

HC 78-80 – Two Common Confusions about the Lord's Supper

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: We are prone to go to extremes. Sometimes we minimize things and other times we exaggerate things. Neither one is right, of course, but both are realities. Today you will learn how Christians can overestimate or underestimate the Lord's Supper, and what God has to say about that.

Our headings are:

Overestimation of the Lord's Supper

Underestimation the Lord's Supper

Our goals are: That you will properly understand the blessings of the Lord's Supper, that you will thank God for them, and that you will not misuse the Lord's Supper.

Overestimation of the Lord's Supper

Q78 Are the bread and wine changed into the real body and blood of Christ?

A. No. Just as the water of baptism is not changed into Christ's blood and does not itself wash away sins but is simply **God's sign and assurance**, so too the bread of **the Lord's Supper is not changed into the actual body of Christ** even though **it is called the body of Christ in keeping with the nature and language of sacraments**.

1. Some say they are saved by eating the Lord's Supper.

But the Bible teaches the Lord's Supper is a sign and seal for those who are God's covenant – nothing more!

You can see this teaching in the precursor to the Lord's Supper – the Passover. The Passover lamb did not save the eater from spiritual death! The Passover lamb was eaten by those who were saved already! The Jews who looked in faith to Jesus, the Lamb of God who was slain from the foundations of the earth, already were saved.

So like the Passover, the Lord's Supper doesn't save. Only Jesus saves! You have to have faith – real faith! Specifically:

2. Jesus, not the Lord's Supper, cleanses us from sins, through the working of his Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her,

26 that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,

Titus 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us,

through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,

They overestimate the value of the Lord's Supper who claim it is salvific.

3. The elements (bread and wine) are not supernaturally changed into the real body and blood of the Lord.

Jesus made it clear the wine was still wine, not blood.

Matthew 26:27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. **28 "For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29**

"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Because Roman Catholics believe the Lord's Supper becomes the real flesh and real blood of Jesus, they believe it saves.

But if the Lord Supper saves, why then don't they give it everyone? Wouldn't that be consistent?

And if the Lord's Supper saves, why not give the wine to the people, like they did in Bohemia at one time? How deceived! See what happens if you marry a Roman Catholic who thinks he is saved by eating the mass (their Lord's Supper)!

4. How then do we explain the strong language that seems to suggest we eat Jesus' literal body and drink his literal blood?

1Corinthians 10:16 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?** **17** For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

1Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. **27** Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will **be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** **28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

a. The Bible uses strong language calling the elements the "body and blood" of the Lord to show a strong symbolic connection between the sign (Lord's Supper) and the thing signified (Jesus). (You might say: "He is a giant." You don't mean the man is a 9 foot "giant." You mean he is big and tall. There was a football player called "the bus." He was called the "bus" to show he was virtually unstoppable.) Further, **Jesus' physical body is in heaven. How can we eat it?**

b. It is illogical to say we eat the literal body and drink the literal blood of Jesus Christ. The Corinthians were drinking too much in church and were becoming drunk, but they weren't drinking human blood. They were drinking wine. **Drinking blood was forbidden.** Even the blood of animals had to be drained when the animal was killed.

c. Also, it is illogical to say we eat the literal body and shed blood of Jesus.

1Corinthians 10:2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. **For they drank of that spiritual Rock** that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.

It is illogical to conclude the Israelites drank Jesus. It was simply symbolic language.

d. In the OT strong symbolic language was used to make the hearer focus on the thing signified.

Genesis 17:10 "This is My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; 11 "and you shall be **circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant...**

The covenant was not circumcision (as Muslims argue), but **the covenant was called circumcision to identify the symbolic work that was required: Circumcision of the heart.**

Underestimation of the Lord's Supper

Q&A 79 Why then does Christ call the bread his body and the cup his blood, or the new covenant in his blood? (Paul uses the words, a participation in Christ's body and blood.)

A. Christ has good reason for these words. He *wants to teach us that as bread and wine nourish our temporal life, so too His crucified body and poured-out blood truly nourish our souls for eternal life.* But more important, **He wants to assure us, by this visible sign and pledge, that we, through the Holy Spirit's work, share in His true body and blood as surely as our mouths receive these holy signs in His remembrance, and that all of His suffering and obedience are as definitely ours** as if we personally had suffered and paid for our sins.

1. The Lord's Supper is spiritual food to believers and must not be treated as just a sign of remembrance.

This was Zwingli's error. It is more – much more. Look at the language the Lord.

John 6:51 **"I am the living bread** which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world." 55 **"For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.**

If you receive the Lord's Supper, which represents the potent saving work of Jesus by faith, it is as if you were receiving Jesus himself. The message of Christ's work in the Lord's Supper penetrates your soul – to its greatest depths – and it draws you to Christ even more. It makes you willing to work for him. **The Lord's Supper is comfort food for your soul.** So don't underestimate it.

2. This Lord's Supper holds all members of Jesus' church together, just like physical food holds the body together.

All Christians eat of the same loaf – the Lord Jesus. So the Lord Supper draws brothers and sisters together. What a beautiful expression **of Psalm 133.** How good and pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity. **Who spends time eating together after a bitter fight?** (Consider how many wonderful agreements are made after a good meal together!) **Christians come together with love. Even if we have issues, we work to resolve them.** And doesn't the Lord Supper also remind you of your need to **learn to make sacrifices for others as well?** This is covenant love. Don't minimize it. Don't miss it!

Q&A 80 How does the Lord's Supper differ from the Roman Catholic Mass?

A. The Lord's Supper declares to us that our sins have been completely forgiven through the one sacrifice of Jesus Christ which He Himself finished on the cross once for all. It also declares to us that the Holy Spirit grafts us into Christ, who with His very body is now in heaven at the right hand of the Father where He wants us to worship him. But *the Mass teaches that the living and the dead do not have their sins forgiven through the suffering of Christ unless Christ is still offered for them daily by the priests. It also teaches that Christ is bodily present in the form of bread and wine where Christ is therefore to be worshipped. Thus the Mass is basically nothing but a denial of the one sacrifice and suffering of Jesus Christ and a condemnable idolatry.*

3. The Papal Mass also underestimates the Lord's Supper.

Roman Catholics teach if you don't believe Jesus dies every week in the Mass you are under the curse of hell. But Christians who come to the Lord's Supper **do not do so in order to be forgiven; they come because they are forgiven**. Look at the facts.

a. When Jesus died on the cross he endured full suffering, once for all, for the sins of the world.

This means he does not have to die again - ever. **He perfected his people!** (See also Hebrews 9:12,25,26)

Hebrews 7:27 who [Jesus] **does not need daily**, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this **He did once for all** when He offered up Himself.

Hebrews 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ **once for all**. 11 And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But this Man, after He had offered **one sacrifice for sins forever**, sat down at the right hand of God, 13 from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. 14 **For by one offering** He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

b. You are grafted into Christ one time for all times and sealed one time for all times by his Spirit!

Ephesians 1:13 In Him you also trusted, **after you heard the word of truth**, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, **you were sealed with the Holy Spirit** of promise, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption...

c. Jesus is in heaven...not on earth to be killed weekly...and will be there till the end of the world.

That's what Stephen saw there: Jesus sitting in heaven. That's what Hebrews points out.

Hebrews 8:1 Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is **seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens**,

You can't kill one in heaven.

4. So worship God and don't try to kill his Son repeatedly.

If you seek to kill Jesus weekly you are underestimating his work, you spit at his sacrifice, and you are a thief of his glory.

John 4:23 "But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth...

Colossians 3:1 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, **sitting at the right hand of God**. 2 Set your mind **on things above**...

Conclusion:

Don't overestimate the Lord's Supper. Eating it does not save you. It is a sign and seal Jesus died for you.

Don't underestimate the Lord's Supper. It is a means of grace to regularly nourish your soul. It helps you to love God better and you are drawn in unity to your brothers and sisters in Jesus.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Thank God for the Lord's Supper.

2. Take the Lord's Supper worthily. Be well-prepared for it. Make sure you trust in Jesus' life and death.

3. Guard the Lord's Supper so it is not misused by hypocrites and bring judgment on themselves.

4. Prepare your children so they will be soon ready to enjoy this nourishing food on professing their faith.

Finally: If you want the rich food God offers in his Word and sacraments, make your life right with him. God

doesn't give his good gifts to his enemies. Ask him to count Christ's punishment as yours so his anger can be satisfied and you can become his child. Then abundant nourishing food is yours for eternity.