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Presbyterianism 101

ALL TO GOD'S GLORY:
The Lord's Table
(WCF 29)

4

The Christian Life: Communion

- **New Section of WCF:** Largely focused on the means of grace and the Christian Life
- **Sacrament:** sign and seal confirming the benefits of the Covenant of Grace
- **Communion:** the Lord's Table is the principal means by which our communion with Christ is expressed

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Institution of Supper (29.1)

Our Lord Jesus, in the night wherein He was betrayed, instituted the sacrament of His body and blood, called the Lord's Supper; to be observed in His Church, unto the end of the world, for the perpetual remembrance of the sacrifice of Himself in His death; the sealing all benefits thereof unto true believers, their spiritual nourishment and growth in Him, their further engagement in and to all duties which they owe unto Him; and to be a bond and pledge of their communion with Him, and with each other, as members of His mystical body.

Institution of Supper (29.1)

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- **Timing:** Final Passover; fulfills, supersedes Passover
 - Absorbs and applies all Passover's significance
 - Differences with Passover
 - Family meal vs. public worship
 - Passover looks back vs. LS looking forward and backward
 - Understanding necessary for right participation

1 Cor 11:26-29, *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

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Institution of Supper (29.1)

8

- **Timing:** Final Passover; fulfills, supersedes Passover
 - Absorbs and applies all Passover's significance
 - Differences with Passover
- **Sign and Seal of Covenant of Grace**
 - Baptism the rite of initiation
 - Supper: rite of continuation

Institution of Supper (29.1)

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- **Immediately before betrayal, arrest, death**
 - Earnestly desires to display His love for Disciples
 - Given for the comfort of His own people
- **Supper given to the Church:** not to private individuals or groups of friends
 - e.g. summer camp, college retreat
 - "...when you come together..." (cf. I Cor 11:17ff)

Purpose of Supper (29.2)

10

In this sacrament, Christ is not offered up to His Father; nor any real sacrifice made at all for remission of sins of the quick or dead; but only a commemoration of that one offering up of Himself, by Himself, upon the cross, once for all: and a spiritual oblation of all possible praise unto God for the same: so that the Popish sacrifice of the mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of His elect.

Purpose of Supper (29.2)

11

- **Memorial Commemorating Christ's Death**
- **Signifies and Seals *benefits* of Christ's death to true believers:**
 - Does not seal truth that He died
 - Does not seal the faith of believers
 - Ratifies His promise to save those who put their faith in Him alone

Purpose of Supper (29.2)

12

- **Memorial Commemorating Christ's Death**
- **Signifies and Seals *benefits* of Christ's Death**
- **Promotes Spiritual Nourishment and Growth**
 - Ongoing Communion with Christ
 - Ongoing Communion with other Believers
- **Badge of Profession, Engagement to Duty**
- **Not a Popish Sacrifice**

Hebrews 10:11-14, *And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.*

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Manner of the Supper (29.3)

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he Lord Jesus hath, in this ordinance, appointed His ministers to declare His word of institution to the people; to pray, and bless the elements of bread and wine, and thereby to set them apart from a common to a holy use; and to take and break the bread, to take the cup, and (they communicating also themselves) to give both to the communicants; but to none who are not then present in the congregation.

Manner of the Supper (29.3)

15

- **Directions for Observance (paras 3-4)**
- **Elements:** bread and wine
 - Bread: ordinary bread, not special; just as bread nourishes the body, so Christ...
 - Wine: just as wine a covenant blessing and ordinary household item
 - We have no right to change the elements into anything (e.g. wine to blood or water!)

Manner of the Supper (29.3)

16

- **Directions for Observance (paras 3-4)**
- **Elements:** bread and wine
- **Sacramental Actions:**
 - Limited by scripture in the Gospels and/or First Corinthians
 - Both given and received by all

Common Errors re: Supper (29.4)

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Private masses, or receiving this sacrament by a priest or any other alone; as likewise, the denial of the cup to the people, worshipping the elements, the lifting them up or carrying them about for adoration, and the reserving them for any pretended religious use; are all contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ.

Common Errors re: Supper (29.4)

18

- **Private Communion:**

- Just say “no;” then say “no, no, no”
- Benefit is not in eating and drinking, but the way the Spirit uses the Word and Sacrament in the midst of the Assembly of the godly ones together

Protestants deny the propriety of private communions because they deny the Supper is a sacrifice. It is a commemoration of Christ's death, and shows forth His death. There should therefore be fellow communicants to whom to show it forth, or at least spectators. It is a communion representing our membership in the common body of Christ. Hence to celebrate it when no members are present to participate is an abuse. The motive for desiring private communion is usually superstitious, and therefore our Church does wisely in refusing it. - Robt. Lewis Dabney

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Common Errors re: Supper (29.4)

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- **Private Communion**
- **Added Ceremonies:** don't over spiritualize it! Irony?
- **Converting Ordinance:** the meal is for the penitent, displays Christ's welcome to those who repent, not to those who have refused to repent

Sacramental Language (29.5)

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The outward elements in this sacrament, duly set apart to the uses ordained by Christ, have such relation to Him crucified, as that, truly, yet sacramentally only, they are sometimes called by the name of the things they represent, to wit, the body and blood of Christ; albeit in substance and nature they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before.

Sacramental Language (29.5)

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- **Bread and Wine:** and they stay that way
- **Vivid Language is shocking to us:**

Matt 26:26–29, *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”*

Presence of Christ (29.6)

23

That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ’s body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthroweth the nature of the sacrament, and hath been, and is the cause of manifold superstitions; yea, of gross idolatries.

Presence of Christ (29.6)

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- **We desire Christ's Presence:** *"The second person of the trinity, being very God, immense and ubiquitous, is of course present wherever the bread and wine are distributed!"*
 - Issue the way Christ is present at (in?) the Supper
 - "Hoc est corpus meum"
 - "This is my body"
 - How would disciples understand His statement?

Presence of Christ (29.6)

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- **Transubstantiation:** substance of elements changed to become body and blood;
- **Consubstantiation:** substance/elements unchanged, but Christ's body in/with/under the elements
 - Calvin: soul feeds on flesh and blood of Christ
- **Zwingli/Memorial:** meal simply commemorates, but neither seals nor applies benefits of the sacrifice; it merely remembers what Christ did

Calvin: *"...our souls are fed by the flesh and blood of Christ in the same way that bread and wine keep and sustain their physical life. For the analogy of the sign applies only if their souls find their nourishment in Christ—which cannot happen unless Christ truly grows into one with us and refreshes us by the eating of His flesh and drinking of His blood"*

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Presence of Christ (29.6)

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- **Westminster:** Real Spiritual Presence of Christ
RL Dabney: Westminster Divines “say believers receive and feed spiritually upon Christ crucified and the benefits of His death; not with Calvin, on His literal flesh and blood...the thing the soul actually embraces is not the corporeal substance of His slain body and shed blood, but their Redeeming virtue” (811)

Presence of Christ (29.6)

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- **Westminster:** Real Spiritual Presence of Christ
- **Christ Present by Faith, to Faith:** virtues and effects of the sacrifice of His body and blood are present
- **The Supper Brings Christ Before us:** places him before our hearts, souls; Raises us to feast with Him
- **Nature:** Sets the central truths of redemption before us in a manner adapted to our nature

Worthy Receivers (29.7)

29

Worthy receivers outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this sacrament do then also, inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of His death: the body and blood of Christ being then, not corporally or carnally, in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet, as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses.

Worthy Receivers (29.7)

30

- **Who is Worthy?** No one? For whom did Christ institute the Supper?
- **Prepare to come at the table:** *It is required of them that would worthily partake of the Lord's supper, that they examine themselves of their knowledge to discern the Lord's body, of their faith to feed upon him, of their repentance, love, and new obedience; lest, coming unworthily, they eat and drink judgement to themselves* (WSC98)

Unworthy to Commune (29.8)

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Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward elements in this sacrament: yet they receive not the thing signified thereby, but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord to their own damnation. Wherefore, all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with Him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table; and cannot, without great sin against Christ while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto.

Unworthy to Commune (29.8)

32

- **Unbelievers:** those who have not embraced the grace signified and sealed at the table ought not
- **Unbaptised and Non-Members:**
- **Ignorant:** someone, whether by nature or sloth, who cannot rightly understand ought not come
- **Ungodly:** written for a State Church; there are many who claim to be believers, but lifestyle contradicts
- **Loving Motivation**
