

# THE LORD'S SUPPER THE FEAST OF SALVATION

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## **I. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament**

### **A. Types and Pictures of the Supper**

The early church fathers and the Lutheran fathers saw many pictures and types of the Lord's Supper in the Old Testament Scriptures. Gerhard enumerates a multitude of pictures of the Lord's Supper. Melchizedek's offering of bread and wine to Abraham, the father of believers, points to the meal of salvation of our great high priest Jesus Christ. Pictures of the Supper are seen in the tree of life in the Garden of Eden, the Passover lamb, the manna in the wilderness, in David's invitation to Mephibosheth to eat at his table (2 Samuel 9:13), in Elijah's food (1 Kings 19:6-8), in Ahasuerus' feast (Esther 1:3), and in Isaiah's burning coal. (Isaiah 6) Allusions to the Supper are found in the poor that eat and are satisfied (Psalm 22:26), in the Good Shepherd who prepares his table in the wilderness (Psalm 23; John 10), and in Psalm 111 where the Lord's wonderful works are remembered, his covenant of redemption stands forever, and he gives food to those who fear him (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord's Supper*, pp. 212-218; *Loci Theologici*, Locus 21, Para. 11-12, Preuss ed. 5:6-7).

### **B. The Institution of the Supper**

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. As our Lord and his disciples gathered that first Maundy Thursday evening, they came together to celebrate no ordinary meal. This was the Passover, the most solemn meal for God's Old Testament people. It was to remind Israel of how the Lord once saved their first-born in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb. This meal, however, not only pointed back to God's deliverance in Egypt through the blood of the Passover lamb, but it also pointed forward to the blood of the true lamb of God who would redeem all men on the cross. As our Lord reclined at this meal for the last time, he was the fulfillment of the Passover ritual for all times. Jesus used this setting to institute his New Testament meal of salvation. In the Passover Old Testament believers ate the flesh of the Passover lamb, which was to picture for them the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world. Here Jesus, the very Lamb of God, did not give New Testament believers merely a picture of his flesh and blood with bread and wine. He gave them his true body and blood wherein he bestowed upon them all the blessings of the cross.

As the Passover meal got underway, Jesus took bread. This was a large flat loaf of the unleavened bread, the matzah, for only unleavened bread was used in the Passover. He gave thanks, or blessed it, and broke it for distribution. Exactly what that blessing entailed we are not told. Still it must have been quite different from the usual Passover benediction. Concerning the blessed bread that he was offering his disciples and inviting them to receive, the Lord said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me."

### **C. The Supper and the Real Presence**

Notice what Jesus said concerning the bread which he was offering his disciples: "This is my body." Jesus did not say, "This is a picture of my body," nor did he say, "This only represents my body." Rather he said, "This is my body." Concerning his true body Jesus said to the disciples, "This is given for you." This very body which they received on their lips was the same

body which was the once and for all sacrifice for sin on the cross. Having received Christ's body in the Supper, the disciples received all the blessings of Christ's redemptive work.

The Words of Institution continue: "In the same way also he took the cup after supper." Jesus took the third cup of the Passover, the cup of blessing according to 1 Corinthians 10:16. This was a cup of wine, for only wine was used in the Passover. He blessed it even as he had blessed the bread and gave it to them saying, "This is the new testament (covenant) in my blood."

Matthew explains further, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:27). These words of explanation concerning this cup, which is his true blood, allude to the ratification of the first covenant in Exodus 24. Real blood ratified the old covenant and the people were given that real blood in testimony of the fact that they received the blessing of the sacrifice. They were sprinkled with the blood of the animal sacrifice which pointed to Christ. Likewise real blood ratified the new covenant, and God's people are still given that real blood of the true Lamb of God so that they are certain that the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice apply to them. The words of institution summarize the blessings of this sacrament with the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," which shows that the whole treasure house of salvation is offered in this Supper. This is Luther's point in the Small Catechism, "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."

Jesus concluded his institution with the command, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." A similar command had already been given concerning his body. These words explain that this institution was not meant as merely a one-time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory (1 Corinthians 11:26). Each time Christians celebrate this Supper they bring Christ's great sacrifice into remembrance and receive the treasure of that sacrifice: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

On the basis of Holy Scripture we reject both the Reformed and the Roman Catholic views of the sacrament. The Reformed Church teaches the doctrine of representation. This means that the Supper is merely a sign or a symbol of Christ's body and blood, a meaning contrary to the clear teaching of the Words of Institution in which Christ declares, "This is my body, this is my blood." The Roman Church maintains the doctrine of transubstantiation, an instantaneous replacing of one substance with another. The substance of bread and wine is to be replaced with the substance of Christ's body and blood with only the accidents (outward forms) of the bread and wine remaining. This is contrary to the Scripture which speaks of the bread and wine being present in the sacrament (1 Corinthians 11:26-28). As Lutherans we teach the biblical doctrine of the real presence. Because of the sacramental union both the Lord's body and blood and the bread and wine are present in the Supper. This doctrine is explained by saying that Christ's body and blood are in, with, and under the bread and wine. The Scripture clearly teaches that in the sacrament the bread is the true body of Christ and the wine is the true blood of Christ.

We confess the doctrine of the real presence for the following reasons: 1) The Words of Institution declare that the bread and wine are Christ's true body and blood (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, 1 Corinthians 11:21-25). 2) The Bible states that the cup is a communion of (participation in) the blood of Christ and that the bread is a communion of (participation in) the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). 3) The Bible states that unworthy communicants are not guilty of bread and wine but of the body and blood of Christ (1

Corinthians 11:27). 4) No one has the right to change a divine institution and last will and testament. Just as we do not have the right to change the will and testament of a relative who has passed away, so we do not have the right to change the words of our Lord's last will and testament that declare, "This is my body, this is my blood." (Mark 14:24, Galatians 3:15) In our day many maintain that they teach the real presence, but in actuality they merely teach a spiritual presence. One that subscribes to the scriptural doctrine of the real presence will confess that in the Supper: 1) He receives the very body, born of Mary, and the very blood which ran from his wounds. 2) He receives the Lord's body and blood not only by faith but also with his mouth (*Manducatio oralis*). 3) The unbeliever also receives Christ's body and blood, but to his harm (*Manducatio indignorum*).

#### D. The Last Will and Testament of Christ

The sacrament is the last will and testament of Christ for Jesus says that this "is the New Testament in my blood." It is a gift or inheritance for God's people and not a human work or something we offer to God. According to Luther the sacrament contains all the elements of a last will and testament.

Since God in the Scriptures again and again calls his promise a testament he means to announce thereby that he will die; and again, in calling it a promise he means to announce that he will live. And thus, by that one word he wanted to make us understand that he would become man, die; and yet live eternally . . . A testament is nothing but the last will of one who is dying, telling how his heirs are to live with and dispose of his properties after his death. . . . Four things are necessary in a complete and proper testament: the testator, the oral or written promise, the inheritance, and the heirs; and all of these are clearly visible to us in this testament. The **testator** is Christ, who is about to die. The **promise** is contained in the words with which the bread and wine are consecrated. The **inheritance** which Christ has bequeathed to us in his testament is the forgiveness of sins. The **heirs** are all the believers in Christ, namely, the holy elect children of God – wherefore Paul in Titus 1 [:1] calls the Christian faith the faith of the elect. (LW 36:179-180)

Before a man dies he often prepares his will in which he bequeaths his property to whomever he desires. Those remembered in his will may be totally unworthy, but he has the right to do as he pleases with what is his. Then, through his death, the will is made effective. Likewise, Jesus is the testator who prepared for his death and established his will, his gift. The Holy Supper is Christ's last will and testament which is to be distributed to believers for all time. This testament he ratified and made effective through his death on the cross. We, his heirs, do nothing to obtain the inheritance nor are we worthy to receive it. The Holy Supper is totally and completely a testament or a gift from God. It is the greatest inheritance that we can ever imagine. It is more valuable than all the wealth of this world. Here is bequeathed to us the greatest treasure of all times, all the blessings of the cross.

#### E. The Supper and Sacrifice

The atonement sacrifice for all sin was finished and completed at the cross when the Savior cried out, "It is finished" (John 19:30; see also 1 Peter 3:18, Hebrews 7:26-27, 9:12). Since the sacrifice of Christ is complete, the Roman Catholic Church perverts the priestly office of Christ when it speaks of each repetition of the Lord's Supper as an unbloody sacrifice—the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, only in an unbloody manner: "The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist *are one single sacrifice*... 'In this divine sacrifice which is celebrated

in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 1367).

To say that the Supper is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross, namely, that in the sacrament Christ's body and blood are again offered up to appease God's just anger over sin, impairs the oneness of the once and for all sacrifice on the cross (Hebrews 7:26- 27, 9:12). The sacrifice of the cross cannot be all-sufficient, offered once, and still need to be continually offered in the Mass. The only way that the sacrament may be spoken of as a sacrifice is that the very body and blood which were once offered for the redemption of all, are now present in the Supper conveying the blessings of that redemption to the individual. Chemnitz writes in his *Examen*:

The fathers call the body and blood of the Lord which are present in the Supper a saving sacrifice, a pure host, our ransom, the purchase price of our redemption, the ransom for the sins of the world, a propitiatory sacrifice and a propitiation, **not because the body and blood of Christ are offered in the Mass by the action of the priest in order that they may become the ransom and propitiation for the sins of the whole world, but because that sacrifice which was once offered on the cross for our redemption and for the sins of the whole world—the body and blood of the Lord—is present, is dispensed, offered, and taken in the Lord's Supper, so that the power and efficacy of this offering, once made on the cross, is applied and sealed individually to all who receive it in faith.** Thus Cyprian says of the Lord's Supper: “This life-giving bread and the cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities.” (Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 491)

The Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are extremely emphatic in their rejection of any form of propitiatory sacrifice in the Supper which militates against the once and for all sacrifice of the cross or makes the sacrament a human work or sacrifice.

#### **F. The Physical Elements in the Supper**

According to Christ's institution, bread and wine are the physical elements in the Supper. Matthew speaks of the contents of the cup in the sacrament as “this fruit of the vine” (Matthew 26: 29). This is the liturgical term for wine in the Passover meal. This indicates that the Lord used wine in the Supper. Also, in April at the time of Christ such a thing as grape juice was an impossibility. There was no refrigeration in that warm climate. Unfermented grape juice could be obtained only when the grapes were freshly pressed – before the juice naturally fermented.

The other physical element used in the Lord's Supper was bread. Here the general Greek term for bread made from grain is used. We know that unleavened bread was used in the last supper, because it was a Passover meal and only unleavened bread was used in the Passover. Yet Jesus in the recorded words of institution did not use the proper term for unleavened bread, indicating that any bread made from grain may be used in the Supper. As a result, the Eastern Church has traditionally used leavened bread and the Western Church, unleavened bread. The earthly elements of the sacrament are wine from grapes and bread from grain.

#### **G. The Supper and the Words of Institution**

When Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of me," he commanded us to continue this institution. What is necessary for a valid Lord's Supper? Jesus said, "Do this," i.e., do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty Words of Institution which effect the presence, and distribute his true body and blood so that they may be eaten and drunk. The Lord said, "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you... Drink of it, all of you, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you and for many, for the remission of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." These are the words of blessing Christ gave to the church so that in our Lord's Supper celebration the Word may be joined to the elements to effect the presence of his body and blood, as Augustine says, "The Word is joined to the element and it becomes a sacrament" (SA III V:2, Tappert, p. 310).

The Lutheran Confessions maintain that the Words of Institution cause the presence of Christ's body and blood. "For where his institution is observed and his words are spoken over the bread and cup (wine), and the consecrated bread and cup (wine) are distributed, Christ himself through the spoken words, is still efficacious by virtue of the first institution, through his Word, which he wishes to be there repeated" (FC SD VII, 75, *Triglotta*, p. 999).

#### **H. The Supper and 1 Corinthians 10:16**

Another portion of Scripture which is important in the study of the Lord's Supper is 1 Corinthians 10:16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (NKJV) St. Paul did not say that the cup and bread are only visual aids to help us understand Christ's redemptive work. No, he said that the cup and the bread are a communion, a partaking of Christ's body and blood. It is the very same body that came forth from the Virgin's womb and died on the cross, the very same blood with which he washed away the sins of the world.

In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the imperative "Do this" of the Words of Institution is particularly illuminated. Here "the cup of blessing which we bless" is explained. Notice that it is a cup which the church is to bless. Then the "Do this" is not only a command to distribute and receive but also to bless. One can distribute and receive forever, but without God's commanded blessing it is only bread and wine. It is God's blessing which causes Jesus' body and blood to be present. On the other hand, one can say God's blessing forever, but if there is no distribution and reception there is no sacrament, for Christ's full institution has not been carried out. The blessing with which the church is to bless the elements in the Supper is the Words of Institution.

#### **I. The Supper and John 6**

John 6 has been understood by some as speaking directly to the institution of the Lord's Supper. John 6 is then held to be St. John's institution narrative of the sacrament. However the eating and drinking in John 6 refer to the eating and drinking which a believer does by faith through the means of grace, receiving all the blessings of Christ's body and blood offered up for salvation. Therefore the Lutheran fathers teach that John 6 does not specifically apply to the Lord's Supper because here the eating and drinking are figurative, while in the Words of Institution the eating and drinking are literal. The second reason that John 6 does not refer directly to the Supper is that the sermon recorded in John 6 occurred a year before the institution of the Supper. Therefore, the sermon in John 6 cannot apply to the dogma of the

sacrament. The third and most important reason Lutherans reject this viewpoint is that the eating in John 6 always results in salvation (John 6:51), while in the Lord's Supper the participants may eat judgment to themselves (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord's Supper*, pp. 340ff., 454; Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 326- 328; Chemnitz, LS 235-240).

At the same time, there is a definite connection between the Words of Institution and John 6. John 6 speaks of the spiritual eating that is necessary for worthy participation in the Holy Supper. All communicants, both the worthy and unworthy, eat sacramentally with the mouth the very body and blood of Christ born of the virgin, but only those who eat spiritually through true repentance and faith receive all the wonderful blessings offered through that body and blood. Thus, John 6 applies to worthy participation in the sacrament, and in this sense speaks to the Holy Supper as our Confessions state.

There is therefore a twofold eating of the flesh of Christ. The one is spiritual, of which Christ speaks chiefly in John 6:48-58. This occurs, in no other way than with the spirit and faith, in the preaching and contemplation of the Gospel as well as in the Lord's Supper. It is intrinsically useful, salutary, and necessary to salvation for all Christians at all times. Without this spiritual participation, even the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not salutary but actually pernicious and damning. (FC SD VII, 61, *Tappert*, pp. 580-581)

## **J. The Supper and Closed Communion**

According to Paul the sacrament draws us into one body, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:17). All Christians who eat his body and blood are united in his body, the church. The sacrament ties them together far more intimately than any bond of blood. The unity that is effected in the sacrament assumes a unity in doctrine and belief. All the communicants present themselves as one spiritual family. Because the Lord's Supper draws us into one body, we will receive the sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those that teach his Word in its truth and purity (John 8:31). The Supper is a confession of agreement in doctrine. Allowing one to commune that does not believe all the teachings of the Bible or communing at an altar that does not confess all the truths of God's Word is really a lie. By this practice we are saying there is unity of belief when there is no unity. We are declaring unity or fellowship with individuals who are not confessing the teachings we have learned from the Bible. This is contrary to the directive of the Lord (Ephesians 4:3, Romans 16:17).

Church fellowship or confessional fellowship is a participation in sacred things (*communio in sacris*), the means of grace. This fellowship is created by those very means of grace and is evidenced in every expression and manifestation of a common faith. Christians practice church fellowship on the basis of the pure marks of the church. The marks of the church are to be pure, that is, there must be complete agreement in all the doctrines of Scripture in order to exercise fellowship. There are no degrees or levels in the practice of church fellowship and there are no expressions of a shared faith which are excluded from church fellowship. Church fellowship is a unit both in respect to the doctrine of Scripture, that is, there must be consensus in all the doctrines of the Word for fellowship, and in respect to the various expressions of a shared faith that they all be considered a unit or an indivisible whole. There is either complete fellowship or none at all (Romans 16:17, 1 John 4:1, 2 John 9-11, 2 Timothy 2:16-19, Galatians 1:8-9, Matthew 7:15-19).

## II. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament

In order to receive the benefits of the Holy Supper, we are to be worthy and well prepared, as Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11: 27-29. "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body and blood of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Before going to the Lord's Supper every Christian should carefully examine himself. The order of confession in our church aids the individual Christian in such self-examination. However, confession, whether public or private, should not take the place of personal examination. Each Christian before coming to the sacrament will examine his life in accord with the Ten Commandments. When we look into the mirror of God's law we see our endless failures and sins and our desperate need for the forgiveness and strengthening of the Supper. If we do not see our failures, then we need to take a better look at the mirror of the law and understand its real intent. When we see our sins and are not sorry for them, we should not attend the Supper because we will not be worthy guests. The impenitent, that is, one who is not sorry for his sins, receives the sacrament to his harm, rather than to his blessing (1 Corinthians 11:30).

In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper we need to be well prepared to receive it worthily, as Paul says (1 Corinthians 11:28). This, however, is not a worthiness brought about by the Law, but by the Gospel, and it does not consist in a perfect life and entire purity of the soul. Rather, to be worthy and well prepared means that we have a sincere sorrow over our sins. We will confess them, striving to do better, and earnestly long for the forgiveness of sins. At the same time this worthiness includes a confident faith in Jesus the Savior. He paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross with his body and blood, and he gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

It should be remembered that weak believers are not to be numbered among the unworthy. Those who feel their spiritual weakness and failure to live the Christ-like life, yet desire to become stronger, are indeed proper guests at the Lord's Table. Such persons the Lord will not cast away. Rather, he invites them to come, for he instituted the Holy Supper as strengthening, nourishment, and medicine for the weak and infirm. He extends to all the gracious invitation, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28), and whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37).

As a Christian prepares to receive the blessed sacrament, he will use questions such as these to examine himself.

1. Am I truly sorry for all my sins in thought, word, and deed?
2. Do I believe that Jesus my Savior paid for all these sins on the cross?
3. Do I believe that Jesus gives me in the Supper his body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins, life, and salvation?

4. Do I sincerely desire with the aid of the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend my sinful life?

Come then and receive the meal. Receive the life-giving flesh and blood of Christ, our ransom, the food for the way, the medicine of immortality, a foretaste of the feast of the lamb.

### III. The Blessings of the Sacrament

Luther aptly summarized the blessings of the Supper in the *Small Catechism*: "The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: Given and shed for you for the remission of sins, namely, that in the sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the sacrament, as the Words of Institution declare, and from it flow all the other blessings of the Supper.

#### A. The Supper Bestows the Forgiveness of Sins

The Lord's Supper is a real means of grace. By means of grace we mean an instrument or channel which brings the benefits of the cross to us and makes them our own. This sacrament is the Gospel. Here we receive all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. On the cross Jesus obtained salvation for all people. He won salvation once and for all at Calvary but he does not distribute and give it at the cross. This he does through the Supper and the other means of grace, baptism and the Word. Luther demonstrates the connection between the cross and the Supper.

So that your readers may the better perceive our teaching I shall clearly and broadly describe it. We treat of the forgiveness of sins in two ways. First, how it is achieved and won. Second, how it is distributed and given to us. Christ has achieved it on the cross, it is true. But He has not distributed or given it on the cross. He has not won it in the Supper or Sacrament. There He has distributed and given it through the Word, as also in the Gospel where it is preached. He has won it once and for all on the cross. But the distribution takes place continuously before and after, from the beginning to the end of the world (LW 40: 213-214).

The holy sacrament is a real impartation of the remission of sins obtained for all people on the cross. In our weaknesses and failures we can often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha, kneeling before the cross, embracing his dying body, and drinking from His five bloody wounds. It is Jesus' body hung on the cross and his shed blood which have paid for the sins of the world (C.F.W. Walther, *Brosamen*, pp. 112 ff.).

As a kidnapped child is bought back by the parents with money, so Jesus bought us back not with gold or silver but with his holy precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. His body and blood are the ransom for sin. In the Supper we receive the very thing which paid for sins, the very thing which freed us from hell's destruction. Then no matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how heavily they burden our conscience, in receiving this

sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven. Within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely his true body and blood.

### **B. The Supper Gives Life and Nourishment**

The Holy Supper confers life. This is not temporal life which we received through natural birth, but it is that new spiritual life which has been regenerated in us through the new birth in holy baptism. Since this life is still weak and imperfect, and constant growth is necessary, the Lord Jesus has instituted this sacrament as a true spiritual nourishment. Luther says concerning this in the Large Catechism:

Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. Meanwhile it must suffer much opposition ... For such times, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment. (LC V 23-26, *Tappert*, p. 449)

Our Lutheran Confessions quote the early church fathers as saying, "Christ's flesh is truly a life-giving food and His blood truly a quickening beverage" (FC SD VIII 76, *Tappert*, p. 606). Likewise, Chemnitz cites the fathers of the Council at Ephesus in 431 AD: "The flesh of Christ on account of the union with the divine nature, which is life itself, is made life-giving or a life-giver and it thus has the authority or power to give life, and this authority it exercises in the action of the Lord's Supper in the believers" (Chemnitz, TNC 474). The body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. They are never unfruitful, impotent, or useless. Here we receive the body and blood of the living God into this body made of dust. What can be more powerful? What can be more beneficial? This is the greatest treasure in the life of a Christian. It is the greatest benefit for body and soul. This dual gift of life-giving bread and cup of blessing benefits the life of the total man, being a medicine and an offering to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities.

### **C. The Supper and the Holy Spirit**

We tend to forget that **we receive the Holy Ghost in the Supper** together with the body and blood of Christ even though we know that the Spirit comes to us in all the means of grace. He comes in all his fullness with all his many gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12:13 St. Paul writes, "For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free – and we were all given the one Spirit to drink." Commenting on this passage Gerhard states, "We drink one and the same Sacrament so that we also receive one and the same Spirit; just as we receive one and the same Baptism, so that we be one body" (Johann Gerhard, *Baptism and Lord's Supper*, p. 375; see also Johann Gerhard, *Schola Pietatis*, I:74). 1 Corinthians 12 has been understood in this manner by a number of other confessional Lutheran theologians (See M. Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 193; C.M. Zorn, *Die Korintherbriefe*, p. 106).

### **D. The Supper and the Sanctified Life**

Since the flesh and blood of Christ are life-giving, they provide the strength that believers need to live a more sanctified life. Out of thanks for all that Christ has done for us by saving us from everlasting death, we will desire to lead a Christ-like life. Yet as we view our lives we see failures on every side. We do not have the strength in ourselves to battle the attacks of the devil, the world, and our flesh. Then as we are tossed about by temptations, when it seems that we have no power in ourselves, we come to his wonderful Table. Here he gives us his quickening flesh and blood which provide the strength for a holier life. It is the power to walk in his loving footsteps. We can indeed do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

The Lutheran fathers make considerable use of the vine and branches picture of John 15 in connection with the Supper. By receiving his body and blood we are engrafted into him, drawing life from him as branches from the vine. We are so united with him that we can say, "It is not I that live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). When we remain in him and he in us through a regular use of Word and sacrament we will bear abundant fruit, for without him we can do nothing.

### E. The Supper and Our Daily Burdens

As the Christian journeys through this life, he meets conflicts and troubles all the way. There are often financial difficulties at work, problems in our family, and conflicts with our friends. There are dreaded ailments like cancer and heart disease, and even the death of those most near and dear. For this reason the German Lutheran fathers often speak of this life as the *Jammertal*, the "vale of tears." Yet in every difficulty and problem of life the Lord Jesus says, "Come to my Table, all you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." Through the sacrament of his body and blood he gives us the strength to face all the problems of life and power to overcome and obtain the victory (Philippians 4:13, 1 Corinthians 15:57). Come to this refreshing repast. Here is the nourishment, the heavenly manna we need all the way through the journey of this life. It is a pure and wholesome remedy imparting salvation and comfort that cures and gives life for both body and soul. "For this bread is a comfort for the sorrowing, a healing for the sick, a life for the dying, a food for all the hungry, and a rich treasure for all the poor and needy" (LW 51: 95). In the *Large Catechism* Luther speaks of the sacrament as our refuge and comfort in life:

In this sacrament he offers us all the treasure he brought from heaven for us, to which he most graciously invites us in other places, as when he says in Matt. 11:28, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you." . . . **We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body.** For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also. Why, then, do we act as if the sacrament were a poison which would kill us if we ate of it? . . . But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all his gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils. (LC V 66-70, *Tappert*, p. 454)

The Lord's Supper is a heavenly and spiritual nourishment unto eternal life for both the body and soul of the believer. Because of this, believers in every burden and conflict of life will come to the Supper. This will also be the case in physical needs and sickness and especially at the

hour of death. For there is no better help than that of the divine physician who gives his life-giving flesh and body as the soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in soul and body.

#### **F. Union with Christ and His Body the Church**

There are many today who are seeking a closer walk with Jesus, a closer relationship with the Savior. There are times in every Christian's life when he feels very distant from the divine Redeemer. At such times the Christian is not to attend some wild emotional revival to have an experience of Christ. He is not to try to wrestle with the Lord in prayer until he feels his presence. Rather he is to go where the Lord has promised to be found, in the Word and sacraments. In the Supper there is an intimate union with Christ, for here he comes into the believer with his body and blood and remains with him. He draws us into union and communion with the divine.

Together with speaking of granting us union with Christ through his body and blood, another way of expressing the blessings of the Supper is to speak of it as permitting us to partake in the divine. This is common in the works of both Chemnitz and Gerhard. This salvific theme is based on a number of passages from Scripture (2 Corinthians 3:18, 8:9, Galatians 3:26, 4:7, John 17:23, 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, Romans 8:29, 1 John 3:2, Psalms 82:1-6, Genesis 1:26), but first and foremost on 2 Peter 1:4, "By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that by these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." In the Supper we partake in the divine, having union and communion with the deity itself:

Therefore, in order that we might be able to lay hold on Christ more intimately and retain Him more firmly, not only did He Himself assume our nature but He also restored it again for us by distributing His body and blood to us in the Supper, so that by this connection with His humanity, which has been assumed from us and is again communicated back to us, He might draw us into communion and union with the deity itself (Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper*, 188). Thus this Holy Supper will transform our souls; this most divine sacrament will make us divine men, until finally we shall enter upon the fullness of the blessedness that is to come, filled with all the fullness of God, and wholly like Him (Johann Gerhard, *Sacred Meditations*, 20:111).

This incorporation into Christ that the Lord's Supper grants constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of his body, the church. One cannot be united with Christ without also at the same time existing in communion with all the other members of this body. As he comes into us with his flesh and blood, uniting us with himself, so he comes into all the other communicants, drawing us together as his church. Paul says, "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf" (1 Corinthians 10:17). As many kernels of wheat are ground together to form a loaf of bread, and as many grapes are crushed to form one cup of wine, so in the Supper we become his one body, the church, by partaking of his one body in the sacrament. This is a wonderful fellowship where we will bear one another's burdens by showing love and compassion to each brother and sister in need. Because this sacrament draws us into one body, we are to receive the sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those who teach his word in its truth and purity. Otherwise we are really lying. We are declaring we are one when we are not one.

## G. The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation

The Holy Supper confers salvation. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal salvation. In the Supper the believer receives the very ransom money that paid for his sins and freed him from destruction. This payment of ransom is what has thrown open the doors of heaven and broken every barrier down. As we receive his body and blood in the Supper we know that heaven is ours. This sacrament is a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher by means of which we pass from this life to the eternal (LW 35:66).

As Christ walked among men, people were healed and raised from the dead by his very touch. His flesh and blood are life-giving. Then as we receive his glorified and risen body and blood into our dying body, we are assured that, even though it returns to the dust from which it was formed, on the last day it will break forth from the grave glorified like Christ's glorified body. So we will ever be with the Lord. Because of this, the early church fathers have often spoken of the Supper as the *viaticum* "the provision for the way," the medicine of immortality which is a food preparing us for eternal life. Luther clearly points to the sacrament as a pledge and seal of the resurrection and eternal life:

So, when we eat Christ's flesh physically and spiritually, the food is so powerful that it transforms us into itself and out of fleshly, sinful, mortal men makes spiritual, holy, living men. This we are already, though in a hidden manner in faith and hope; the fact is not yet manifest, but we shall experience it on the Last Day (LW 37:101)... Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature. (LW 37:134)

Martin Chemnitz quotes the early church fathers using the same comforting language:

Because in the Eucharist we receive that body of Christ which has been given for us, and blood of the New Testament which has been shed for the remission of sins, who will deny that believers there receive the whole treasury of the benefits of Christ? For they receive that through which sins are remitted, by which death is abolished, by which life is communicated to us, by which Christ unites us to Himself as members, so that He is in us and we are in Him. Hilary says beautifully: "When these things have been taken and drunk, they bring about both that Christ is in us and that we are in Him." Cyril says: "**When in the mystical benediction we eat the flesh of Christ in faith, we have from it life in ourselves, being joined to that flesh which has been made life, so that not only does the soul ascend through the Holy Spirit into a blessed life, but also this earthly body is restored by this food to immortality, to be resurrected on the last day.**" Therefore we receive in the Eucharist the most certain and most excellent pledge of our reconciliation with God, of the forgiveness of sins, of immortality and future glorification... Beautiful is that statement of Ignatius, which is found in his Epistle to the Ephesians [20], where he calls the Eucharist *pharmakon athanasias*, *antidoton tou mee apothanein*, *alla zeen en theo dia Ieesou Christou*, *katharteerion alexikakon*, that is, "**a medicine of immortality, an antidote, that we may not die but live in God through Jesus Christ, a cleansing remedy through warding off and driving out evils.**" (Chemnitz, Ex. 2, 233-234)

This is the medicine of immortality, an antidote that we may not die, but live forever in him.

## H. The Supper and Eschatology

Near the end of the book of Revelation, the Apostle John assures the elect, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb" (Revelation 19:9)! The Lord's Supper begins the messianic wedding banquet, the victory banquet, which will reach its full consummation in heaven. The Supper is the messianic feast which will culminate in the feast of the lamb, the lamb's high feast. Then because we receive his glorified and risen body and blood in the Supper, which is the antidote for death, we know that this very body will one day break forth from the grave, glorified like Christ's glorified body. Thus we will ever feast with the Lord in paradise above.

The risen Lord walked with the Emmaus disciples on the way, became a guest and then the host at their meal (Luke 24: 13-35). He taught them his Word and revealed himself to them in the breaking of bread. Now as the church gathers in Word and sacrament worship, he is the host who gives himself to us for food as the beginning of the messianic victory banquet, where all tears are wiped away and death is swallowed up forever, a foretaste of heaven.

Paul says, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but it also, at the same time, points forward to the final consummation of our redemption on the last day. Each time we celebrate the sacrament we do it eagerly awaiting the second coming as did the whole ancient church when it cried *Maranatha*, "Lord come quickly." The Father then gives us his Son under the form of bread and wine as a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the lamb which will be ours at his second coming. In the Supper we for a moment step out of our mundane workaday existence, where we carry one after another to the grave, and we have a foretaste of heaven, where the lamb once slain himself descends and angels prostrate fall. Here is heaven on earth as the Lutheran fathers prayed, "Your Supper be my heaven on earth, till I enter heaven." Then as we eat at his Table here, we have the certainty that we will be at his Table there where we will eat of the heavenly manna and drink of the river of his pleasure forevermore.

### **I. A Lord's Supper Prayer**

O Lord, although I am not worthy that you would today enter my heart, yet I need your help and desire your grace for the strengthening of my faith. My only confidence as I near your holy altar is that you have invited me, a poor miserable sinner, to receive your body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

O Lord Jesus, now unite yourself with me so that I remain in you and you in me, ever undivided both here in time and forever in all eternity. May your holy body, Lord Jesus Christ, nourish me; your rose-colored blood quench me, your bitter suffering and death strengthen me. O Lord Jesus Christ, hear me, and in your holy wounds hide me, that I never be separated from you. From the old evil foe redeem me, and in the true faith keep me. Then I, together with all the elect, may joyfully sing your praises both here and hereafter in eternity. Amen.

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**Abbreviations:**

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes are from the *Tappert* Translation unless otherwise indicated):

AC - *Augsburg Confession*

Ap - *Apology of the Augsburg Confession*

FC - *Formula of Concord*

LC - *Large Catechism*

SD - *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*

**Luther's Works:**

LW - *American Edition*

St. L. - *St. Louis Edition*

WA - *Weimar Edition*

**Writings of Chemnitz:**

MWS - *Ministry, Word, and Sacrament*

TNC - *Two Natures in Christ*

Ex - *Examination of the Council of Trent*