

The Lord's Supper (2nd)

(In this study we begin comparing the difference between the standard reformed view and the Baptist view of the Lord's Supper. This lesson also reviews again what is meant by the term "sacrament" because it is generally misunderstood by most people.)

In our last session, we studied somewhat of the different views of the Lord's Supper among the Protestants. We closed by saying that in this session we would look at the Reformed view as given in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*. There are some things given this confession in which aligns with Baptists beliefs. We will not look at them at this time but consider them together later.

The first thing to consider is from the beginning of Article 1, "Our Lord Jesus, in the night where He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper, to be observed in His Church, ..." Also throughout "Chapter XXIX—Of the Lord's Supper," the term *sacrament* is continually used regarding this rite. Since the term *sacrament* is so often used throughout the world of Christendom and often by Baptists who, it appears, are unaware of what they are saying, I believe it is needful to review this term again. We gave a broad overview in our last study, but let us review some of the details again. Quoting from John Calvin in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book IV, Chapter 14, he gave the following:

First, we must attend to what a sacrament is. It seems to me, then, a simple and appropriate definition to say, that it is an external sign, by which the Lord seals on our consciences his promises of good-will toward us, in order to sustain the weakness of our faith, and we in our turn testify our piety towards him, both before himself, and before angels as well as men. We may also define more briefly by calling it a testimony of the divine favour toward us, confirmed by an external sign, with a corresponding attestation of our faith towards Him. You may make your choice of these definitions, which in meaning differ not from that of Augustine, which defines a sacrament to be a visible sign of a sacred thing, or a visible form of an invisible grace, but does not contain a better or surer explanation. As its brevity makes it somewhat obscure, and thereby misleads the more illiterate, I wished to remove all doubt, and make the definition fuller by stating it at greater length.

Then he proceeded with this:

The reason why the ancients used this word in this sense is not obscure. The old interpreter," [Referring mainly to Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*] "whenever he wished to render the Greek term μυστήριον into Latin, especially when it was used with reference to divine things, used the word *sacramentum*. Thus, in Ephesians, "Having made known unto the mystery (*sacramentum*) of his will;" and again, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you-wards, how that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery" (*sacramentum*) (Eph. i. 9; iii. 2). In the Colossians, "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is now made manifest to his saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery" (*sacramentum*) (Col. i. 26). Also in the First Epistle to Timothy, "Without controversy, great is the mystery (*sacramentum*) of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim. iii. 16). He was unwilling to use the word *arcanum* (secret), lest the word should seem beneath the magnitude of the thing meant. When the thing, therefore, was sacred and secret, he used the term *sacramentum*. In this sense it frequently occurs in ecclesiastical writers. And it is well known, that what the Latins call *sacramenta*, the Greeks call

μυστήρια (mysteries). The sameness of meaning removes all dispute. Hence it is that the term was applied to those signs which gave an august representation of things spiritual and sublime. This is also observed by Augustine, “It were tedious to discourse of the variety of signs; those which relate to divine things are called sacraments” (August. Ep. 5. ad Marcell.).

We will summarize by saying that Calvin “asserted that a sacrament was (1) a help to our faith, (2) an external sign, (3) a seal on our conscious of God’s promises, (4) to sustain the weakness of our faith, and (5) a testimony of our piety towards God before Him and before angels and before men. Then he proceeds to say that this is all a mystery by using the Latin translation of the Scriptures by the Catholics where they substituted the Latin word for sacrament in the place of the Greek word for mystery. ... When we simply take the Scriptures as written we do not find that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are some mysterious sign of some invisible grace for the purpose of helping our faith or sealing some covenantal promise. They are simply a memorial service and [a] picture of our salvation that was purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ.” “A Baptist should not be guilty of referring to baptism or the Lord’s Supper as sacraments. Equally, we should not refer to the Lord’s Supper by calling it the Eucharist. It is not a thanksgiving feast. It is simply a memorial service.”

Also, as seen in the quote from Article 1, it is stated that the Lord’s Supper is “to be observed in His Church.” However, in the *1689 Baptist London Confession*, it is “to be observed in his churches.” On the surface this may seem like an insufficient point, but it is not. From the end of Article 1 in the *Westminster Confession*, it identifies this “Church” as “members of His mystical body”; that is, the mystical body of Christ. From the *London Confession*, the conclusion of Article 1 is “of their communion with him and with each other.” There is a difference between members of a “mystical body” and members of a “congregation.”

I am aware that some Baptists often speak of a “mystical body of Christ,” as well. The problem with this is it is uncertain as to what is meant when someone uses this term. I have heard this term used when referring to “the Church” as being all the elect (or believers) of God. Equally, some use this term to describe all the believers living at a given time on earth, or all living on earth and the departed in heaven. In a book entitled *A Cloud of Witnesses*, which is a book of last speeches and testimonies of the Scottish Covenanters in the 1600’s, at least some of them believed that Christ’s mystical body was “the Church of Scotland.” Cf. particularly, pp. 245, 295 as found in the 1989 edition printed by Sprinkle Publications. The quote from the *Westminster Confession* that I have supplied comes from a book printed by the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and contains not only the confession but the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Sum of Saving Knowledge, the National and Solemn League, Acknowledgement of Sins, Engagement of Duties, Directories for Publick and Family Worship, Form of Church Government, and all of the other documents related to the standards and beliefs of the Church of Scotland and the Reformer in general. Not only is the term “mystical body of Christ” confusing and means different things to different people, it is not found in the Scriptures and, therefore, should be avoided. (The same thing can be said about other terms as “church militant,” “church triumphant,” “invisible body of Christ,” and other unscriptural and unclear ideas and concepts. Equally, the Scriptures do not speak of any denominational hierarchy that governs over a group of congregations. The only ecclesiastical authority found in the New Testament is the congregation of God.) Without question the Scriptures declare of individual congregations and it is individual congregations that carry out the Lord’s Supper. In fact, the only epistle in the New Testament that teaches specifically about the Lord’s Supper was written to the congregation at Corinth and how that congregation was to administer the elements to its members—the members of the body of Christ at Corinth, I Cor. 12:27. (I plan to say more about this in the future, the Lord willing.)

Our time is about gone and we will stop at this point and continue looking at the confessions in future studies.