Who is Coming to Supper?

Text: Matthew 26:20-29

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**Scriptures:** 1 Corinthians 5.1-13; Matthew 26:20-29

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 167, 115, 1b, 432, 378, 523

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD30)

Occasion: Lord’s Supper

Theme: The attendance of the 12 disciples at the first Lord’s Supper

Proposition: Come to the table if you can.

**Introduction**

One of the challenges of organising a wedding is knowing who to invite. This can take many hours of careful thought and delicate decisions. At time of Reformation, anyone could come to the celebration of Mass if they were a member of the Roman Catholic Church. It didn’t matter what you believed in your heart. It didn’t matter how you lived your life. You could come and receive an ‘infusion of grace’ automatically; just like filling up your petrol tank at a gas station. The Protestant Reformers spoke out against this desecration of the Holy Sacrament.

Lord’s Supper is a topic which is dealt with extensively in the Heidelberg Catechism. This reflects the particular importance of issues surrounding this sacrament at time of Reformation. Sacraments are considered in general in Lord’s Day 25, the Lord’s Supper is the specific focus of Lord’s Days 28,29 &30. In Lord’s Day 30, Q81 asks *“Who are to come to the Lord’s Table?”*

Our world is not the same as 16th century Europe, but the same question is well worth asking today. Perhaps you yourself have asked that question. Who should be invited to the table of our Lord when we celebrate the sacrament every alternate month? Let’s look for an answer from the Word of God this afternoon. We’ll find 3 criteria, form our 3 points:

1. Those who trust Christ
2. Those who are godly
3. Those who are invited
4. **Those Who Trust Christ**

The twelve disciples were close to Jesus and followed Him. It seemed that all trusted Him in the way he was leading them. They willingly followed him through the days, weeks, months and years of His public ministry. They trusted Him even though it was clear that he was not the military Messiah many had hoped for; one who would lead the zealots in throwing off the yoke of oppressive Roman occupation. Eleven of the twelve did not know that one had offered to betray the Lord Jesus in return for coins; thirty pieces of silver. (Matt 26:14-15).

They had gathered in a large, furnished the upper room for the celebration of Passover. This was on the first day of feast of unleavened bread (Mark 14:15). We read in Matthew 26:20: *“Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples”.* Jesus led them to ask themselves whether they truly trusted Him by dropping a “bombshell” on the supper table (v21): As they were eating, He said, "Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me." (Matt 26:21) These words pierced the hearts of the disciples who loved their Lord. They were “deeply grieved” and said to Him “Surely not I, Lord”. The way the question is posed in the original Greek language indicates doubt in the mind of the questioner. There is humility demonstrated here by eleven of the disciples in a desire to be examined by Christ, to see if their hearts did truly trust in Him.

So when the Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 11:28 “But a man must examine himself”, he is teaching a pattern of testing trust in Christ which the Lord had **already established** at the first Lord’s Supper before his death. What does this self-examination include? (HCLD30Q&A81)

1. A displeasure with oneself because of personal sin.
2. A trust that these sins are forgiven/covered by the suffering and death of Christ.
3. A desire that their faith may be strengthened so that they are enabled to lead a better life.

This examination is a testing/discernment/proving of self in the light of the living Word of Christ. We could express this in the words of Psalm 139:23 *“Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts”.* Lord’s Supper is intended **only** for those who are truly converted to God – who have truly repented of their sins. Those whose heart has been supernaturally changed by the Holy Spirit. Those who have sufficient maturity to be able to self-examine. In the words of 2nd Corinthians 13:5a “*Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves!”*

This self-examination not possible for young children who have not reached a stage of mental development whereby they can self-examine. This is why children and youth who have not publicly professed faith do not come to the Lord’s Supper table. It is not because they are not part of the church! It is not because many of them do not believe! It is not because some have fully committed themselves in their hearts to Christ! But because they have not publicly confessed their trust in the Lord.

Public profession of faith requires a careful self-examination. This takes place in a variety of ways, including through profession of faith class interactions and meeting with the elders. The individual, through careful self-examination must be convinced that they can truly say: *“Yes I do trust in Christ, and I am prepared to commit myself to Him, to His body the church, to live a life which is pleasing to Him under the care of His appointed under-shepherds, the elders in the church”.* Only those who confess that they trust in Christ are able to come to Supper at the Lord’s Table, but this is not all…

1. **Those Who Are Godly**

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul wrote to the church about not associating with immoral people. Here he is not referring to the immoral of the world: covetous, swindlers, idolaters, but to fellow Christians: so-called brothers/sisters. He says (v11) *“not even to eat with such a one”.* What does He mean here by not having table fellowship with someone? There are at least 3 possibilities:

1. An ordinary meal at home.
2. The Love Feast - a 1st century communal meal which Christian congregations eat together on the Lord’s day.
3. Lord’s Supper – celebrated in the 1st century church as part of the Love Feast.

It’s helpful here to note Jude 12 *“These are the men (false teachers) who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves”.* Similarly 2 Peter 2:13 *“They (false teachers) count it a pleasure to revel in the daytime. They are stains and blemishes, revelling in their deceptions, as they carouse with you”.* These are references to the Love Feast, in which Lord’s Supper was celebrated. The Love Feast during which Lord’s Supper was celebrated is most likely the context of Paul’s admonition to the Corinthians *“not even to eat with such a one”.*

The phrase ‘stains and blemishes’ is used by Peter by way of reference to the impurity of animals unsuitable for sacrifice (Lev 1:3,10) Similarly, there can be damage to those who partake of Lord’s Supper unworthily; they are like stains and blemishes on a sacrifice. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:30 that because of the stain of unrepentant, ungodly people, there may be severe consequences for the church “*For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”* It seems that there was judgement on the whole body for the actions of some individuals. In the words of Heidelberg Catechism A82: “*dishonouring God’s covenant, brings down God’s anger upon the entire congregation*”. This speaks of the temporal judgement of sickness and death, not the eternal loss of salvation.

In the case of the Corinthian church, Paul was given divine prophetic spiritual sight which we do not have in specific cases, however the principle is clear. Just as in an effective military unit that has been well trained and taught. When one person ‘stuffs up’ everyone is affected – all suffer. As a unit they are bound together - for better or for worse. Likewise, the whole church suffers when some live unrepentant ungodly lives. In 1 Cor 5 Paul instructs the church to “*purge the evil person from among you*” (v13). Here is a text which clearly points us to church discipline for sake of the purity of the church.

It is the elders of the church who have been given charge over the flock; it is their Christ-ordained responsibility to exercise discipline: e.g. 1 Peter 5:2 “*shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight*”. This applies to the sacrament of baptism: checking that one or both parents are professing Christians. This also applies to the sacrament of Lord’s Supper. The elders have a role in ‘fencing’ or ‘supervising the table’. The standard for admission to the table is not perfect godliness, but a desire for purity before God as repentant sinners forgiven in Christ.

This is reflected in our form for Lord’s Supper: “*Anyone who is unrepentant, who does not trust in Jesus Christ, or who has no desire to lead a godly life, should refrain from the holy sacrament*”. “*This solemn warning is not designed, however, to discourage penitent sinners. We do not come to the supper trusting in our own righteousness, but rather testifying that we are sinners who look to Jesus Christ for our salvation*”

Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 30 Q&A82 expresses the Scriptural truth that those who show by what they say and do that they are unbelieving and ungodly should be excluded from the Lord’s Supper by the official use of the keys of the kingdom until they reform their lives. This is not popular teaching today, but it is Scriptural truth. I would encourage you to carefully study 1 Cor 5:1-13 if you are not yet convinced of this.

Only those who confess that they trust in Christ and who show by what they say and do that they strive after godliness are able to come to Supper at the Lord’s Table, but this is not all…

1. **Those Who Are Invited**

Have you ever thought about the fact that the large crowds who followed Jesus were not invited to the last supper? Even though gatherings of 4,000 and5,000 had eaten together in the presence of Christ earlier. Even though many had followed Him. **Only** the inner 12 disciples were invited to this Special Supper. This is clear both from Mark 14:14b ‘*say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is My guest room in which I may eat the Passover with* ***My disciples****?"' and from* Luke 22:15 *And He said to them (the apostles), "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover* ***with you*** *before I suffer”’*

Have you ever wondered why was Judas invited to the table? He had **not yet** denied Christ –he still showed outward trust. He had not yet shown himself to be ungodly according to the known testimony of 2 or 3 witnesses. He was invited to be there by Christ – even though Jesus knew of Judas’ treachery. We cannot mirror our Lord’s actions here in every detail as He is uniquely God and man and the first Lord’s Supper was not identical to the ones which follow. What should Judas have done? When called to self-examine. He should have expressed his sin to Christ, received forgiveness and not eaten and drunk judgement on himself.

There is a general gospel invitation to be made to all people. We find this in the parable of marriage feast in Matthew chapter 22. The command is to invite “as many as you find” in main highways. By analogy, everyone is welcome to come to hear the Word of God read and preached in this place, to come for fellowship and prayer.

But specific elder invitation to the table is not the same focus. There is a role for the elders in ascertaining a credible confession of faith, and a godly life, and to issue an invitation. Communicant members in good standing in the church have an open invitation to come to the table. With regard to non-members, our policy in this Reformed church follows the recommendations of Synod 1998 for guest participation in Lord’s Supper which is expressed as follows: “It is the responsibility of the session to ascertain the following before it grants permission to guests to participate in the Lord’s Supper

1. That the guests trust in Christ, and in Christ alone for his/her salvation.
2. That the guest is a communicant member in good standing in his/her own church.
3. That the guest lives a repentant, upright and godly life”.

If you have visitors coming, please see one of the elders, or myself, prior to, or on the Lord’s Day before the service.

 In summary, the answer to the question “Who are to come to the Lord’s Table?”

1. Those who trust in Christ; having publicly confirmed this through profession of faith.
2. Those who are godly; having demonstrated this in their lives and not having been found to be unrepentant of sin.
3. Those who are invited by Christ’s appointed under-shepherds in the local church: the elders.

AMEN.