The Cup of Blessing that we bless

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:16

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 26:36-46; 1 Corinthians 10:15-21

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 318, 271, 180, 377, 32, 23, 531+532

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD28)

Occasion: Lord’s Supper

Theme: The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthian church about the significance of the Lord’s Supper cup.

Proposition: Brothers and sisters, at Lord’s Supper we give thanks for a cup of blessing which was won for us through Christ’s drinking a cup of sorrow, suffering and judgement.

**Introduction**

It’s important that we know what the words we say and hear mean. This is especially vital in the church where the language we employ is founded upon the Word of God. At each Lord’s Supper celebration, as I administer the cup, I say these words “*The cup of blessing which we bless is a communion of the blood of Christ*”. *Take, drink, remember and believe that the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed for a complete forgiveness of all our sins*”.

I was recently asked by a young lady in our congregation: what do the words “the cup of blessing which we bless” mean? It’s a good question. As I thought about it, I decided that it really justified a longer answer in the form of a sermon…so here it is! The text is the verse from which the words “the cup of blessing which we bless” are taken – 1 Corinthians 10:16.

Let’s look at this part of the Holy Scriptures under three headings:

1. The cup
2. The blessing
3. The thanksgiving
4. **The Cup**

We all know what a cup is. It is not necessary for us to check the meaning in a dictionary, but if you do, you’ll likely read a definition like this ‘a small bowl-shaped container for drinking from, typically having a handle’.

We find references to physical cups in many places in Scripture, for example:

* A silver cup was placed by Joseph’s steward in Benjamin’s sack (Gen 44:2).
* King Solomon had many gold drinking vessels (1 Kings 10:21).
* Jesus spoke of giving a cup of cold water to one of his disciples (Matt 10:42).

The word ‘cup’ is also used figuratively in the Bible to refer to the portion, share or allotment, which is given to a person by the will of God e.g. The apportioned contents of the cup can be good to ‘drink’ as with:

* The cup of salvation (Psalm 116:13).
* The cup of consolation (Jer 16:7).
* The cup of blessings from the Lord ‘my cup overflows’ (Ps 23:5).

However, the most common usage in Scripture is that of the cup of God’s wrath in judgement for example: **“***For in the hand of the LORD there is a cup with foaming wine, well mixed, and he pours out from it, and all the wicked of the earth shall drain it down to the dregs*” (Psalm 75:8). This is the cup of ‘staggering’ or ‘trembling’ from which Jerusalem had drunk when the Lord judged her in the time of Isaiah: “*you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, who have drunk to the dregs the bowl, the cup of staggering*” (Isa 51:17b). It is the cup that all who oppose the Living God will drink “*God remembered Babylon the great, to make her drain the cup of the wine of the fury of his wrath*” (Rev 16.19).

When Jesus was in the garden of Gethsemane, struggling in His perfect humanity with the will of God for his life and death, it was the bitter cup of sorrow in anticipation of the wrath of God to come on the cross that he referred to when He fell on His face and prayed: "*My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*." (Matt 26:39). And later: "*My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done*” (Matt 26:42).

When Jesus had been in the upper room together with his disciples just prior to going to Gethsemane, he was much more composed and calm when he took the cup and said: "*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*." (Matt 26:27b-29)

But now He was by himself, sorrowful and deeply troubled in the garden, his disciples not able to keep watch, but having all fallen asleep. He was alone then, and He would be utterly alone at Calvary ‘*cut off from the land of the living*’ (Isa 53:8). The cup He drank from was a cup of loneliness, but first and foremost it was a cup full to the brim with the wrath of God. His was a cup of judgement which He willingly drank down to the ‘dregs’ until He could truly say *“It is finished”* (John 19:30). The contents of that bitter cup killed Him, body and soul, there on that lonely shameful cross.

It is this drinking of the cup of the Lord’s wrath, which the wicked deserve to consume, that He drank for sinners like us, brothers and sisters. “*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). We remember the cup which He drank as we celebrate the sacrament of Lord’s Supper. Celebrate? How can we be glad in such a cup? Because, whilst it was a cup of sorrow, bitterness, loneliness and judgment for Christ, it is a cup of blessing for all who trust in Him. This brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The Blessing**

Paul writes to the Corinthians about the Lord’s Supper cup, as a ‘cup of blessing’. This was a term used by the Jews to designate the 3rd cup of wine at the Passover Feast. This may have been the cup which Jesus used when He instituted Lord’s Supper, it is certainly a reference to the sacrament. This ‘cup of blessing’ is the cup of salvation which brings bountiful benefits to those who receive it in faith from Christ who says, ‘this is my blood of the covenant’.

What are the blessings of this cup for us who drink it in remembrance of Christ who drank the bitter cup of God’s wrath? It is not a cup of judgement as it was for Christ, but of pardon for us. We know this from the words of Jesus when he first celebrated Lord’s Supper with His disciples in the upper room. The cup both then and now contains wine representing His “blood of the covenant”.

God’s covenant with His people has been a ‘blood covenant’ from the time He promised to bless Abram. The agreement was sealed with a blood oath represented by the carcasses of dead animals which had been slaughtered and between which the Lord alone symbolically passed in the form of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch (Gen 15:17). God was confirming the covenant Himself. He alone would guarantee that the terms of the agreement were fulfilled. In the words of Hebrews 6.13 “*Since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself*’. If the covenant was broken, like the animals which had been slain, His blood would be shed.

When God made His covenant with Moses the blood of animals was sprinkled on the mercy seat in the Tabernacle (e.g. Lev 16:15) to atone for the sins of the people. Blood was shed because of their disobedience to their covenant Lord. However, as the writer to the Hebrews confirms, *it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins* (Heb 10:4). The blood of the older Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants pointed forward to the New Covenant which the Lord promised through His prophet Jeremiah: "*Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah….I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts…. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. …For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more*." (Jeremiah 31:31-34) The blood of this New Covenant in which sins are truly forgiven and by which people know the Lord with changed hearts is not the blood of slain animals, but the blood of the slain Lamb of God.

The cup which we drink at Lord’s Supper is not a cup of wrath, but a cup of pardon, the blood of Jesus, the Covenant Keeper, whose blood was shed in the place of covenant breakers; that is people like you and me. The cup which we drink is a cup of blessing. It is not a cup of loneliness as it was for Christ in Gethsemane and at Calvary, but of fellowship, of community, of solidarity with others who also drink this cup of blessing by God’s grace.

In our text, Paul writes to the Corinthians and asks the question: “*The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?*” (1 Cor 10:16). That’s a question expecting the emphatic answer ‘Yes’ – like asking “Is the Pope a Catholic?” The wine of Lord’s Supper IS a participation in the blood of Christ. The bread of Lord’s Supper IS a participation in the body of Christ. This participation (koinonia) is a partnership, a fellowship with Christ. The cup represents a sharing in the power of Christ’s blood of the New Covenant to grant forgiveness for sins.

In this participation, this sharing by faith, the righteousness of Christ is our righteousness. In this participation, this sharing by faith, the acceptance of Christ by His Heavenly Father ‘This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased’ is our acceptance by our Heavenly Father as the children of God. We share in this blessing together and have fellowship not only with the Lord, but with one another around the table. The Apostle Paul describes it this way: “*Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread*” (1 Cor 10:17).

The cup which we drink is a cup of blessing. This is also a cup of joy, a cup of consolation, of comfort. The cup of the blood of the New Covenant was bitter for Christ to drink, but in contrast it is sweet for us. It is a cup with reminds us that we have a source of joy which cannot be taken away, for our joy is in the Lord. The cup which we drink is a cup of blessing. Which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **The Thanksgiving**

Paul writes: “*The cup of blessing that we bless”.* What does it mean to bless this cup? The Greek word translated bless literally means ‘to speak well of’, it means to express praise and thanksgiving.

We see this word ‘bless’ used in many places in Scripture. For example: when Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, having been mute for 9 months, wrote his son’s name on a writing tablet, this happened: “*And immediately his mouth was opened and his tongue loosed, and he spoke, blessing God*” (Luke 1:64). Zechariah spoke well of the Lord, opening his mouth and speaking words of praise about His God. We don’t know everything he said, but some of his thanksgiving is recorded in Luke’s gospel, beginning like this: "*Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David*” (Luke 1:68-69). Human beings, like Zechariah, like you and me bless their God, praising and thanking Him in response to His blessing towards them.

This is the way the Apostle Paul ‘speaks well’ of the Lord in Ephesians 1:3-6: **“***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined usfor adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved*”.

In the sacrament of Lord’s Supper we commemorate the death of Jesus Christ, remembering His drinking down of the cup of God’s wrath until He had suffered every last ‘drop’ of God’s righteous judgement upon His people. In the sacrament, we ‘speak well’ of the Lord as we sing praises together – “*singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in our hearts to God*” (Col 3:16). Our gratitude is our response to the grace of God in enabling us to be in union with Christ.

Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 28, Q&A77 points us to the places in Scripture where Christ promises to nourish and refresh believers with his body and blood as surely as they eat the broken bread and drink the cup. This promise is conveyed in the words we have been focusing upon this afternoon. The blessing of communion with Christ, of a living union with our Saviour is not only represented in Lord’s Supper but is also strengthened by the sacrament.

We receive blessing from the cup, from the grace that God as allotted to us in Christ. That blessing strengthens our faith and enables us to ‘bless the cup’. That is to give thanks and praise to the One who offers us the cup to drink…. Christ Himself. When you hear the words ‘the cup of blessing which we bless’, understand and reflect upon the richness of what you are seeing, touching, drinking. It is not the bitter cup of God’s wrath, but the cup of salvation, the cup of consolation, of joy and of peace which of which you drink as you remember the cup which Christ drank for you and your heart is filled with praise and thanksgiving for all that has been done for you.

AMEN.