pride and self-centeredness, every impulse of anger and hatred against God and the neighbor, is sin. The worldliness of our purposes, the adultery of our hearts, the hatred we might harbor against our brother even for a moment, even all these are known to God and they are sinful.

Even weakness of faith, doubt and anxiety, is sin. We are sinful Christians because we are not really devoted to God with our whole heart. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks of the fact that even the most holy man in this life has but a small beginning of this new obedience. Our shortcomings and our failures are part of the reality of our sins before God. When we come to the Lord’s Supper, we must be truly sorry for all of these. We must examine ourselves in the light of God’s Word, the absolutely perfect standard for Christian living.

July 25 – LD 30, Day 3: Those Who Come to the Lord’s Supper Must Believe in the Cross of Jesus Christ, Desire to Have Their Faith More and More Strengthened and Their Lives Made More and More Holy.

by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Isaiah 53

Be sure to read question and answer 81 of the Heidelberg Catechism again before you read this meditation.

Those who come to the Lord’s Supper must desire that their sins be forgiven them. We sin daily. Our sins are grievous in God’s sight. We must be truly sorry for them and repent of them. We long for the assurance that all our sins were forgiven us for the sake of Christ Jesus and because of His great sacrifice on the cross.

To come to the Supper of the Lord, we must of course have a true and saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. We must know and believe that He is God’s own Son. We must understand why Jesus Christ died on the cross, and what He accomplished through His death on the cross. New Christians should receive instruction in the great truths of the gospel, especially in the truths of what it means that Jesus, in the greatness of His love, offered Himself for us on the cross. His sacrifice was absolutely necessary to pay for our sins. In our coming to the Lord’s Supper, we should be consciously thinking about, and meditating on the truths of Christ and of His cross, and the amazing wonder of His love for us.

Our sins incur the just and holy wrath of God. They separate us from God. They make us worthy of His judgment. We deserve to be condemned because of our sins. So serious are our sins against the Holy God that we deserve to be forever cast away from His presence into the everlasting torment of hell.

Jesus died the awful death of the cross to pay for our sins. He suffered the wrath of God on our behalf. He bore the judgment of God that our sins deserved. By His death on the cross, He paid the awful penalty of our sins. He satisfied the justice of God. He even bore the agony of hell that our sins deserved. In the deepest hour of His suffering, the dreadful darkness that came over the cross, Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “My God, My God, Why hast thou forsaken me.”

When we come to the Lord’s Supper, we must desire to have our faith more and more strengthened. The Lord’s Supper is for those who are weak in faith. We are all weak in faith. The Lord gave us this sacrament to encourage us and to strengthen our weak faith.

When we come to the Lord’s Supper, we must desire to have our lives made more and more holy. Holiness is love and consecration to God. There is no greater power to motivate us to holy living than the true spiritual remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross. This is the purpose of the Lord’s Supper.

We are helpless against the power of sin. We cannot overcome the power of sin ourselves, as it continues to operate in our sinful nature and heart. Only God, by the power of His grace and Holy Spirit, can, and will deliver us from the destruction of sin in our lives. He is pleased to do this through the preaching of His word, and through our observing the Lord’s Supper. True Christian living is holiness before God. Holiness is separation from sin. It is love for God. Holiness is spiritual perfection and devotion to God. Only when we are made holy by the grace and Spirit of God can we have fellowship with God and with His Son Jesus Christ. Of this, the Lord’s Supper is a sign and pledge.

July 26 – LD 30, Day 4: Hypocrites and Such as Do Not Turn to God With Sincere Hearts, Eat and Drink Judgment to Themselves

by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Psalm 50:16 - 23

The apostle Paul in I Cor 11 speaks of how serious it is when a person comes to the table of the Lord and does not truly repent of sin. They become guilty of the body and blood of Christ. They eat and drink judgment to themselves.

The Lord intended that the Lord's Supper should be the source of great blessing and encouragement for His people. But when one comes with a sinful attitude to the Lord's Supper, he eats and drinks judgment to himself. How awful this is! God's Word warns us about this, and we must take this warning seriously. When one partakes of the Lord's Supper with an evil heart of unbelief and sin, he makes himself guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. What could be more serious than this! Who would deserve a more severe judgment than one who is guilty of crucifying the Son of God afresh?

The Heidelberg Catechism warns us about hypocrisy. In Jer 17:9 - 10, we read, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it? I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." A hypocrite is a sham. He pretends to be what he is not. Before the world, he tries to show himself as some great saint, while in his heart and life, he is really evil and refuses to repent at all.

God exposes the hypocrite. He cannot hide before God. God knows the heart when it is evil. Man cannot escape His condemnation. God searches the heart of man through His Word which 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." Heb 4: 12.

The ungodly must be warned not to come to the Holy Supper of the Lord lest he be condemned. The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of holy fellowship with God and with Jesus Christ. The impenitent man who does not turn to God, as we all should, will be judged by God. Many professing Christians today do not want to hear anything negative. Serious warnings from God's own Word must be sounded forth and listened to.

These warnings are not intended to frighten us or to discourage us from coming to the Lord's Supper. We must examine our own hearts, repent and turn again unto the Lord. In the spiritual activity of examining ourselves, we must earnestly pray that God will help us. A proper prayer in preparing ourselves to come to the Lord's Supper is the humble prayer of Psa 139:23 - 24. "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."

As fearful and necessary as these warnings are, no sincere Christian should be terrified by them. God will receive in mercy all those who come in humble and sincere repentance to Him. Those who come to the Lord with humble and sincere hearts, genuinely repenting of their sins, will be blessed by partaking of the Lord's Supper. After all, the Lord gave us this sacrament not to turn us from Him in fear and dread, but to assure us that all our sins are forgiven us for the sake of Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross. We receive this assurance with humble faith and thankfulness to God.

July 27 – LD 30, Day 5: The Need for Supervision of the Lord’s Table
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Hebrews 13: 7 and 17 - 21

Up to now, we have been considering the need of every believer who comes to the Lord’s Supper, to prepare himself through self examination. This is a deeply personal calling and responsibility.

The elders of the church have the calling to supervise the administration of the Lord’s Supper. I Cor 4:1 speaks of the fact that the ministers of Christ are ‘stewards of the mysteries of God’. In I Cor 11, where Paul gives extensive instruction about the proper observance of the Lord’s Supper, he in fact admonishes the whole church concerning this serious matter. Because the church of Corinth was careless about the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, and was tolerating heresies and divisions among her members, therefore the judgment of God came upon the whole church. Many were sick in the church and many were asleep. The reference to falling asleep is to death. So serious was the judgment of God on this church!

Elders, properly elected and ordained in the church, receive their authority from Christ and His apostles. The members of the church must submit to the oversight of the elders.

The matter of who may come to the Supper of the Lord must not be left entirely to the discretion of the members of the church. It is common in many churches, that the only thing that is done to fulfill the calling of the elders to supervise the Lord’s Supper, is to make a very general announcement before the celebration of the Supper, that sincere Christians who have repented of their sins and confessed faith in Jesus Christ, may come to the table of the Lord. More is involved than this in the oversight of the elders.

The Lord’s Supper was given to be celebrated by the church spiritually. There are hypocrites mixed with the true members of the church. This is Satan’s work as the parable of the wheat and tares teach us.

The Lord’s Supper is not a public ceremony. It is not one to which the whole world is invited. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he was in the upper room in intimate fellowship with His disciples who by His grace, were one with Him, believing in Him and keeping His commandments. It is wonderful that true people of God join together to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in close fellowship with the Lord and with each other.

Evil men and false teachers do not belong to this communion. We believe that the right reading of the gospel accounts suggests that Judas was dismissed before the Lord instituted the Supper. There are often those who join the worship services, but do not know and acknowledge their sins. Some are ignorant concerning the truth. Some, even though they know their sins, will not acknowledge and confess their sins, and wrongly imagine that their sins need not be confessed and repented of.

Christ, through His apostles, has appointed elders to have spiritual oversight of the church. No one who will be a member of the church, may despise this oversight and refuse to submit to it for his own spiritual benefit and correction. The Lord has given to the elders the calling to watch over the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, to guard the honor and glory of the name of the Lord every time this sacrament is administered in the midst of His church.

July 28 – LD 30, Day 6: Supervising Our Confession and Life
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Ephesians 4: 11 - 16

In celebrating the Lord's Supper, the church must be united together in the blessed truth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Her members must also be committed to live by this truth in all godliness and sincerity. There is freedom and space for differences on minor issues, but the church must be truly one in knowing, loving, and confessing the great doctrines of Jesus Christ and of salvation in Him.

Paul admonished the church of Corinth because when she celebrated the Lord's Supper, there were divisions and heresies among her. I Cor 11: 18 - 19.

There are many churches where it does not matter what a person believes. Everyone has the right, these churches say, to their own opinions and private interpretations of scripture. There is no absolute truth. There are many different interpretations of scripture. One is not more right than the other. The members of such churches come to the table of the Lord in some sort of vague spirit of brotherhood and human friendliness. Everyone claiming in a very shallow and general way to be a Christian is allowed to come to the table of the Lord. Differences with official positions of the church are allowed. Often, in these churches, even grossly ungodly living is tolerated in a false spirit of so-called Christian love.

The truth of God can and must be known from the infallible scriptures which are the Word of God, and by the enlightening of the Spirit of Christ in the church. The elders must be constantly engaged in teaching and preaching the truth of the Lord and admonishing the members of the church to live by this truth. They must be courageous to defend the truth and resist false teachers and evil works. By so doing, the church is built upon the truth and is able to stand strong in a world of confusion and ungodliness.

Members of the church must walk humbly with one another, putting down every inclination of pride and self-exaltation in the church which can so easily arise from our sinful nature. The elders must labor among members of the church when divisions threaten her blessed and glorious unity in Christ.

Heresies divide the church. Knowledge and love for the truth unites her. False teachers must be identified and corrected, and if they do not repent, they must be rejected. Titus 1:9 - 11 and 3:10.

Impenitent wickedness must be properly dealt with by the elders of the church through the use of the keys of the kingdom, which is Christian discipline.

By the Lord's Supper, we show our unity in Christ in doctrine and life. We read of the church of Pentecost that her members "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers ...And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking of bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."

Sinful divisions in the church may not be ignored when she celebrates the Lord's Supper. They must be resolved, and peace and love must prevail among the members of the church before the Lord's Supper can properly be administered. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ is exalted when we know and love and maintain His truth in His church. The elders of the church are appointed to guard the church from errors and preserve her blessed unity.

July 29 – LD 30, Day 7: Those Who By Their Confession and Life Declare Themselves to be Unbelieving and Ungodly Must be Kept From the Table of the Lord
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Isaiah 1: 11 - 20

The above quoted words of the Heidelberg Catechism are strong words. There are churches that boast of tolerating everyone no matter what they believe or how they live. They maintain that such tolerance shows the love and friendliness of the church. If however, error and ungodly living is tolerated and there is no admonition and no discipline in the church, the end result will be that the name of Christ will be dishonored in the church and it will be impossible to properly observe the Lord's Supper in a God-glorifying way. The concern of the church must rise higher than merely pleasing certain individuals who are her members, or fear of offending them.

So serious is this matter of keeping ungodly men from the table of the Lord that the catechism states that if such sinful tolerance is permitted in the church, the covenant of God will be profaned and the wrath of God kindled against the whole church. The Lord's Supper celebrates the covenant of God. The highest purpose for which the church celebrates the Lord's Supper is the worship of God and glorifying Him.

The apostle Paul had to admonish the church of Corinth because divisions and heresies were tolerated in her midst. Paul says emphatically that he did not praise the church for this. He points out in I Cor 11 that the wrath of God came upon the whole church so that many were sick and many fell asleep (died). Therefore, the church of Corinth was called to repentance. The implication, as can be gathered from the rest of Paul's letter to the church of Corinth, was that the elders had to rectify this matter. Only when heresy and ungodliness was removed from the church did she again experience the blessing of the Lord upon her.

One of the famous actions of the great Reformer, John Calvin, recorded by church historians that loved the truth of the Reformation, was an incident that took place in Geneva where Calvin was the pastor at the time. He was convinced that certain evil men called the libertarians should not be allowed to come to the table of the Lord. When these men insisted on coming to the table regardless of what they were told, Calvin placed himself bodily in front of the communion table and refused to allow them to come to the table of the Lord.

It takes great courage and strength to stand for the truth in our day. It takes great zeal and love for the honor and glory of the Lord to insist on maintaining the truth and opposing error and wickedness that can, and does at times even come into the church. There is little of this kind of zeal in our day in many churches. Tolerance for all sorts of evils and for false teachers in the church has caused the church to be over run by heretics, and corrupted by the false teaching of ungodly men. When this happens, the name of God is blasphemed. That is how serious this is. May God give us men of courage who stand for the truth. And may we, as members of the church, know and love the truth, instruct one another and build one another up in the truth. May we also be an example and encouragement to our fellow saints to maintain true godliness not only for our own personal lives, but also in the midst of His church. When faithful elders maintain the truth, and peace and unity prevails in the church, she will be greatly blessed of God in her celebration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and His glory will shine in her midst.

The Second Part - Of Man's Deliverance
Of The Holy Supper Of Our Lord Jesus Christ
Lord's Day 31

Question 83. What are [a] the keys of the kingdom of heaven?

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

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

Answer. Thus: when according to the command of [d] Christ, it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, that, whenever they [e] 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 [f] condemnation, so long as they are [g] unconverted: according to which testimony of the gospel, God will judge them both in this and in the life to come.

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

Answer. Thus: when according [h] to the command of Christ, those, who under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines or practices [i] 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, [j] or to those who are thereunto [k] appointed by the church; and if they despise their admonition, [l] 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 [m] received as members of Christ and his church.

[a]: [Mat. 16:19](#)

[b]: [John 20:23](#)

[c]: [Mat. 18:15,16,17,18](#)

[d]: [Mat. 28:19](#)

[e]: [John 3:18,36](#); [Mark 16:16](#)

[f]: [2Thes. 1:7,8,9](#)

[g]: [John 20:21,22,23](#); [Mat. 16:19](#); [Rom. 2:2,13-17](#)

[h]: [Mat. 18:15](#)

[i]: [1Cor. 5:12](#)

[j]: [Mat. 18:15-18](#)

[k]: [Rom. 12:7,8,9](#); [1Cor. 12:28](#); [1Tim. 5:17](#); [2Thes. 3:14](#)

[l]: [Mat. 18:17](#); [1Cor. 5:3,4,5](#)

[m]: [2Cor. 2:6,7,8,10,11](#); [Luke 15:18](#)

July 30 – LD 31, Day 1: The Keys of the Kingdom
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 16:13 - 20

Lord's Day 31 speaks about the authority and discipline of the church. In describing this authority, the Heidelberg Catechism uses a Biblical figure. This figure does not have its origin with the Heidelberg Catechism but with God's own Word. The figure is used in several places in scripture, including in the passage that you were asked to read for this meditation. The same idea is also spoken of in John 20:23, and also Rev 3:7.

The kingdom of God is pictured as though it is a high-walled fortress. Cities in the Old Testament time had such walls to protect them from being overrun and destroyed by enemies. Access in and out of this city is only through a gate. The key is the power to open and close this gate for those going in and out.

Jesus spoke very often during His ministry about the kingdom of God. The entire Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matt 5 - 7 has the truth of the kingdom as its main theme. Jesus also called this kingdom the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of righteousness and glory. It is also referred to as the kingdom of Christ. When we are saved by the wonder of the grace of God, we are made citizens of this kingdom.

The kingdom of God is the spiritual realm where God rules in absolute sovereignty and power. God is known and acknowledged by the subjects of this kingdom. The authority of this kingdom was given to the hands of Jesus when He was exalted to the right hand of God. See John 5:22 - 23. The King in God's kingdom is, and must be obeyed and served by these subjects. The citizens of the kingdom know and do the word of Christ their king. Within the walls of the kingdom, the citizens are protected by God and by King Jesus from their greatest enemies. Being a citizen of this kingdom is exceedingly blessed and glorious. This kingdom will be finally realized in all of its perfection and glory in the new heavens and earth when Jesus comes again at the end of time. King Jesus will come to establish His kingdom of righteousness after overthrowing the wicked kingdoms of this world. In the everlasting heavenly kingdom, Jesus will reveal His glory and power among the subjects of His kingdom whom He has redeemed by His sacrifice on the cross.

The concepts 'kingdom' and 'church' in the figure "keys of the kingdom" refer to the same blessed reality. King Jesus is Lord and King both of His church and kingdom. The true members of the church of Jesus Christ are now, and will in heaven, also be the citizens of this kingdom. Christ has given authority to His Church to rule in His kingdom while this Church is still on earth.

Today, the power of the keys are given by the Lord Himself, especially to the pastors and elders of the church. These elders have a very serious responsibility to properly exercise their power and authority for the benefit of the citizens of the kingdom and the glory of Christ the King.

The power of the keys is a very great power. Imagine what Jesus says in Matt 16: 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." In our meditations on Lord's Day 31 of the Heidelberg Catechism this week, we want to consider something about what all of this means. I hope that you, the reader, will take a great interest in this subject and meditate on it.

July 31 – LD 31, Day 2: The Spiritual Nature of the Keys of the Kingdom
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: John 20:19 - 23

The keys' power is spiritual in nature. This is very important for everyone to understand. The same thing can be said in another way. The authority which Christ has given to His church on earth is spiritual in nature, not physical. God has given physical earthly power to the state. This power is called in scripture the power of the sword. See Rom 13: 1 - 3. Kings and princes, governors, prime ministers and other rulers of the nations of this world were given by God the power of the sword. The power of the sword is the power to maintain law and order in the state. It is the power to administer physical punishment to the evildoers and the power to reward those who do well. As Christians, we are to honor all those in authority over us. This honor is especially shown by submission and obedience. Those who do evil should fear being punished by the state for their evil doing. The Bible teaches that the government does not bear the sword in vain, so we ought to have a proper fear of those whom God has appointed to rule in the state. The state even has the power to put those who do great evil to death. The power of the sword given to the state is also the right to defend itself against aggressors and to wage war against them.

The power of the keys which Christ has given to the church however is spiritual. The church does great wrong when she imagines that she also has the sword's power. She does wrong when she threatens physical punishment to those whom she judges even rightly, to be wrong. She does wrong when she takes up the sword and engages in war to advance the cause of the kingdom of Christ and His truth. God has not given this power to the church. Throughout history there have been churches who have imagined that the church has the power of the sword. She has engaged herself in worldly politics. She has been the leader to stir up revolt against governments perceived to be unjust. She has at times even encouraged civil disobedience. Any church who does this does not have the blessing of God. She will herself be punished by the state and God will judge her through this punishment.

The key power given to the church is spiritual. It has to do with declaring the forgiveness of sin and the salvation of God's people.

That the power of the keys is spiritual does not mean that it is really nothing, and that it need not be feared because such spiritual power really cannot do anything. That would be a very grave mistake. The spiritual power of the keys of the kingdom is the power to open and shut the kingdom of God. It is the wonderful power to declare to the penitent sinner that their sins are forgiven them for the sake of Christ Jesus. Believers are declared righteous before the sovereign of heaven and earth. God's people are promised a place in the glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ. The key power is certainly a great and wonderful power.

The power of the keys is also the fearful power to declare to impenitent sinners that as long as they continue in their wicked sin and impenitent lives, they are in danger of being cast out of the kingdom unto everlasting judgment in hell by the just and holy God.

The power of the keys is ultimately that of Christ, the king of His kingdom. In the book of Revelation, it is said that Christ has the key of hell and death. Rev 1: 18. It is also said with reference to the kingdom of God, that Christ is the one who opens and no man shuts, and shuts and no man opens. Rev 3: 7.

**August 1 – LD 31, Day 3: The Wonderful Power of the Preaching of the Gospel to Open the Kingdom
by Rev Arie den Hartog**

Read: John 3:16 - 18 - 36.

How wonderful from a positive point of view is the power of the Gospel! The power of the gospel is the power of Jesus Christ. It is not the power of a mere man, not even that of a preacher of the gospel. The statement "According to the command of Christ" Is mentioned twice this Lord's Day. The key power of the kingdom is the power of the declaration and preaching of the Word of Christ, the sovereign king of His kingdom.

The wonderful positive power of the key of the kingdom is this. "When according to the command of Christ it is declared and publicly testified to all and every believer, (by the preaching) 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."

All men are by nature born as sinners. There is none righteous, no, not one. Because of this awful reality, all men stand condemned before the just and holy God, the sovereign of heaven and earth. They have no part in the kingdom of God. Any man who does not repent, no matter who he or she might be, no matter how great he might imagine himself to be, no matter how popular and honorable he might be before the men of this world, before God he stands condemned. For this reason, he has no place in God's kingdom.

When we are living according to the Word of God, it matters not what men may say of us. But what does matter, what should be the absolutely most important concern of our life, is what God says concerning us.

The gospel is God's good news that declares that all those who repent and believe in Christ by a true faith will be saved. They will be saved because their sins are forgiven them through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. As long as a person is an impenitent sinner, he stands condemned. He is in danger of being thrown into everlasting hell. The gospel promises that all those who truly believe in Jesus Christ, will immediately receive life from God in Jesus Christ. The gospel declares that those who truly believe in Jesus Christ the Son of God, the Savior who sacrificed Himself on the cross for the sins of His people, will become heirs of His everlasting and glorious kingdom. This is what it means that the preaching of the gospel is the key power of the kingdom!

The duty of the church through her ministers is to preach the gospel of Christ in all its truth, power and glory. She may not ever compromise the truth of the gospel. The church may not say something to men that Christ has not said. The church has the solemn obligation through her ministers to be faithful ministers of Christ, and official heralds of His truth, bringing nothing but the Word of Christ in all its power, beauty and holiness. The church must declare the truth of God and also the perfect demands of His holy law.

Whenever the church preaches the gospel, she must sound forth the serious call to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Without repentance, there can be no salvation. But to the penitent sinner, the gospel declares the hope of salvation and the inheritance of the glorious kingdom of Christ.

The preaching of the gospel is the power of the Spirit of God to bring about repentance in the hearts of God's people and to give them hope, assurance and comfort with regard to their citizenship and blessing in the glorious kingdom of Christ, in spite of the shame, persecution and suffering they experience in this present world.

**August 2 – LD 31, Day 4: The Discriminating Power of the Preaching of the Gospel
by Rev Arie den Hartog**

Read: II Thessalonians 1:1 - 9

The preaching of the Word of Christ must sound a note of warning to those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways. According to the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, the sounding of the word of warning is the exercise of the keys of the kingdom. The catechism has this to say; “and on the contrary, when it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and to 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 life and in the life to come.”

It is especially this aspect of the power of the keys of the kingdom that many churches neglect. They teach that God loves all men. They teach that God has a wonderful plan for everyone. Many minimize the seriousness of sin. Recently, there has been a lot of public media attention in the United States on a famous preacher who declares that there is no hell. All men in the end are going to be saved. This, he deduces from his false understanding of the love of God for all men. A God who loves all men certainly will not cast the majority of the human race into everlasting hell. According to this preacher, all talk about the future of man is mere speculation. This preacher has a large following, and no wonder. Foolish and sinful men want to expel from their thinking any fear of the judgment of God upon their worldliness, ungodliness and gross wickedness.

God is indeed a God of mercy and love, according to which He saves His people in spite of their unworthiness and sin. But God is also a God of severe justice. Holiness and righteousness are absolute perfections of God. Because of the holiness of God, He pours out His wrath on the wicked ungodly. He will in the last day judge them by His own standard of perfect righteousness and give them the judgment which they justly deserve.

In fact, the Bible warns in Luke that servants who knew the word of their lord and did not listen and obey it, shall be beaten with double punishment. The meaning is that those who have heard the preaching of the gospel and the call to repentance, and have hardened their hearts to it, will have an even more severe judgment than the millions who die without ever hearing the preaching of the gospel. See Luke 12:47 - 48.

It is the solemn duty of the church to be very serious about sin. God hates not only those sins of word and deed, but all evil thoughts and desires of men’s hearts when they are not repented of. Our modern times are one of great apostasy. One of the main characteristics of this apostasy is the minimization of sin. Churches that do not warn men about God’s judgment on sin are not the ministers of salvation for men, but they are in fact deceivers of men. The blood of the men that they have failed to warn will be on them.

The faithful preacher of the gospel of Christ, in obedience to His word, must sound a clear warning about the seriousness of sin. He must clearly set forth exactly what sin is. He must show how sin is absolutely contrary to the Word of God. He must warn of the severe judgment of God that will come on the impenitent. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of an angry God. And we who also hear this Word of God, must repent and turn to Christ in whom alone is deliverance from judgment and salvation.

August 3 – LD 31, Day 5: Christian Discipline
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: I Corinthians 5:1 - 12.

There are two keys of the kingdom. In our last meditations, we have been talking about the preaching of the Word, which is the first and primary key of the kingdom. The second key is Christian discipline administered by the church. The church must also use this key in obedience to, and in honor of Christ. Several of the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in the first three chapters of the book of Revelation contain strong warnings to churches who were not dealing with evil persons in their midst through the use of Christian discipline.

Christian discipline is an official work which the church must perform through her elders. It involves admonishing sinners who are members of the church to repent. When after repeated admonition, those continuing to live in sin do not repent, they must be excommunicated from the Christian church. Excommunication is a public declaration concerning an impenitent sinner, that he is no longer a member of the church, and that he is barred from the privileges and blessings of church membership, such as partaking of the Lord's Supper. When a person who has been disciplined in a Biblical way is finally excommunicated, he or she is to be shunned. The members of the church are exhorted not to have any fellowship with that person in the hope that he or she will be ashamed and turn from his or her wicked course of life.

Christian discipline is a fearful work. But it has positive purposes. The primary purpose is that the sinner might repent and be saved by the mercy of God. For this, the church must continually pray while the process of discipline is being performed. There is need of discipline in order to maintain the holiness and purity of the church. There must be concern that the name of Christ be not blasphemed by the world when gross public sinners are allowed to continue as members of the church. Christian discipline must also deal with those who are false teachers in the church. If false teachers are allowed to continue in the church, the truth of Christ will be corrupted, and there is great danger that other members of the church will be lead astray from the truth by these false teachers. Paul warned the elders of the church of Ephesus that the time would come, after his departure, that evil men would arise from among the membership of the church. How shocking! Paul calls these grievous wolves, who do not spare the flock of Jesus Christ whom He purchased with His precious blood. He goes on to say that these evil men will speak perverse things, and draw away many disciples after them. See Acts 20: 28 - 30.

The elders of the church are exhorted to watch carefully against evil men. These must be identified and publicly admonished. Members of the church are to be warned concerning them. If these evil men do not repent, they must be excluded from the church.

Even the ordinary members of the church must be involved in and concerned about the work of discipline. We must submit ourselves to those whom God has appointed in the church as overseers to watch for the spiritual welfare of our souls. If we are disrespectful of the elders, we make their work grievous to them. When the elders admonish us about our sins, we must not be offended, but turn from our sins, for the saving of our own souls. If we belong to a church that is faithful in the exercise of discipline, we should be thankful to God. Finally, the exercise of discipline is a labor of love, love to bring the sinner to repentance, and also love for the honor and glory of the name of the Lord.

August 4 – LD 31, Day 6: The Biblical Order For Doing Christian Discipline
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read: Matthew 18: 15 - 20

Because the work of discipline by the church is a very serious matter, the Lord Himself has given us a detailed description of how discipline should be done. This order is found in the passage of Matt 18. Be sure to read this passage carefully before reading this meditation. The order given by the Lord Himself is of course characterized by His perfect wisdom. The church should always follow this order carefully. If she does not follow this order, there will often be great confusion in the church. When members of the church bring a complaint against another member, they must be told to follow this order.

Offenses that arise between brethren should be dealt with personally. They need not be told to the church. If these offenses can be resolved in a personal way by brother speaking to brother, the result will be the reconciliation of brethren in the Lord. It is a blessed thing when this takes place even with the involvement of the elders of the church.

Before an accusation against a brother is brought to the church, two witnesses should be sought. The word of one person is hard to believe. When there is only one who accuses another, the matter is often reduced to the word of one brother or sister against another brother or sister, and it is often difficult, if not impossible to establish the truth.

When the offending person refuses to repent or even acknowledge his or her sin, then it must be told to the church. The reference 'tell it to the church' in Matt 18 cannot possibly mean tell it to all in the church, to every member, or to a public assembly of the congregation. Discipline is properly the work of God's appointed elders. They are charged with this work, usually endowed with wisdom from the Lord, and best qualified to deal with this difficult work. Over time, a discipline case can become very involved and complicated.

Not every sin committed by church members should be made the object of discipline. We all sin repeatedly, and must repent of our sin daily. Everyone must confess his faults to his brother in Christ, and everyone should be ready to forgive the lesser sins, even though still serious in themselves. Everyone must constantly remember that we are all sinners. Confession and forgiving in the love of Christ covers a multitude of sins in the communion of the saints of the church.

Usually, only gross public sins which create great offences in the church are the object of church discipline. There are two types of such sins. The catechism speaks of those who, under the name of Christians, maintain doctrines that are not in harmony with the truth, that by God's grace, the church must maintain and confess together. Members of the church should be placed under discipline when they are promoting false teachings in the church and when they are living in gross public sins.

The above being said, it is also really the case that only one sin is the object of discipline. This is the sin of hardened impenitence after having been repeatedly admonished by the church. Even the most dreadful sins are forgiven by the mercy of Christ when they are repented of. And then there is no need to proceed with discipline.

If at any point in the process of discipline, the one under discipline makes sincere repentance, the discipline of this person should be lifted. This is announced to the church and there is great joy in the church because of the repentance and salvation of a sinner.

August 5 – LD 31, Day 7: A Few Additional Comments About Discipline
by Rev Arie den Hartog

Read II: Thessalonians 3:6 - 15

Christian discipline is, and must be a work of the love of Christ. It is a work of love because its first objective is the restoration of a brother to the church. Christian love must also control the manner and attitude in which the work of discipline is done. The erring brother must be repeatedly admonished in a brotherly way. This can easily be violated. As the exercise of discipline involves admonishing a person about his or her sins, it can become very emotional. Sometimes, rash accusations are thrown back and forth. Sometimes even those appointed to perform this difficult work can grow weary and become impatient. This can lead to harshness and lack of compassion.

Discipline is not a work that can be done in a hasty matter. Those who walk in sin must be repeatedly admonished. All lawful means must be tried to bring the sinner to repentance. The church must be exhorted to pray earnestly to God for the repentance of the sinner and the labors of the elders with such a person. Only when a person shows clearly that his heart is hardened, and he absolutely refuses to listen to the church, does the church proceed to the extreme remedy of excommunication.

On the other hand, the church should not extend discipline beyond a reasonable time frame. Ultimately, the impenitent sinner must not be tolerated in the church; otherwise great damage will be done to the whole church.

When discipline is performed by the church according to the Word of Christ, it has great authority and power. No one should imagine that they can be careless and flippant, when after long careful labors of the representatives of Christ in the church; they have been excommunicated from the church of Jesus Christ. Excommunication means that the impenitent sinner has indeed been excluded from the kingdom of Christ by God Himself, and is in very serious danger of being cast away from God into hell forever. Simply going to another church in order to escape discipline will not change the matter. When a person has been admonished by the church on the basis of the Word of God, and he remains impenitent, he must realize that he will be judged by, and punished by the Lord Himself. So Jesus told the disciples, whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.

Pray for the church of which you are a member, that she might be faithful in doing the work of discipline and not be ashamed, knowing that this is the will of Christ.

After a person has been excommunicated, the members of the church must have no fellowship with that person. When they do meet with that person, they have the solemn duty to call him repeatedly to repentance. If we do not do this, we ourselves become responsible for the sins of the excommunicated person.

Even after a person has been properly excommunicated by the church, there must still be earnest prayer made for the repentance and salvation of such a person.

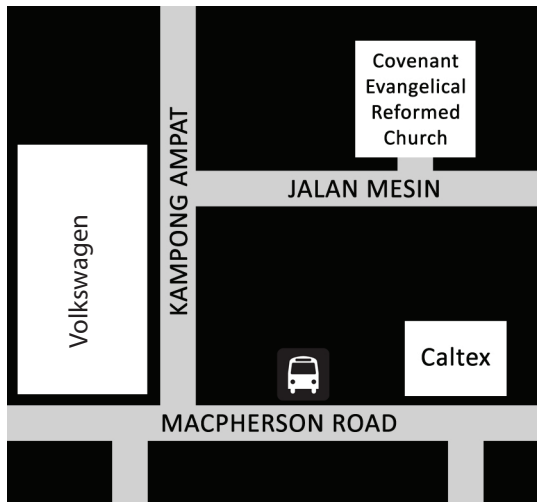
When an excommunicated person returns to the church by the grace of God, he must make confession of his or her sins against God and against the church.

When the sinner does sincerely repent, that person should be restored to the church. This occasion should always be one of great joy in the church and thankfulness to God. There is joy among the angels of heaven, before the presence of God, when even one sinner repents.



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