**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 42: The Lord’s Supper (Book 4, Chapters 17-19)

**Chapter 17: The Sacred Supper of Christ, and What It Brings Us**

1. Calvin calls the supper a “spiritual banquet, wherein Christ attests Himself to be the life-giving bread, upon which our souls feed unto true and blessed immortality [John 6:51].”
2. “The signs are bread and wine, which represent for us the invisible food that we receive from the flesh and blood of Christ.”
3. “Christ is the only food of our soul, and therefore our Heavenly Father invites us to Christ, that, refreshed by partaking of Him, we may repeatedly gather strength until we shall have reached heavenly immortality.”
4. You and I receive great assurance and delight in this sacrament, because by means of it we commune of Christ and His sacrifice for us. We see that Christ took our sins and our guilt and our punishment upon His human flesh so that “by His stripes we are healed.”
5. This is called the “spiritual presence” view of the Lord’s Supper.
6. If you recall in our series on Leviticus, in the peace offering of Leviticus 3 and 7, the one who offered the sacrifice, got to eat of the sacrifice so that they participated in the benefits of the sacrifice. Additionally, the Levitical priests got to eat of almost all of the various sacrifices. Now our Great High Priest has offered Himself up as our sacrifice. And 1 Peter 2:9 calls the church a “royal priesthood.” So just as the OT priests and those who offered a sacrifice fed upon the sacrifice and got to participate in the benefits of the sacrifice, so too we as NT priests feed upon our sacrifice, Jesus Christ, through communion and in doing so, we partake of all of His blessings and benefits.
7. But, just like in baptism, one can only truly feed upon Christ by faith. “In partaking of Christ, His life passes into us and is made ours – just as bread when taken as food imparts vigor to the body.” This is done by the working of the Holy Spirit through faith, so if one partakes of Christ’s body apart from faith/Holy Spirit, the one eats and drinks judgment upon himself.
8. Of course this seems so grand and beyond us, so Calvin writes, “Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure His immeasureableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.”
9. Calvin acknowledges that in some way this is still mysterious for us and as a mystery it is too lofty for us, so Calvin writes, “I rather experience than understand it.” Now I think we need to qualify that. Calvin has discussed his view of the Supper in 29 sections so he is trying to explain and understand, but at the end of the day we can’t FULLY comprehend it. We simply have it held before us in Scripture.
10. Calvin then argues against the Lutheran view of the Table (consubstantion) which says that Christ is present “in, with, under, and through the elements.” This is the Lutheran doctrine of the “ubiquity” (being everywhere) of Christ’s body and Calvin calls it a “monstrous notion” that Christ’s body would descend into the bread in an manner unseen to us but the bread really does become His body.
11. 1 Cor 10:16-18 – “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? **17**Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. **18**Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?”
12. Calvin also urges “frequent” participation in the Supper and his preference is for weekly communion. Why? Because the practice of the RCC during his day was to have communion once a year.

**Chapter 18: The Papal Mass, a Sacrilege by Which Christ’s Supper Was Not Only Profaned but Annihilated**

1. The Catholic view of the Supper (transubstantiation) is that each time the Mass is held, Christ is re-sacrificed. Calvin says this is a frightful abomination, a defiling of Christ’s Sacred Supper, a device of Satan that erases from human memory the truth and “a most pestilential error” whereby a priest offers up Christ as a victim so that we can be reconciled to God.
2. Calvin then lays out 5 errors that follow from such a view.
3. The First Error: The Mass is an unbearable blasphemy because it dishonors Christ our only High Priest.
   1. Christ is our eternal high priest and therefore He does not need priestly partners.
   2. Hebrews 5:6 (from Ps 110) – “You are a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.”
   3. Hebrews 7:27 – “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all [time] when he offered up himself.”
4. The Second Error: The Mass suppresses and buries the cross and passion of Christ.
   1. The Catholic Church views the table as “an altar” which overthrows the cross.
   2. Hebrews 9:12 – “**12**he entered once for all [time] into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.”
   3. There is no need for any further sacrificial work and to say otherwise is to draw people away from the cross. To say that further sacrificial work is needed is to call the cross insufficient to save.
5. The Third Error: The Mass wipes out the true and unique death of Christ and drives it from human memory.
   1. Hebrews 9:15-17 says that the confirmation of a testament/will requires the death of the testator. Christ confirms the covenant of grace by His death.
   2. The Mass, then, is a different testament, a different covenant if you will because individual masses promise new forgiveness of sin and new bestowal of righteousness.
   3. Also, the RCC calls the supper a “bloodless sacrifice” which goes against Hebrews 9:22 that without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness of sins.
6. The Fourth Error: The Mass robs us of the benefit that comes from Christ’s death by causing us not to recognize or ponder the death as intended.
   1. “Who can think himself redeemed by Christ’s death, when he has seen new redemption in the Mass? Who can trust that his sins are forgiven, when he has seen a new forgiveness?
   2. The RCC teaches that in the Mass we offer Christ to the Father to obtain forgiveness of sins and to participate in Christ’s passion.
   3. Calvin says that we are to remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, not offer Him up anew.
7. The Fifth Error: The Mass has taken away, destroyed, and abolished the Sacred Supper that Christ instituted for our blessing.
   1. The Supper is to be received with Thanksgiving as an aid to strengthen our faith, but the Mass is represented as a paying a price to God.
   2. The Supper promises us that we are continually revived and forgiven through Christ’s once-for-all-time sacrifice, but the Mass says we need new forgiveness so Christ is sacrificed over and over again.
8. Calvin will go on to survey how the mass arose in church history. Basically the early church fathers used the word “sacrifice” in connection with the Lord’s Supper but understood it as the church’s sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God but it changed over time by the Roman Church into the church sacrificing Christ as an offering for sin to appease God and obtain forgiveness and favor from Him.
9. Calvin says that the Mass “from root to top, swarms with every sort of impiety, blasphemy, idolatry, and sacrilege.”

**Chapter 19: The Five Other Ceremonies, Falsely Termed Sacraments; Although Commonly Considered Sacraments Hitherto, They are Proved Not to Be Such, and Their Real Nature Is Shown**

1. Roman Catholicism has 7 sacraments:
   1. Sacraments of Initiation: baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist (first communion)
   2. Sacraments of healing: penance & extreme unction
   3. Sacraments at communion: holy orders and marriage
2. Confirmation is “a public profession of faith.” Now this in and of itself isn’t a bad thing. We do this as part of becoming a member in the Presbyterian church. But it’s NOT a sacrament (a visible sign of God’s invisible grace). Confession does nothing to reveal the promises of God’s grace. The RCC claims that confirmation confers the Holy Spirit upon a person for an increase of God’s grace.
3. We’ve covered penance a lot when looking at Luther’s 95 Theses, but by way of reminder penance is confessing sins to a priest in private, the priest absolves the person, and the person performs acts of penance for forgiveness of sins (to show they are truly sorry).
4. We saw in James 5 that the anointing of the sick person with oil the Catholics have turned into the sacrament of extreme unction. They teach that the oil itself is an instrument of healing rather than a symbol pointing to the Holy Spirit and consecration.
5. Holy orders is what we would call the offices of the church but of course Rome adds more than are Biblically warranted. We see in Scripture the offices of minister, elder, and deacon, but the RCC has 7 offices. And again, the offices are not visible symbols of God’s invisible grace or promises so there is nothing sacramental about the church offices.
6. Marriage is a wonderful thing, but again, it’s not a sacrament. It does have symbolic meaning in that the union between husband and wife reveals Christ’s union with the church. Ironically, if it is a sacrament then why deny it to the priests? This is inconsistent because a sacrament is for all of God’s people.