

Lord's Supper Celebration – Why Change?

The “Hi-Liter” in Clarion of November 29 notified its readers that the Church in Burlington - South has made some concessions in the way the Lord's Supper would be celebrated. They will henceforth offer a choice of wine or juice and it will be served in individual cups. At the same time we are informed that they will still come together at the table in the front.

In most churches the Lord's Supper is celebrated by reading the accepted Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper after which those eligible (or confessing members in good standing) are invited to come to the table. In an orderly fashion they are invited by the elders and they rise from their place and walk to the table. There they sit together with a number of brothers and sisters who confess the same and receive a piece of bread from a plate onto which the minister has just shortly before broken it. When everyone is finished the minister pours wine into a number of cups and passes them around so that everyone can take a drink from a cup. After this a portion of God's Word is read and, in some cases explained about, followed by the singing of a psalm or hymn by the whole congregation.

All of this takes place to show in symbols the story of salvation. The spoken word of the gospel (the good news of salvation) in the Form is responded to in the confession of faith of the believers when they respond to the invitation to participate in the celebration of the act of salvation. The act of hearing the gospel and then responding to it is symbolic of the call of grace and responding in faith.

When the minister breaks the bread into pieces he explains the symbolism. The bread that is broken being symbolic of the body of Christ which was broken for those who participate in the supper. Later when he pours the wine he again explains the symbolism. The wine, poured out, is symbolic of the blood of Christ for a complete remission of all our sins. After the signs and seals of the covenant have been witnessed, God speaks through the reading of His inspired Word and the Holy Spirit works a response through the congregational singing.

The traditional practice of the churches in celebrating this Supper is well suited for its intended symbolism.

It might be good to just pause for a moment at this concept. The Reasons for Change... Indeed! Before we change a practice or a habit we should have a reason to do so. It will not suffice to explain that ‘a change is as good as a rest’, or that ‘variety is the spice of life’. Change is of particular importance when we are dealing with matters of our faith. The importance increases when we realize that we are dealing with one of the two sacraments our Saviour instituted for His Church. We must therefore conclude that before we make any changes there must be very good reasons to do so.

In the aforementioned notice in Clarion we are informed of the reasons that the Fellowship Church of Burlington-South gives for making the changes we mentioned. We read, “The basis for change is to assist everyone to ‘celebrating Christ's supper unhindered.’” Further we read, “There is, at the very least, a perception that a common cup carries bacteria, and even if some doctors would

disagree with this, the perception remains and interferes with the celebration.” “Additional reasons are given: ‘Besides, there are concerned members who may have a weakness for alcohol, and others who for health reasons cannot partake of a communal cup. The ground for change, therefore, would be that we do not want members to be prevented from fully participating, as community of believers, in the sacrament.’”

It appears that the consistory of this church has not dealt with the issue of individual cups versus the common cup, but has instead opted to address the matter of t members becoming uncomfortable even if they have, at the very least, unfounded concerns.

The matter of hygiene is not a valid concern. The consistory admits in its reasoning that some doctors deny that a common cup carries bacteria. In fact, in all the literature that is available on the subject every doctor denies that it is possible to transmit the acquired immune deficiency syndrome via a common cup, especially one with alcoholic contents. In addition, the use of individual cups necessitates far more handling, especially around the rim of the cup. There is much more likelihood that this will cause bacterial spread than a common cup that is handled only at the base and sides.

But far more importantly the direction of scripture and the symbolism of the sacrament are diminished when these changes are introduced. Scripture teaches that our Lord ‘took *a* cup’ and commanded his disciples to ‘drink ye all of *it*’ (Matth.26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 22:17, 20). In I Cor.10: 14ff we read about the comparison Paul makes with the unity of the Church and eating from one loaf of bread. By analogy this applies equally to the cup. Hymn 46 of our Book of Praise rejoices in the fact that grain, once scattered on the hillsides, was in the broken bread made one. The refrain of unity must pervade the symbolism of the Lord’s Supper.

Throughout history the common cup has continued to be used. When many of the abuses of the Church were corrected after Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses on the wall of the church at Wittenberg, the common cup was not changed to many individual cups.

On the contrary the church, throughout its checkered history has maintained the common cup for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Yet, today, when changes are being suggested and accepted, we are not confronted with error in the way the Church has followed Scripture in this matter, but we are rather asked to acquiesce to change in order to accommodate modern concerns and fears. This should make us reconsider the wisdom of such changes.

We should further be willing to listen to the instructions God gives us in His word about change and about doing things according to our own ideas. Already early on in salvation history we can read about Jacob and his mother Rebekah. They were aware of the birthright belonging to Jacob but they were afraid that something was going wrong when it appeared that Esau might receive it. So they intervened. In this way they felt sure their concern would be alleviated. They could not leave matters in the Lord’s hands.

Also in the matter of celebrating the Lord’s Supper we must leave things as the Lord has established them. Why change? What’s wrong with how the Lord has instituted it and how the Church has celebrated it for all these years? Are our concerns about addiction and communicable diseases unknown to the Lord? Do they change what he has commanded? Let us stand firm.

Can there never be an exception then? What about that alcoholic brother or sister and that person with health problems who can not have alcohol? From the reasons given we can not detect if there are such real cases in Burlington - South. Maybe these are hypothetical cases. But it is surely possible that such cases exist. Then the consistory must deal with them on an exception basis. If it is true that an alcoholic in the congregation will indeed return to his sinful ways by attending the Lord's Supper, an exception can be made for such a person. The same goes for the sick brother or sister. But these exceptions do not justify a deviation from the Scriptural norms for the celebration of the Lord's Supper by the congregation as a whole. Let us follow the direction of God's Word and remain encouraged by the example of the Church throughout its many years of history.

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Reader's Reflection on Unity

It has been stated that unity already exists within and between certain Reformed churches in this country and/or continent. With this unity in place, it is further stated that we may now proceed with federative unity. Is it certain that there is unity within and among all these churches? Are we all one in doctrine AND life? If we are, then we may certainly proceed with federative unity. Does unity exist merely on the basis that we share Scripture, Confession, and Church Order? It sounds positive if we can be said to share the doctrine in these three. But how do we live this doctrine? Are we equally committed or united in doing that? Are we all in agreement on the fine points and details in these doctrinal documents (without becoming legalistic)? God's law is never 'legalistic', but it is a perfect guideline for lives of thankfulness for His gift of salvation in Christ Jesus.

If we all agree then unity does exist and we must continue to proceed to federative unity.

As Reformed churches we have the true and complete doctrine of salvation. We have God's promises in His Word and summarized in our Confessions; and we also have His covenantal demands in His Word, also summarized in our Confessions. As a consequence of God's gift of salvation He requires lives of thankfulness from His children in the one body to which they belong. This is the beginning of unity - God reconciled unto Himself His creation, including mankind lost in sin. First there was a perfect unity between God and man in Paradise. This unity was disrupted by man's fall into sin, but God restored this unity in Christ, and this unity will be complete when our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ returns on the final Day. On the way to that final Day He gathers His church from the four corners of the earth and preserves it for that Day.

Again we ask, do we continually strive to meet our covenantal obligations in an equally committed manner, to the very iota and dot which will not pass from the law until all is accomplished (Matth.5:18)? The points of covenantal obligation and church unity are found in Paul's letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4. This chapter begins with Paul exhorting the church 'to lead a life worthy of the calling to which we have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.'

These first few verses primarily call for the unity of the faith, and direct to true church unity. This work is the beginning of the preservation of Christ's church. When Christ ascended into Heaven, He lead a host of captives and gave gifts to men. The basis of these gifts is in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are to all on whom He has been anointed. God's children are to equip each other for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature and fullness of Christ.

This is a tremendous responsibility for us as His children. When we come to the full knowledge of Christ, and build each other up in that knowledge, we no longer remain as "children tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the cunning of men, by their craftiness in deceitful wiles. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every joint with which it is supplied, when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up builds itself in love."

When we speak the truth of God's Word uniformly, we contribute to unity. What are these various winds of doctrine? Man's inaccurate interpretation of God's Word or a refusal to accept certain aspects of it, because it treads upon circumstances in their lives, only to 'burden' themselves further in a life of suffering, which they by human nature would rather not endure.

Some claim that the iota's and dots of the law can never be fully understood, claiming no clear revelation in God's Word, or saying this in order to excuse themselves from obeying His commandments. These call God a liar. The cunning of men by their craftiness in deceitful wiles is nothing more than that which proceeds from sons of disobedience of the father of lies himself - Satan.

Christ clearly elaborates on God's law throughout the four Gospels. All of the letters of in the New Testament clearly compliment Christ's explanation of this law.

When we all agree on doctrine and life, covenant promises and demands, both in faith and among the communion of saints, then unity exists in the church. When this unity is established among all denominations then federative unity can be achieved under God's blessings.

This is what Christ requires of His church. His prayer for the church in John 17 begins with the call for unity in the faith among the believers in doctrine and life. Then comes the call for world wide unity in the one catholic church which we confess in Art.8 of the Apostles Creed.

We have to make sure that identical commitment to unity exists among or within all the prospective denominations around the 'unity' table. Then as one catholic church, we may jointly await the glorious return of our Saviour. Then unity will be absolutely complete, which includes the Triune God with His new creation as was intended in the beginning - A unity in life everlasting.

In Christ: Bill Doekes

Good (Blasphemous) Luck!

By Wes Bredenhof

The phrase “Good luck!” is a common one, both in the language of Christians and non-Christians. When someone is about to write a test, we often express our hopes for that person’s success with an optimistic, “Good luck!” If we run across someone fishing at the lake, we may wish them luck. We often utter the phrase without even thinking about what we are in fact saying. In fact, it probably doesn’t occur to us that when we say “Good luck!” we are in fact blaspheming the name and power of our Mighty God.

In Proverbs 16:33, we read that “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.” The lot was used in Israel for determining God’s will in certain cases. An unbelieving observer might have been led to conclude that the outcome of the lot was determined by chance. But the author of this proverb makes clear that it is God who is in control. There is no such thing as chance or luck. Luck is the invention of unbelief. Luck is a pagan substitute for the controlling hand of our heavenly Father. It is, quite literally, a false god.

Consider also the well-known words of Christ “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father’s will.” (Mt.10:29). God has ordained everything that happens. Even something like a sparrow dropping to the ground dead is part of His plan. It doesn’t happen by some strange twist of fate. It happens through providence. God is the one in control.

Surely we can all agree that God is all-powerful, and controls everything which happens in the universe. But then why do we deny his power by uttering a pagan phrase such as “Good luck”? What kind of honour do we bring to His Name when we make it sound like there truly is something such as “luck” or “chance?” You may argue that they are just words and no one really means them, but then I would remind you that many unbelievers say the same thing when you confront them about their blasphemous use of God’s Holy Name. Words are not meaningless. The speech of the Christian must be visibly different from that of the unbeliever. He must show with his speech that he has been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb—that he is holy, set apart from those who still wallow in the filth of their sins.

Furthermore, eliminating the phrase from our speech will give us many opportunities to witness about Jesus Christ. We will seek to season our language with Christian vocabulary, also when we wish good tidings upon unbelievers. You may say, “I hope that God will bless you.” You may even shorten that to a simple, “Blessings.” Whatever the case may be, find a substitute which does not eliminate the power of our awesome God. This will also encourage fellow believers when you wish good things for them as well. However, let not whatever we say to either believers or non-believers be only lip-service. We must mean what we say. When we wish them God’s blessings, let us also pray for them. Bring their needs before the Father—especially the need for salvation if the person you’ve spoken to is an unbeliever.

For Christians to speak about “luck” or “chance” is plainly blasphemous. It does no honour to God, but is an affront to His providential power. It is a slap in His face. We must refine our speech

to reflect our belief that God is in control of all things, and that, as we confess, “all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand.” May God give us a desire to honour Him more and more in our speech.

TO THE EDITOR

In response to the article POLEMICS AND MUSIC - A RESPONSE, (Vol.3, No. 8 of Reformed Polemics) I find that br. Bill Selles is confusing the issue at hand. This article is a response to br. Ron Dykstra. I have read br. Dykstra’s article and, although I found it hard to read, the sentiments expressed in it are right on.

Br. Selles writes that a recording by Stephen Curtis Chapman is made to the glory of GOD. Now this may well be true but when he bases it on some writing in one of his albums I think that we should first find out who this man is, for this album is printed in order to sell the product and the words printed there are not on the same level as Holy Scripture that we should just believe them without question. I would like to find out who this Stephen Curtis Chapman is: what church he frequents, is this a church we are affiliated with, what his life style is, etc. Further we should note that this is only one album that is dedicated to GOD. What about other christian rock musicians? Are they to be accepted under the same dedication?

Even though br. Selles uses Romans 14:5 as proof that he can listen to rock or anything else without anyone being allowed to dispute it, he should first read further in the same chapter of Romans, from verse 15 to the end. There it speaks of not eating in order not to mislead one that is not convinced that it is right, especially when one is placed in authority, e.g. minister, elder, teacher, etc.

To come back to the music, namely ‘Rock’, let us see what we can find out about it from the secular institutions. The word ‘Rock’ did not come about accidentally. No, it describes the intent of the music. Let’s look at a dictionary:

Webster’s Third New International Dictionary

Rock: a) to move back and forth in or as if in a cradle

b) To bring into or maintain in a state of rest, sleep or serenity by gentle motion to and fro.

(1) To cause to shake violently

(2) To daze with a vigorous blow

(3) To astonish or disturb, esp., by upsetting cherished opinions or customary ways of life.

<Rocking the solid beliefs they had never dreamed of questioning>

If this is how the world describes this music should we as Christians who should be ever vigilant and awake than allow ourselves to be rocked to sleep? Or should we allow it to daze us as with a blow to the head, or should we maybe allow it to disturb our faith life, our cherished opinions?

You may take whatever secular opinion you deem proper, they all attack our Christian lifestyle. The world knows this and Satan makes full use of this. He knows that if he can replace our sacred

Psalms and Hymns with so called Christian rock than it is only a small step from there to replace Christian rock with anything else.

This, of course, does not mean that we can not be attracted to rock music. As with all other temptations, we have to struggle to stay pure. Brothers and sisters, let us then be ever vigilant and let us not be deceived for the time is short. Let us pray that God's Kingdom may come soon and that we may be partakers in that Kingdom.

Wishing you the Lord's blessing, Martin Onderwater