

Sinai: Mount of Confirmation of God's Covenant

Scripture Readings: *Exodus 24:1-18 (text); Hebrews 9:11-22*

Heidelberg Catechism Question 75

**On the occasion of the celebration of the first Lord's Supper
at Pasig Covenant Reformed Church on May 2, 2010**

Introduction

In a church in Germany, a couple of noblemen stepped forward to receive communion from a deacon. But the deacon refused to give the two men the cup. A second minister present tried to take the cup from the deacon to give it to the nobles. A struggle for the cup ensued, and as a result, the deacon was excommunicated on the spot!

The city was Heidelberg, and this mean-spirited business took place in 1559. The minister was the Lutheran theologian Tilemann Hesshus, and the deacon was a Zwinglian named Wilhelm Klebitz. This controversy was over the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. It was this bitter controversy, which nearly tore Heidelberg apart, that was the immediate reason for Prince Frederick to order the writing of a new catechism known to us today as the Heidelberg Catechism.

The 16th century Reformed churches took their Lord's Supper very seriously – so seriously that the Reformation divided camps between the Lutherans and the Zwinglians over this issue. Can we say that of the evangelical churches today? Although some churches still have a high regard for this institution, some churches even offer Coke or Koolaid instead of wine or grape juice; and potato chips and pizza instead of bread!

What is behind this terrible descent from the very reverent and serious attitude towards the Lord's Supper to the present casual and careless approach to this sacrament? For one thing, the gospel has been watered down to a half-gospel of God's love without God's holiness. Preachers avoid mentioning God's wrath on unrepentant sinners so that the cruel death of Christ on the cross to atone for his people's sins has been largely ignored or forgotten.

A second reason is the Gnostic impulse – the emphasis by evangelicals on spiritual and emotional experience which follows from their quest for direct or unmediated communion with God. An example of this is the early 20th century song "In the Garden," where the writer talks directly and walks with God, "And the voice I hear falling on my ear the son of God discloses." Michael Horton describes this Gnostic impulse and its effects on today's evangelicals:

Their goal was to return to the spiritual, heavenly, and divine unity of which their inner self is a spark, away from the realm of earthly time, space, and bodies. With little interest in questions of history or doctrine, the Gnostics set off on a quest to ascend the ladder of mysticism. The institutional church, with its ordained ministry, creeds, preaching, sacraments, and discipline, was alienating; like the body, it was the prison-house of the individual soul.

Thus, the ordinary means of receiving God's grace through the preaching of the Word and the partaking of the sacraments has been supplanted by the spectacular, the extraordinary, the unmediated, and the mystic.

How then should we understand what the Lord's Supper means in the life of the believer and the church? And what benefits do we receive from it?

From our text, we will see that the Israelites at Mount Sinai had a foretaste of the Lord's Supper that Christ instituted before his death as the confirmation and renewal of God's covenant with his people. And its purpose is to nourish our souls with the body and blood of Christ in this life, until he returns to take us to our heavenly Mount Sinai where all of God's people will eat and drink with him in a final and greatest of all Lord's Suppers.

In our text, this covenant is confirmed in two ways:

- 1. Through the Sprinkling of Blood**
- 2. Through a Fellowship Meal with God**

Through the Sprinkling of Blood

Exodus Chapter 24 is a transition chapter. Chapters 19-23 describe the gathering of the people at Mount Sinai and the giving of God's covenant requirements, while Chapters 25-40 detail the building of the tabernacle.

When God commanded Moses to go before the Pharaoh of Egypt and tell him to let God's people leave Egypt, he was to tell the Pharaoh that God wanted his people to "worship him on this mountain," Mount Sinai ([Exod 3:12](#)). And as surely as God fulfilled his promises to Abraham, Israel escaped out of Egypt and arrived on Mount Sinai after 50 days. On that mountain, God made his covenant with Israel and confirmed it as they worshiped him.

After two days of preparing for worship and consecrating themselves, the people assemble before the mountain where God's fearful presence was visible in "thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast" together with smoke and an earthquake. God warned the people not to go near the mountain lest they surely die.

The people then sacrificed animals as burnt offerings and peace offerings, whose blood Moses sprinkled on the altar and on the people. The people respond with a vow, "*Everything the Lord has said we will do.*" He reads the Book of the Covenant and again, the people promise to obey the Lord. God thereafter commanded Moses and the 70 elders of Israel to go up the mountain. There, they "beheld God and ate and drank" (v 11).

From the beginning, the shedding and sprinkling of blood pointed to the forgiveness of sins and purification from uncleanness. After Adam and Eve sinned, God covered their guilt and shame with animal skin. In doing this, God already signified that a bloody animal sacrifice is necessary for forgiveness. To escape from Egypt, the Israelites were told to paint their doorposts with the blood of the Passover lamb. During their wilderness years and all throughout their history, they continued to offer bloody animal sacrifices for their sins.

In the New Testament, the Hebrews passage that we read recounts the ceremonial sacrifices of bulls and goats, where we read, *“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins”* ([Heb 9:22](#)).

But the writer of Hebrews also knew that Old Testament sacrifices were but a shadow of things to come. He saw that *“it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins”* ([Heb 10:4](#)). Later in verses 9-10, he says that the blood of bulls and goats is only effective for the forgiveness of sins because it points forward to the bloody sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Thus, the bloody sacrifices at Mount Sinai pointed to Christ’s sacrifice. The sprinkling of animal blood on the Israelites pointed to the sprinkling of Christ’s blood on those who believe in him.

As Moses sprinkled the people with blood, he declared, *“Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.”* On the night before his blood was sprinkled on his disciples, Jesus used the language of Moses in the first Lord’s Supper, *“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood”* ([Luke 22:20](#)).

Later, [Hebrews 10:22](#) says that the blood of Christ is also sprinkled on our hearts, *“Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”*

What does it mean that our hearts are sprinkled with the blood of Christ? To be sprinkled with the blood of Christ means to be forgiven of our sins and having a clear conscience, to be purified by his blood from all our filthiness, to be free from all guilt and shame. This is why the Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 75 says that the visible elements of the Lord’s Supper are sure signs that *“his body was offered and broken for me and his blood poured out for me on the cross.”*

Because of their evil conscience, the Israelites were terrified at the sight and sound of God at Mount Sinai. Not so with us – we have confidence to draw near to God. But sometimes, our guilty feelings overwhelm us after a sinful act, thought, or word. And we don’t even want to come to God in repentance. When we truly repent of our sin, we are to ask the Holy Spirit for his power to overcome sin. As Christians, *“let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need”* ([Heb 4:16](#)). As we draw near to Christ in this Lord’s Supper, let us ask him to give us freedom from a persistent, nagging, guilty conscience. Then we can truly have the joy of our salvation in Christ.

After Moses and the elders of Israel offered their sacrifices, they were commanded by God to go further up the mountain. And on the mountain they had fellowship with God.

Through a Fellowship Meal with God

On the mountain after they drew closer to God, Moses and the elders had intimate communion with God in three ways: (1) they saw God; (2) they ate in the presence of God; and (3) Moses dwelt with God in the cloud of glory.

Seeing God

Twice in verses 9-11, Moses and the elders of Israel are said to have seen God. Isn’t this a contradiction of God’s own warning to Moses in [Exodus 33:20](#), *“But you cannot see my face, for*

man shall not see me and live”? How then can God “*speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend*”? ([Exod 33:11](#)). Some Jewish rabbis try to avoid this issue by saying that Moses and the others saw only the glory of God, or the place of God, but not God himself. Others say that they were permitted to see only the feet of God.

But I believe that on this occasion, they were given privilege by God to see him and live. Could they have seen the pre-incarnate, glorified Christ, as Peter, James, and John did on the Mount of Transfiguration? A number of parallels connect these two stories. They both happened in a high mountain setting, with a mediator (Moses and Christ) and three people accompanying the mediator (Aaron, Nadab, Abihu with Moses; Peter, James, and John with Christ). A cloud descends and overshadows the mountain, and the voice of God speaks out of the cloud. The mediator becomes radiant in glory so that the people around the mediator become terrified before the brightness of God’s glory. Finally, in both events, the witnesses survived seeing God in his glory.

Throughout history, mankind has always longed to see God. Don’t we as Christians long to see God? But we forget that we are more privileged than Moses who had but a shadowy knowledge of Christ ([Heb 11:26](#)), while we now have a fuller revelation of God in Christ. We forget that Christ has already revealed God to us – [John 1:18](#) says that he has made God known to us. We forget that, by faith, we see Christ in his revealed Word, and in this Lord’s Supper ([Heb 2:9](#)).

Feasting with God

Not only did Moses and the elders of Israel see God; they also ate a fellowship meal in his very presence. In Scriptures, a meal is usually shared to confirm a covenant made between two parties, e.g., Isaac and Abimelech ([Gen. 26:30, 31](#)), and Jacob and Laban ([Gen. 31:44-46](#)).

Most evangelicals think that the Lord’s Supper is nothing more than one’s testimony of faith in Christ, or a memorial ceremony to Christ. But Jesus had much provoking words to say about the Lord’s Supper. It is much more than just a remembrance. Much more than just one’s declaration of faith in Christ. He says in [John 6:53-54](#) that “*unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.*”

When we receive the elements of the Supper, we are participating in the body and blood of Christ. Question 76 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that in the Supper, we “*become more and more united to his sacred body, by the Holy Spirit.*” The Spirit of Christ draws us up to heaven, where Christ is. There, by faith, we partake of his body and blood. By faith, Christ is really present with us. And as surely as physical bread and wine nourish and refresh our physical bodies, so does the body and blood of Christ nourish and refresh our souls. The Lord’s Supper surely “*nourishes and refreshes my soul for eternal life with his crucified body and poured-out blood.*” And as Moses and the elders of Israel confirmed the covenant with a meal, so we too confirm our faith and renew our covenant with God through the Holy Communion.

Dwelling with God Forever

After feasting with God up on Mount Sinai, God commands Moses to go to the top of the mountain. So Moses leaves all the elders and ascends to the mountaintop where he spends 40 days and 40 nights in the glory-cloud which symbolizes the presence of God ([Exod 40:34-35](#)).

So did Christ's disciples enjoy intimate fellowship with God in human flesh for 40 days after his resurrection. No doubt they enjoyed covenant meals with Christ during that time. But when Jesus comes again in glory, he will bring us in a triumphal procession to the top of our Mount Sinai – heaven itself – where we will dwell with God, not for 40 years, or 40,000 years, but for eternity. And in that great feast in the heavenly city, Christ will once again drink of the fruit of the vine with us. He will spread his banquet table for us so that our souls will be nourished forever. All – not just Jews, Americans, Asians, Hispanics – but all those who have trusted Christ as Savior and Lord will be seated at this banquet table. The prophet Isaiah saw this gathering of all nations on the heavenly Mount Sinai for that great end-time feast:

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations ([Isa 25:6-7](#)).

All the peoples of the earth will rejoice for eternity in a bountiful feast of the best food and wine because the veil of death has been torn and swallowed up in Christ's death and resurrection once and for all ([1 Cor 15:54](#); [Rev 21:4](#)).

Conclusion

Beloved in Christ, come, all of you who repent and walk in obedience by the Holy Spirit. Be assured that God will graciously receive you, and wholeheartedly welcome you to the table of his Son. Christ invites us, "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" ([Psa 34:8](#)). "Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live" ([Isa 55:2-3](#)).

Be nourished and refreshed for eternal life with the crucified body and poured-out blood of our Lord and Redeemer Jesus Christ. Through him, God has confirmed his covenant of grace with you. Partake of this bread and wine and renew your vows to him when he brought you from sin and death into everlasting righteousness and life. *AMEN.*