

You Are What You Eat: A Lord's Supper Meditation

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"Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt. For they did not continue in my covenant, and so I showed no concern for them, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will be merciful toward their iniquities, and I will remember their sins no more." — Hebrews 8:8–12

"You are what you eat," couldn't be more true than when talking about the Lord's Supper. When we come to the Lord's Table we are declaring our confidence in Jesus's body and blood as our singular hope for salvation. At the same time, we are receiving through a complex and simple sugars a taste of who we are—redeemed sinners adopted into the family of God.

Identifying the New Covenant Meal

When Jesus transformed his last supper into the Lord's Supper, he took bread and broke it saying, "This is my body, which is given for you." Then he took the cup saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood" (Luke 22:17–19). In his words and actions, Jesus was passing down a tradition that would forever recall the meaning of his death.

Jesus's death revealed God's judgment upon human sin, but because Jesus died for the sins of his covenant people, his death substituted for the punishment of his covenant people. Jesus spoke of his death and the Lord's Supper in covenantal terms, because his blood inaugurated a new kind of relationship between heaven and earth.

Speaking specifically about the promises of the new covenant, Hebrews 8 teaches the believer what God has done for them in Christ. First, the new covenant moves me to delight in the law that is written on their heart. Second, it gives me saving knowledge of God through Christ. Third, it invites me into a personal relationship with God. And finally, it forgives me for all of my sins. In short, what the law could not do, weak as it was; the new covenant does by means of Christ's perfect obedience and the Spirit he sent to us as he sat down at God's right hand.

For this reason, we do well to take the Lord's Supper often. Even more, when we take it we need to remember what Jesus Christ did for us and what his death says about our new-found identity in him. Indeed, the Lord's Supper is a meal that defines a people. Since only those who have trusted in Christ are permitted to the table, it makes a visible distinction between those who partake and those who don't.

A Meal that Identifies Us

For non-Christians who do not partake, it is a sign that they remain outside of the covenant blessings of God. Like Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11--13, those who do not take the Lord's Supper are strangers and aliens to the promises of God; they are without God and without hope in this world. Consequently, the Lord's Supper invites unbelievers (children or adult) to consider their own need for grace. In a visible way, it shows them they are outside the gates of Christ, but that the invitation remains to come to dine at the table if they will but trust Christ and turn from sin.

At the same time, the covenant meal also marks out the believer. While the world defines us by our skin color, social standing, education, sexual orientation, or working profession, the Lord's Supper defines us as blood-bought children of God. It identifies us as the Lord's covenant people, and it calls us to stop identifying ourselves by our past history, our personal problems, or our sinful living.

Like the food eaten in any temple the Lord's Supper offers food that identifies us with Christ. To be sure, we (Protestants) don't believe the bread and juice become the body and blood of Jesus (as in the Catholic view of transubstantiation). However, we do believe that eating the meal identifies us with Christ, and more than that it defines our own identity.

In this way, we are what we eat. And when we take the Lord's Supper, we are once again identified as his beloved children. Simultaneously, we are called to examine our hearts to consider whether our lives affirm or deny this identify. As an identify-shaping meal, it is vital we take the Lord's Supper with regularity and that when we take it we understand what we are doing, and what it is doing to us!

Holy Father,
You sent your Son to identify with us,
now let us identify with him.
Forgive us for feeding on the food of this world;
Feed us on your faithfulness,
on the grace and truth found in your gospel.

As we put bread and cup to our mouths,
may our hearts be close to you and not just our lips.
Incline our hearts to identify ourselves with you,
And may this Lord's Supper further impress on us
A sense of your presence, your holiness, and your grace.

Soli Deo Gloria, dss