

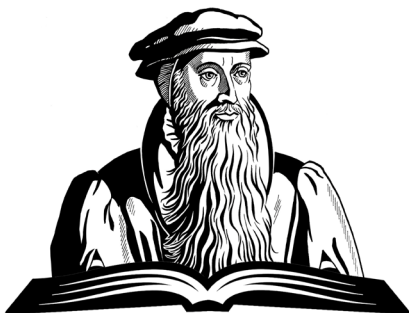
SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Video Lecture Series

by Rev. Walter Harinck

Module 6:
**ECCLESIOLOGY—
THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH**

Lecture 10
**THE SACRAMENT OF
THE LORD'S SUPPER**



The John Knox Institute
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Module 6 ~ Lecture 10

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

If my father, lying on his deathbed, would ask me if, after his passing away, I would do something for him, what do you think I would answer? “This do, in remembrance of me.” This was the last time before his crucifixion that Jesus was alone together with his disciples. It was in the upper room, the night before his death. In that touching moment, he asked his disciples to do this—the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup—as a lasting remembrance of him.

Dear friends, in this last lecture of this module on Ecclesiology, we want to make study of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is all about the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the center part of this holy Sacrament. Shortly before His death on the cross He instituted this precious Sacrament with the signs and seals that proclaim His love and faithfulness.

The Lord's Supper was instituted in the midst of the Passover meal. This was not mere coincidence, but sheds important light on both the Lord's Supper and the Passover. The Passover belonged to the Old Covenant. The old cannot go out till the new has come in. The old was the preparation for the new. In the coming of the Lord Jesus, the Passover is fulfilled. So the Passover was a preparation for the supper of the New Testament church.

In our thoughts, let's go to the upper room in Jerusalem. We see Jesus and his disciples gathered around the table for the Passover meal. On the table, the roasted lamb, the unleavened bread, the herbs, the cups and the wine. The Lord Jesus probably followed the usual pattern. He took the first cup and said: “with desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer”—Luke 22, verse 15. Then Jesus arose, wrapped himself in a towel, and took a basin to wash the feet of the disciples. When all were seated around the table, then Judas likely dipped in the dish with Jesus. Then Jesus took the second cup, speaking of his sufferings, his betrayal, and his death. He broke the bread, as was customary, but instead of saying the regularly recited words, “This is the bread of misery that our fathers ate in Egypt,” he pronounced these astonishing words: “This is my body”. The term “body” was normally applied to the roasted lamb, however, Jesus sets the lamb aside, and he points to himself as its fulfillment. Most likely, it was the third cup, the cup of blessing, that was transformed into the cup of the Lord's Supper, when he said, “This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you”.

The Passover was instituted by God to be a yearly religious ceremony as a commemoration of Israel's deliverance out of Egypt—Exodus 12. It is identified by Paul as a type of Christ, in 1 Corinthians 5, verse 7. For the sake of the lamb's blood painted on the doorposts of the children of Israel, the angel of death had “passed over” their houses, and went on to kill all the firstborn in Egypt, for those who did not apply the blood.

The lamb of the Passover was a sacrificial lamb. The meal that followed the sacrifice owed its significance to its relation to the sacrifice. It was a feast of death and of life at the same time, because the death of the lamb was a vicarious sacrifice—a substitute. The Passover lamb secured protection for the lives of the Israelites.

The Lord's Supper has a similar character to that of the Passover. It is not merely a memorial instituted by Christ, but it is a means through which he gives his grace. The communicants symbolically partake of the sacrifice offered on the altar of the cross. In partaking, we do not repeat the sacrifice, but continue the feast instituted by Christ, by which we testify our participation in the altar and share in the benefits bought by the sacrifice offered on it. The Lord's Supper is for communion with the sacrifice, which presupposes it to have been offered up already.

In the same way that baptism was given in the place of circumcision, the Lord's Supper was given in the place of the Passover feast. The Lord's Supper is actually a new form of the Passover, in the fulfilled work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The change is fitting to the New Testament period. The body is no longer a roasted lamb, but simple bread, pointing to the body of the Lord Jesus Christ. The wine now represents the precious blood of Christ, and the full atonement he accomplished. Christ is the fulfillment of all the Old Testament ceremonies, and the entire Old Testament sacrificial system.

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in four places in the Bible. In the first three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and in the first letter of the Apostle Paul to the Corinthians, we find accounts of this institution.

Let's read the account in 1 Corinthians 11, verses 23–26: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That 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 cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”

Jesus spoke about the bread, “this is my body.” These words are most fundamental. In Luke 22, verse 19, the words are added: “which is given for you.” And 1 Corinthians 11:24, it is added: “which is broken for you.” These words show the focus is not confined to the actual substance of Jesus' body, but Jesus himself, who was the Word made flesh, to suffer, to die and to give himself for his people. The words and the actions of Christ in the Supper are essential. We may not leave out any part of it without perverting the whole action. Jesus took the bread, he blessed the bread, he brake the bread, and he gave the bread. And he said, “Take, eat: . . . this do in remembrance of me.”

The Biblical accounts concerning the cup are even more detailed than that of the bread. There is a call to drink, a statement of the wine being his blood, and the promise that he will drink it anew with them in the kingdom of God. Concerning the wine, Jesus said, “my blood,” “for many,” “the new testament,” or “the new covenant.” In giving himself for his people, Christ secured and ushered in that new covenant in his blood. When Jesus took the cup, the history of redemption turned from the Old Testament to the New Testament: “This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you”—Luke 22, verse 20. The “cup of the New Testament” and “my blood” are closely connected to “for the remission of sin.” Christ gave himself and his blood as a perfect Passover Lamb, and his blood is the full remission of sin. No other sacrifice is needed. The offer in the blood of Christ is sufficient for the greatest of sinners.

The actions of Jesus with the wine are the following: he poured the wine in the cup; he blessed

the cup; and he gave the cup—Matthew 26, verse 27. And then he declared, “Drink ye all of it.” We assume that Jesus himself was the first to drink of the cup followed by the words: “This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” The description of the words and the actions of Christ are important. They help us to shape our understanding of the institution of the Holy Supper.

In the early chapters of Acts, it is referred to as “the breaking of bread.” Luke, the author of Acts, used this expression to identify that special meal, along with the apostolic teaching, fellowship, and prayer, which constituted the core components of Jerusalem church life in the beginning. During the early phase of the New Testament church, the Lord’s Supper was an extension of the fellowship meals, or love meals, of that period—Acts 2, verse 46. As the church grew in its appreciation of Christ’s teaching, so its understanding of the significance of the Supper deepened.

In the New Testament, we read several different names referring to this Sacrament. It is referred to as “the Lord’s supper”—1 Corinthians 11, verse 20; “the Lord’s table”—1 Corinthians 10, verse 21; “communion of the blood of Christ,” and “communion of the body of Christ,” in 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16; and it is Jesus’ description of how we commune with him, in John 6, verse 53–58. Let us read the verses of that portion: “Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”

It is also referred to as the Eucharist, from the Greek verb “eucharisteo”, which means to give thanks. Jesus gave thanks before he administered the first Supper. Each term helpfully conveys a different dimension of this Sacrament.

During the long history of the church, the Lord’s Supper has been a matter of controversy. Four distinct views have been put forward, which seek to explain the nature of the Supper, and how it benefits those who receive it.

The church of Rome teaches the doctrine of “transubstantiation.” It believes that the body and blood of Christ are physically present in the bread and wine. When the priest consecrates the elements in the Supper, it is claimed that the so-called “substance” of the bread and wine is changed into the “body, blood, soul, and divinity” of Jesus Christ. The medieval Catholic Church formally approved the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215. It promotes the belief that Jesus Christ is offered up as an “unbloody” sacrifice each time the Mass is celebrated. The name “Mass” comes from the Latin formula that sounds after the preaching and prayers, so that all the non-members would leave before the Lord’s Supper takes place. This doctrine of transubstantiation was one of the key theological battlegrounds of the sixteenth-century Reformation. The Reformers were right to strongly condemn the Mass as a degrading denial of the finished work of Christ, and as promoting the idolatrous worship and adoration of the bread and wine.

The Lutherans seek to distance themselves from the Roman view of the Supper, embracing the doctrine of “consubstantiation,” in relation to the way Christ is related to the elements. Instead of the elements becoming his actual body and blood, Christ is believed to be present “in, with, and under” the elements. This was an attempt to do justice to the words of Jesus, “This is My body”. But its great weakness is its failure to safeguard the Bible’s teaching on the nature of Christ’s humanity. In order to maintain the link between Christ’s physical body and the elements of bread and wine, Lutherans spoke of the “ubiquity” of Christ’s body. This means that from the day of ascen-

sion into heaven, the body of Christ is now everywhere present. The consequence of this teaching is that the human nature of Christ is somehow fundamentally different from the rest of the human race. But, if Jesus was not made like his brethren in every aspect, except for sin, then how could he be our representative and Savior?

The Swiss Reformer, Huldrych Zwingli, explained the Lord's Supper in a way that distanced him from the Lutheran view. While affirming that Christ is indeed present in the Sacrament, he tended to understand that as an extension of Christ's promise to be present. He thought of the Supper as a present testimony to the things Christ accomplished in the past. Zwingli put all the emphasis on the commemoration of the sufferings of Christ. He believed that the power of the Sacrament came through the preaching of the Word as part of the celebration. Other Reformers disagreed with this view, arguing that it fails to capture the full weight of the language used in the Supper, both in the Gospels and in Paul's letters.

The dominant view of the Reformation is the one reflected in the confessions of many Reformed churches, that Christ is really present and at work in the Holy Supper by his Holy Spirit and through his Word. In the covenantal meal, Christ is pleased to impart himself to his people. At the Supper, believers "feed upon him in their hearts by faith with thanksgiving." This view also matches with the warnings linked to the Lord's Supper: "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"—1 Corinthians 11, verse 29. The Reformed viewpoint is the Calvinistic viewpoint of the Reformer of Geneva.

John Calvin developed the teaching of the instrumental nature of communion. The bread and the wine are means through which the Holy Spirit communicates Christ to the believing communicant. In contrast to Luther and the Roman Catholics, he taught that Christ's physical presence is contrary to the truth that Christ has a real human nature. As God, he is everywhere present, but as man, his human nature ascended into heaven. Being a human body, his body cannot be physically present in thousands of places throughout the world, where the Lord's Supper is held. Sacramental elements are signs of spiritual realities, not the realities themselves.

Calvin strongly opposed the Roman Catholic viewpoint. Just as the water of baptism doesn't become the blood of Christ, or wash away sin itself, so the bread and wine do not become the body and blood of Christ. In contrast to Zwingli, Calvin taught that the Lord's Supper is not primarily about the believer's witness but God's action. The Lord's Supper directs the heart of the believer not only to the past, but to Christ in heaven in the present. Christ is present in the Lord's Supper service—not physically, but spiritually. This presence is known by the Holy Spirit in the way of the exercise of faith. Calvin stressed the spiritual nature of the Sacrament: "Christ is not an empty deceiver to mock us with empty representations." In a very real way, Christ feeds his people with his body and blood through the bread and wine. He feeds them with himself through the Lord's Supper.

Calvin's view is captured in *the Belgic Confession*, article 35: "Christ, that he might represent unto us this spiritual and heavenly bread, hath instituted an earthly and visible bread as a sacrament of his body and wine as a sacrament of his blood, to testify by them unto us that as certainly as we receive and hold this sacrament in our hands, and eat and drink the same with our mouths, by which our life is afterward nourished, we also do as certainly receive by faith (which is the hand and mouth of our soul) the true body and blood of Christ our only Saviour in our souls for the support of our spiritual life."

To teach his people, Christ instituted the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He had special reasons to speak of "his body" and "his blood." Like bread and wine support this temporal life, so the

crucified body and the shed blood of Christ are the true meat and drink, whereby our souls are fed unto eternal life. Article 35, of *the Belgic Confession* says: “To represent to us this spiritual and heavenly bread Christ has instituted an earthly and visible bread as the sacrament of his body and wine as the sacrament of his blood.”

The new life of faith needs food and drink. As soon as the Holy Spirit begins to work grace in the heart of a sinner, the sinner begins to hunger and thirst after righteousness, forgiveness of sins, and looks for a way to be restored to God. Like the prodigal son, you cry out, “I perish with hunger.” To support this spiritual life, God sent Jesus Christ, who is the bread of life. There is such divine teaching in the tokens of the Lord’s Supper. There is a lengthy process before kernels of wheat can become bread. The kernel has to be sown in the dark earth, where it dies. It has to grow, to ripen in the sun and in the rain, and to be blown by the wind. It has to be cut down and threshed, then separated from the chaff. Then the kernels are ground into flour, mixed with water and oil, and baked in a hot oven.

It was also a long way that Christ had to go before he could be the bread of life to nourish starving sinners. Like the kernel of wheat, he had to be sown in the earth, and he had to die. He needed to be broken under the guilt of his people. He had to be ground under the millstones of God’s holy wrath because of our sin. He had to go into the hot oven of Satan’s temptations. He was brought under the demands of God’s justice. Jesus gave us the token of the Lord’s Supper to remember his suffering, and to recall that he paid a precious price for our salvation. Think of the long way he had to go.

Also the token of the poured out wine is given to teach and instruct the believer. It is also a long process before grapes become wine. Grapes have to be pressed in the winepress, before they give wine. Thus Christ had to be trodden as the grapes and pressed as the berries in the winepress of God’s anger against sin: “How am I straitened till it be accomplished”—Luke 12, verse 50.

The tokens in the Holy Supper point to his dying love, and his justifying sacrifice. They show so richly how Jesus has become the author of our eternal salvation. His broken body and shed blood are the true meat and drink for a hungry and thirsty people. This is experienced through the work of the Holy Spirit: “For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed”—John 6, verse 55. Without a spiritual hunger and thirst, Christ has no form, no comeliness to us. Then we do not see and taste significance in the tokens. Without a believing heart, the tokens will remain empty for us.

Calvin writes: “And truly he offers and shows the reality there signified to all who sit at that banquet, although it is received with benefit by believers alone, who accept such great generosity with true faith and gratefulness of heart”. Only when we know something of the bitterness of sin, Christ will be sweet to us. The paschal lamb had to be eaten with bitter herbs. Do you know how bitter it is to have sinned against a God so good and holy? To have pierced Christ with our sins? Oh, surely, you will taste the sweetness of the Lamb of God, and admire him in the tokens of the broken bread and the poured out wine.

In a spiritual way, Christ is present in the administration of the Holy Supper. He is the Host of the Table. He invites those who labor and are heavy laden, and promises to give them rest—Matthew 11, verse 28. He invites as the great physician, who knows and heals their diseases. Christ fulfills at the Table what he promises: “If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me”—Revelation 3, verse 20. That’s what the newly born heart needs and seeks in the Lord’s Supper.

The tokens are not empty and vain. Bread remains bread, and wine remains wine, but the Lord

is at the Table, and he assures his people through the tokens of his love and faithfulness. Answer #79 of the *Heidelberg Catechism* says so clearly: Christ wants “to assure us that we are as really partakers of his true body and blood (by the operation of the Holy Spirit) as we receive by the mouths of our bodies these holy signs in remembrance of him; and that all his sufferings and obedience are as certainly ours, as if we had in our own persons suffered and made satisfaction for our sins to God.” In other words, the riches of the Holy Supper is the precious assurance of faith that in life and death, I belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Do you see the rich blessing of this Holy Sacrament? Faith always stretches out its hands to Christ and cannot do without Christ. Christ wanted to teach and assure his penitent people about his love, to seal unto them the forgiveness of sin, the acceptance of their persons, and the salvation of their souls.

In this Sacrament, Christ especially approaches his doubting children, who say, “Does the Lord Jesus love me? Did he allow his blood to be shed for me? Did he allow his body to be broken for me? For such a one as I am?” Then Jesus says, “Yes, for you also, my body was broken, and my blood was shed. See the token—see the bread being broken before your eyes and the wine poured out in the cup. And as certain as you see with your eyes and taste with your mouth, have I given myself also as a reconciliation for all your sins and iniquities.” The Lord Jesus did this so that they will be delivered from their doubt, and say with the bride, “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is towards me.”

In Biblical times, and also in many cultures today, a meal served not only to feed the body, but also to have fellowship with one another. The Holy Supper is a spiritual meal with very simple outward tokens, but it serves two purposes—feeding and fellowship. The food and the Host are both in Christ. The Lord’s Supper is about communion with Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ is the central focus when we come to the Table of the Lord.

The key text about the communion with Christ is 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16: “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?” And immediately after writing this about the communion of the blood and body of Christ, Paul continues, in verse 17, where he adds: “For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.” Paul confesses “we are many.” We are all different, unique individuals with our own weaknesses and gifts. But we are also “one bread and one body.” There is unity in Christ! The Lord’s Supper is to be an expression of that spiritual unity, which Christ himself works in uniting sinners to himself, the One who is the bread of life. Each partaker makes the same confession—they shew forth the death of the Lord Jesus.

This also shows that communion with Christ cannot be enjoyed while the communion with each other is broken. Paul strongly warns about “eating and drinking unworthily.” God’s anger is stirred up when the Holy Supper is used while there is division between his people. The issue was not that they were unworthy, but they were unloving. And therefore, we have to examine ourselves before we use the Lord’s Supper—1 Corinthians 11. Verse 28.

The purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to strengthen the faith that is already present. Christ instituted the Supper for those who follow him in truth and in spirit. Only believers can receive the blessing of the Lord’s Supper. The call to remember him presupposes knowing him, and discerning the Lord’s body presupposes spiritual eyesight. Attending in unbelief is to eat and drink judgment to yourself. Therefore we have to examine ourselves, as Paul stresses in 2 Corinthians 13, verse 5: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves.”

The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 30, question and answer #81, gives Biblical instruc-

tion: “For whom is the Lord’s Supper instituted?—For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and death; and who also earnestly 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 drink judgment to themselves.”

Three simple marks are mentioned, which we find everywhere in Scripture—repentance, faith, and charity. Repentance is turning to God and Christ with true sorrow for your sins, making confession before God, pleading for mercy on the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ alone. Repentance is always closely connected to faith. The worthy partaker of the Holy Supper has a true sorrow because of his sins and miseries, but he also has faith that hungers and thirsts after Christ. Faith turns to Christ as he reveals himself to the believer in the promises of the gospel: “Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.”

Last but not least, there is the mark of charity—the desire to love and serve God and our neighbor, to live a holy life before God and men. This desire is not without struggle with the old Adam within: “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?”—Romans 7, verse 24. Do you know about repentance, faith and charity? In preparing for the Lord’s Supper, we need to pray, “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”—Psalm 139. What a blessing it is to truly hunger and thirst after the Lord Jesus Christ, confessing with the disciples, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life.” Then repentance may be imperfect, and faith may be weak, and charity may be defective, but he will in no wise cast you out.

The Sacrament of the Holy Supper focuses on the past, the present, and the future. Jesus commanded us to do this in remembrance of him. So we remember his suffering and self-sacrificing love in the past. We focus on the present because Christ is our living Savior. He is the living Host of the Table. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, he draws his people unto himself. But we also anticipate the future, and the Lord’s Supper proclaims a glorious future. Matthew 26, verse 29 says, “But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” And 1 Corinthians 11, verse :26 says, “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death till he come.”

The Lord’s Supper is a foretaste of the fullness to come. In Christ, the Kingdom of God has come already, and the communicants may have a taste of the feast that Christ has prepared. In the Lord’s Supper, Christ lifts up the hearts of his people to himself, and to expect that blessed future. The Lord’s Supper points forward to the true last supper, which will be the eternal marriage supper of the Lamb—Revelation 19, verse 9. This glorious future makes the Lord’s Supper a meal of hope, and gives us a desire for Christ’s return. May that hope and desire be our blessed portion.

Thank you for following these lessons about Ecclesiology, the Doctrine of the Church. I kindly invite you to follow the next and last module in this study Systematic Theology about the great things to come.