

God's Gift to You: The Means of Grace

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1989 Synod Convention Essay*

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God's Gift to You: The Means of Grace

I. The Means of Grace: The Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments

A. There Is No Promise of The Holy Spirit's Activity Apart From Means

In the Reformation God through Luther restored to the church the central article of the faith, justification by faith alone. As this restoration was taking place, men who seemed to be walking with Luther robbed the church of the comfort of the Gospel by rejecting the scriptural means through which the treasure of salvation is received. Zwingli and others like him said that the Holy Spirit does not need a wagon. (*Dux vel vehiculum Spiritui non est necessarium*. F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 146) They sarcastically implied that the Holy Spirit does not need a cart to carry the blessings of redemption to humanity. He does not use the Word, Absolution, Baptism and the Lord's Supper to work faith, strengthen faith, and preserve faith. Rather God works in man directly by His almighty power. Luther called all who in any way separate the activity of the Holy Spirit from the Word and Sacraments "enthusiasts"

(*Schwärmer*). *The Formula of Concord* defines for us what Luther meant by the term "enthusiasts": "They are those who imagine that God draws men to Himself, enlightens them, justifies them, and saves them without means, without the hearing of God's Word and without the use of the Holy Sacraments." (FC Ep II 13, p. 471)

Enthusiasm is nothing new under the sun. In the latter half of the second century a schism occurred in the church as a result of Montanus' claim that the Holy Spirit spoke directly through him and his companions. He too doubted that the Holy Spirit needed a wagon. Luther traced this viewpoint all the way back to the fall where he showed that Adam and Eve became the first enthusiasts when Satan led them from the Word of God to their own ideas and imagination. (SA III VII 5, p. 312) Nor are we lacking in enthusiasts today. We are surrounded by Reformed churches who still do not believe that the Holy Spirit uses a wagon. The charismatic movement is exploding around us with its direct revelations, its baptism with the Holy Spirit and fire, and its speaking in tongues. All this is to say nothing about modern theologians who put themselves above the Scriptures, and Romanists who make the Pope an infallible teacher outside and beyond the written Word of God.

This enthusiasm destroys the comfort of forgiveness and the certainty of salvation for poor lost sinners. If there are other revelations or traditions besides the Scripture through which God speaks, how do we know that we have the full life-giving truth. If the Spirit has not tied Himself to means, then we do not find forgiveness, life, and salvation in the words of Absolution, in the waters of Baptism and in the Lord's Supper. We are left in the lurch as to where to find forgiveness of sins and strengthening of faith. We must scurry from one revival to another hoping to feel the certainty of salvation. When the spiritual high wears off, one must go back to searching again. In times of trial and tribulation we are thrown to and fro in a sea of despair and outrageous fortune, for we can find no place where God's peace is dispensed and we feel no certainty of salvation within ourselves.

B. The Spirit Promises to Work Through Means

The Spirit has chosen to use a wagon to convey to us all the treasures of salvation. The Scripture declares that faith comes from hearing the Word (Romans 10:17), that Baptism saves us (I Peter 3:21), that whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven and whenever you do not forgive sins, they are not forgiven (John 20:23), and that the Lord's Supper gives the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). The Scriptures clearly state that God works through means, as Luther taught:

For He wants to give no one the Spirit or faith outside of the outward Word and sign instituted by Him, as He says in Luke 16 :29, "Let them hear Moses and the prophets." Accordingly Paul can call baptism a "washing of regeneration" wherein God "richly pours out the Holy Spirit" [Titus 3:5]. And the oral Gospel "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" [Rom. 1 :16]. (LW 40:146)

The Scripture nowhere promises the Spirit and His gift outside of the means of grace. In fact our Confessions quote Luther as saying, "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and Sacraments. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and Sacraments is of the devil." (SA III VIII 9, p. 313) It is impossible to receive any saving knowledge apart from the means of grace. Whenever man looks to other revelations, error and heresy begin.

The scriptural and confessional doctrine of the means of grace is defined in this way by Dr. Pieper:

...He (God) ordained the means by which He gives men the infallible assurance of His gracious will toward them; in other words, He both confers on men the remission of sins merited by Christ and works faith in the proffered remission or, where faith already exists, strengthens it. The Church has appropriately called these divine ordinances the means of grace. (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 103)

This doctrine is a wonderful comfort for the believer. We do not have to spend our whole life searching for God's grace and forgiveness. He freely offers and gives it to us in His objective means of grace. There is nothing we must do or accomplish to receive His grace. Not only does He give us His forgiveness in the means of grace, but through them He also works and strengthens the faith which receives that forgiveness, life, and salvation. This comforting doctrine, which emphasizes that our salvation does not depend on our own efforts, indeed upholds the central article of the faith, justification by faith alone.

II. The Word of God: God's Gift to You

A. The Word of God Is Inspired, Infallible and Inerrant

The term "the Word of God" is used in various ways in the Scripture. It can refer to the Word made flesh (I John 1:1) or it can refer to the oral and written Word (John 8:31-38). Jesus is the Word par excellence. The oral and written Word is the Word of God because God speaks through it, and its content is the message of Jesus Christ. The Scripture is the Word of God because here the Word made flesh is revealed. Luther speaks of the Scripture as Jesus' swaddling clothes and cradle, showing that Jesus will be found only in the Word (LW 52:171). Toward the end of his life Luther was asked if there was a difference between the Word Incarnate and the oral and written Word.

"By all means!" he replied. "The former is the incarnate Word, who was true God from the beginning, and the latter is the Word that's proclaimed. The former Word is in substance God; the latter Word is in its effect the power of God, but isn't God in substance, for it has a man's nature, whether it's spoken by Christ or by a minister." (LW 54:395)

This proclaimed and written Word is the primary means of grace, the chief thing in both the Sacraments. It is a means of grace in every form in which it reaches man, whether it be preached, printed, meditated upon, or pictured. This Word of God does not lose its saving power even though it is broadcast over radio or television, copied repeatedly, and translated. It is always the same powerful means of grace.

The source of the Word, whether proclaimed, pictured, or printed, is the Holy Scripture, the pure clear fountain of Israel. The Scripture is the Word of God because here God has said exactly what He wanted to say in the way He wanted to say it. God the Holy Spirit breathed into the minds of the holy writers the very thoughts they should express and the very words they were to write. Therefore we know that the Bible is infallible and errorless in every detail. This doctrine which we call "verbal inspiration" is definitely the teaching of the Scripture. St. Paul says, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Timothy 3:16) Likewise St. Peter writes, "Prophecy never came by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (II Peter 1:21; see also John 10:35, John 17:17, I Corinthians 2:13, II Peter 3:15-17)

The doctrine of verbal inspiration has always been taught in the Evangelical Lutheran Church despite the contention of some who imply that Luther and the Confessions did not uphold this teaching. The Lutheran Confessions of the 16th Century were written under the basic assumption that the Holy Scripture is the infallible and inerrant Word of God. The Formula speaks of the Old and New Testaments "as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teachings are to be judged and evaluated." (FC SD Rule and Norm 3, pp. 503-504) The Lutheran Confessions shared this view with all Christians of their time. Only after the Reformation period was the verbal inspiration of Scripture questioned. This was likewise the teaching of Luther. He said, "I am content with the pure meaning and trustworthiness of Holy Scripture." (LW 7:120) "The Word of God is perfect; it is precious and pure; it is truth itself." (LW 23:235) Similarly he quoted approvingly St. Augustine's fine statement, "I have learned to hold the Scriptures alone inerrant. Therefore I read all others, as holy and learned as they may be, with the reservation that I regard their teaching true only if they can prove their statements through Scripture or reason." (LW 41:25)

B. The Word of God is the Power of God unto Salvation

The battle for the Bible has been fought in our circles and throughout the American church. In many places it is still being fought. Fine statements concerning verbal inspiration have been formulated. This is a wonderful blessing for which we should thank God. But at the same time we must always emphasize why the battle for the Bible was fought. The Scripture is not just an errorless record of past history. It is not merely an exact account which makes computer age technology look poor in comparison. It is not only a musty source book where one can find the answers to important questions. Rather, it is the power of God unto salvation. (Romans 1:16) The Word of God is like a fire and like a hammer that shatters the rock (Jeremiah 23:29) and is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword. (Hebrews 4:12)

The Word is creative and life-giving. It can turn a heart dead in trespasses and sins to a living faith in the Savior. This is the teaching of the entire Scripture. Already in the Old Testament the power of the Word is confirmed when God speaks through Isaiah, "For as the rains come down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it." (Isaiah 55:10-11) The Word will accomplish what God pleases, namely, that faith is worked through hearing that Word (Romans 10:17) or, as St. Peter puts it, that we are born again through the incorruptible seed of God's Word. (I Peter 1:23; see also I Corinthians 2:4-5, II Thessalonians 2:14) In his study of I John 5:13 Luther writes, "Scripture must serve the purpose of bringing it about that his (John's) epistle is a means and a vehicle by which one comes to faith and eternal life." (LW 30:321) There is no question that this is the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before Emperor Charles V the fathers confessed at Augsburg:

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it pleases God, in those who hear the Gospel. (AC V, p. 31)

This life-giving Word which creates faith in us also strengthens faith and preserves us in that faith. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit is given in all His fullness with all His many gifts. Here the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are offered and bestowed. The Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. (Psalm 119:105) It gives direction for our life and therefore "is

profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." (II Timothy 3:16) The Word is the nourishment and strengthening which our faith and new spiritual life needs on our earthly journey. (I Peter 2:2, Acts 20:28-30) Just as our body needs food to grow, so our spiritual life needs the Word to remain strong and healthy. The Scripture is the feast to which Isaiah invites, "Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price ... let your soul delight itself in abundance." (Isaiah 55:1-2) In the midst of all adversity and affliction God's Word gives peace, comfort, and joy to the heart. (Psalm 19:8-9; Jeremiah 15:16; John 16:33) In every need and conflict of life we will flee to that life-giving Word, for through it the Holy Spirit creates faith, strengthens faith, and preserves it unto our end.

C. The Central Message of the Word Is Revealed in the Cross

When we speak of the Word being the power of God unto salvation and giving forgiveness of sins and life, we are specifically speaking of the Gospel in contradistinction to the Law. The Law is never life-giving. The Law can only kill. This proper distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Law is the holy, eternal, unchanging will of God. The Law commands what people are to do and not to do, and always insists on total obedience. While the Law serves as a curb in this sinful world, and also as a guide in that it shows believers how to live as children of God, its primary purpose is to make us conscious of sin. (Romans 3:20) Because it is impossible for sinful human beings to keep the Law perfectly, "The Law is a word of destruction, a word of wrath, a word of sadness, a word of grief, a voice of the judge and the defendant, a word of restlessness, a word of curse." (LW 31:231)

The Gospel, on the other hand, makes no demands but freely grants and offers. It gives the gracious forgiveness of Christ and eternal salvation. Showing God's undeserved love to sinners and to the unworthy for Christ's sake alone, the Gospel shines to illuminate human hearts and to make them alive. The Law and the Gospel are very different and distinct. "The Law says 'do this', and it is never done. Grace says 'believe in this', and everything is already done." (LW 31:41) The Law is to be preached to hardened sinners while the Gospel is to be preached to those who are burdened down by their sins. (C.F.W. Walther, *Law and Gospel*, Thesis VIII, pp. 101-111)

The message of the Gospel is God revealed in the cross. In the Law, God hides Himself behind the fire, smoke, thunder and lighting of Mt. Sinai, so that sinful man does not dare to approach. But in the Gospel God has revealed His grace and mercy to the fallen creation in the person of Jesus Christ. God clothed Himself in flesh that man might know His love. God hid Himself in the suffering and death of the cross so that we might know Him. In the *Heidelberg Disputation* Luther insists, "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. ...God can be found only in suffering and the cross." (LW 31:53) This is the theology of the cross which is the heart and core of the Scripture, as St. Paul writes, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified." (I Corinthians 2:2) The cross which signifies the suffering of Christ, as His redemptive act, is an event which appears to be a tragedy, but which is in fact the grandest event God ever performed. The theology of the cross recognizes God precisely where He has hidden Himself, in His suffering and in all which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness. This is the paradox of the cross.

Jesus became poor and lowly to raise us to His divine glory, to eternal life in heaven. He lived a perfect and harmonious life with God and man which the Father accepted as the perfect life of all people. Then He allowed Himself to be nailed to a Roman cross and to be swallowed up in death so that He might give Himself as the one sufficient redemptive sacrifice for all sin. What appeared to be His end, His defeat, was really His ultimate victory. In His death the Victim becomes the Victor Divine, the Conqueror of the Universe, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, for He broke forth from the grave triumphant, having vanquished His foes, freeing us from the

power of sin, death, and the devil. His glorious resurrection is the pronouncement of absolution for the whole world. In Him all are forgiven.

It is through the word of the cross that God comes to us and unites us with Christ's death and resurrection. As Law, the cross shows the full extent of God's wrath because of sin and destroys every form of self-righteousness. As Gospel, the cross shows fully the extent of God's love. It gives forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation which were guaranteed to us by the resurrection. Thus the cross in the light of Easter becomes God's means for making us alive, for bringing us to faith. As Jesus suffered death to give us life, so sinful man must hear the killing word of the Law so that his heart is prepared for the life-giving word that in Jesus' death and resurrection there is forgiveness for all, a gift of God's grace. He dies to sin and arises to the new life of faith.

This faith worked through the word of the cross always has as its object the righteousness of Christ. This is not a righteousness within the believer but it is an "alien" righteousness accomplished through Christ's holy life and death. This is a righteousness reckoned to faith, as was already said in the Old Testament of Abraham, "He believed in the Lord and He (God) reckoned it to him as righteousness." (Genesis 15:6) Luther describes the faith relationship to Christ with the beautiful picture of marriage:

Faith unites the soul with Christ as a bride is united with her bridegroom. By this mystery, as the Apostle teaches, Christ and the soul become one flesh. (Ephesians 5:31:32) ... By the wedding ring of faith he shares in the sins, death, and pains of hell which are his bride's. As a matter of fact, he makes them his own and acts as if they were His own and as if he himself had sinned; he suffered, died, and descended into hell that he might overcome them all. . .

Who then can fully appreciate what this royal marriage means? Who can understand the riches of the glory of this grace? Here this rich and divine bridegroom Christ marries this poor, wicked harlot, redeems her from all her evil, and adorns her with all his goodness. Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, of which she may boast as of her own and which she can confidently display alongside her sins in the face of death and hell and say, "If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his," as the bride in the Song of Solomon [2:16] says, "My beloved is mine and I am his." (LW 31:351-352)

This is the "joyful exchange" (*Der frohliche Wechsel*) of which Luther speaks. Christ takes the rags of our sin and corruption upon Himself and gives us the glorious wedding garment of His righteousness and immortality. Thus we remain at the same time saints and sinners (*Gerecht und Sunder zugleich*).

D. The Word of the Cross Motivates Us to Live for Him

Since such great blessings come to us through the Holy Scriptures, Luther's logical conclusion is that we will want to be constantly occupied with the Word, reading it, hearing it, remembering it, and meditating upon it. "Nothing is so effectual against the devil, the world, the flesh, and all evil thoughts as to occupy oneself with the Word of God, talk about it, and meditate on it. ...This indeed is the true holy water, the sign which routs the devil and puts him to flight." (LC Preface 10, p. 359-360) In other words, there is nothing more important for the Christian life than making use of the Scripture as our Lord says, "If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples

indeed. And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32) Likewise St. Paul writes, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." (Colossians 3:16)

The Word of God is the strengthening and the nourishment for our faith-life in all the conflicts and troubles of this present existence. Therefore we will have our own personal devotional life where we read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the Word. Our household will have its family altar so that our children realize that Jesus and His cross are not just for Sunday. Here our family will gather around the Word to be nourished daily by the Savior so that we can face the difficulties of day to day living.

In a time when many Americans believe that they can be Christians without any connection to a congregation and the means of grace, we will desire to gather regularly as the body of Christ around the Word and the Sacraments. Here are found the Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution, and the Lord's Supper, which are the efficacious instruments or means through which the Spirit brings sinners to faith, sanctifies, and preserves them in faith and thus builds the church. Through these means the Lamb once slain is in the midst of His congregation as He shall be for all eternity. The Christian will take every opportunity to grow through participation in the various Bible classes of the congregation. He will consider Christian education by means of the Sunday school, the youth group, and the Christian day school a high priority for his church. Considering the benefit that the Christian day school has been for the Confessional Lutheran Church in this country, its value should not be underestimated, as the Proverb says, "Train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6)

We, who have the Word of Christ in its truth and purity which gives all the blessings of salvation and which creates the faith to receive these blessings, will never be selfish with that treasure. All around us there are souls going headlong to destruction and we have the only antidote which can save them. We will want to share that saving Gospel with all people. In our work and at our leisure we talk about many things - the political situations, financial worries, and our family problems. If we can discuss such things with those around us, then we can also talk about the most important thing - Jesus and His cross for our salvation.

The home mission and foreign mission programs of our Synod are indispensable for our faith-life for hereby we are able to bring the Gospel to people we would not normally reach with our personal evangelism. Concerning the early church it is stated, "Those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the Word." (Acts 8:4) Even in the face of persecution, the early Christians continued to witness concerning Christ. So faithful were they in this proclamation that by 150 A.D. the Gospel had been heard throughout much of the Mediterranean world. What an example for us who have had the Word in its truth and purity for nearly 140 years. In all our proclamation and outreach we will always remember that the only instruments through which God builds His church are His means of grace, namely, the Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments.

This treasure won on the cross and given to us in the word of the cross will motivate us to live our whole life for Him who died for us and rose again. Out of thanks for salvation full and free we will offer our life as a living sacrifice to the Lord. (Romans 12:1) We will allow His love to shine through us to all those around us. In this way we will be epistles of Christ not written with ink but by the Spirit, (II Corinthians 3:3) living epistles, and witnesses for Christ in these last days, as Martin Franzmann states in his great hymn:

O Spirit, who didst once restore
 Thy Church that it may be again
 The bringer of good news to men,
 Breathe on thy cloven Church once more,
 That in these gray and latter days
 There may be men whose life is praise,
 Each life a high doxology
 To Father, Son, and unto thee. Amen
 (*Worship Supplement*, Hymn 758)

III. The Sacraments: God's Gift to You

A. The Sacraments are the Visible Word

The Gospel always remains the supreme means of grace. This truth Luther emphasizes when he writes, "The Word, I say, and only the Word, is the vehicle of God's grace." (LW 27:249) It is the Word of God which gives power to a sacrament and makes it a sacrament as he especially says concerning the Lord's Supper, "It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament." (LC V 10, p. 448) The Sacraments are a means of grace because of the Word and promises of God connected to them. The Sacraments can be considered the sacramental Word or the visible Word, as does the *Apology*:

As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite (sacrament) itself enters through the eyes to move the heart. The Word and the rite have the same effect, as Augustine said so well when he called the sacrament "the visible Word," for the rite is received by the eyes and is a sort of picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect.
 (Ap XIII 5, p. 212)

B. The Definition of a Sacrament

The Scripture does not use the word "sacrament" nor does it give a definition of a sacrament. Yet our Lutheran fathers saw that the rites bestowing God's grace had certain common elements. This is the source of our Lutheran definition of a sacrament. "By a sacrament we mean a sacred act instituted by God Himself, (LC Preface 20, p. 364; LC IV 1, p. 436) which consists of certain visible means connected with His Word, (LC IV 18, p. 438; LW 36:124) through which He offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us." (LW 36:124; Ap XIII 3-4, p. 211) (*ELS Catechism* p. 196) Based on this definition the Lutheran Church confesses two Sacraments, Baptism and Communion. Melancthon used a broader definition for a sacrament, as is seen in the *Apology*, "If we define sacraments as 'rites' which have the command of God and to which the promise of grace has been added, we can easily determine which are sacraments in the strict sense." (Ap XIII 3, p. 211) With this definition Melancthon speaks of three Sacraments Baptism, Absolution, and the Lord's Supper. (Ap XIII 4, p. 211) In his early writing Luther, too, occasionally spoke of three Sacraments. For instance, in *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church* of 1520 he says, "I must deny that there are seven sacraments and for the present maintain that there are but three: baptism, penance, and the bread." (LW 36:18) Yet before the treatise was completed he concludes, "The sacrament of penance, which I added to these two, lacks the divinely instituted visible sign, and is, as I have said, nothing but a way and a return to baptism." (LW 36:124) Lutherans have always held Holy Absolution in high regard, for it is a returning to Baptism, but it is not a sacrament according to our definition, since it has no divinely instituted visible means connected with the Word.

The Sacraments belong in the sphere of the Gospel. They are gracious acts through which God provides what He has promised in His Word. The Sacraments are an expression of God's

gracious disposition, and through them He makes us partakers of His gifts. The Sacraments give us that same treasure of salvation as the Word gives. Speaking to the question why God has given the Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution and the Holy Supper when they all offer the same forgiveness of sins, our fathers respond that one should not ask the impertinent question why God has given us four means of grace instead of one. We should rather thank Him that He has so richly blessed us in making us partakers of forgiveness and that He, through these means, gives us a joyful heart assured that we are acceptable to Him. Anyone whose heart has been terrified by his sins knows how important it is to believe in the forgiveness of those sins and he readily appreciates the greatness of divine mercy in providing not only one, but many means through which we receive the forgiveness of sins. (*Der Kleine Gebets-Schatz*, pp. 64-65) In a similar vein Luther writes:

The Gospel offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in His grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin (the peculiar function of the Gospel) is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacrament of the Altar; fourth, through the power of keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren. Matt. 18:20, "Where two or three are gathered," etc. (SA III, IV, p. 310)

IV. Holy Baptism: God's Gift to You

A. The Command and Institution of Baptism

Baptism is that glorious creative act of the entire Trinity in which we were born again, being united with Christ's death and resurrection, and thus were incorporated into the body of Christ, the church, receiving all the blessings of salvation. This Sacrament the Risen Lord instituted shortly before His Ascension. He commanded the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20) Likewise He said in the Gospel of Mark, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned." (Mark 16:16) The divine institution of Baptism is also evident from apostolic practice. The apostles administered Baptism already at the first Pentecost. In his Pentecost sermon St. Peter urged, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2:38)

According to the institution of Baptism, we are to make disciples by means of baptizing and by means of teaching. Baptism is then a means through which disciples are made. An individual is to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. From the Second Commandment and the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer we see that the name of God means God Himself and everything about Him. To be baptized in the name of the Trinity means to be connected to the Trinity, to be united with the Trinity in such a way that the individual becomes God's possession and is dedicated to His service. In this institution the Lord commands His church to baptize all nations. This shows that Baptism is meant for all people - no age group excluded. Finally the baptismal command concludes, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," reminding us that the Lord will be with us in Baptism not only in His omnipresence, as He is in all things, but in such a way that we are saved according to the Father's mercy, united with Christ and His death and resurrection, and born again by the Spirit. (MWS 113)

Already in the Ancient Church a connection was seen between Jesus' Baptism and our own. St. Ignatius of Antioch wrote, "He (Christ) was born and was baptized that by His passion He might cleanse water." (*Epistle to the Ephesians* 18) This connection is confirmed by Luther in a number of his sermons. (LW 51:318; St. L. XI, 2124-2125; St. L. XIII, 136-146) Jesus' Baptism

culminated in His death and resurrection, through which He fulfilled all righteousness, winning righteousness for all by His active and passive obedience. His Baptism began the Baptism of His cross and death, as He spoke of it. (Luke 12:49-50) His Baptism, which began His redemptive ministry, is the source of the blessings of our Baptism. It puts the power into Christian Baptism. Jesus' Baptism, culminating in His death and resurrection, is the basis for our Baptism so that in it we participate in Christ's death and resurrection. The connection between our Lord's Baptism and our own, Luther summarizes in his chief baptismal hymn:

To Jordan came our Lord, the Christ,
 To do God's pleasure willing,
 And there was by Saint John baptized,
 All righteousness fulfilling;
 There did He consecrate a bath
 To wash away transgression
 And quench the bitterness of death
 By His own blood and Passion,
 He would a new life give us.
 (ELS *Hymnal Supplement*, Hymn 111)

The essential parts of Baptism are the water and the Word. (Ephesians 5:25-26) The water used in Baptism is ordinary water like that which one would drink or in which one could bathe. We do not have to obtain the water from a special place like the Jordan. Nor is the amount or manner of applying water expressed in Scripture. Some today believe that the word "baptize" denotes only "immersing." However in Mark 7:4 the Greek verb *baptizein* is used to speak of "the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels and couches" showing that this verb simply means "to wash." When we wash pitchers, vessels and couches, we do not ordinarily totally immerse them. Thus we may apply the water in Baptism in any manner. This water in itself does not make Baptism. Luther says in the *Small Catechism*: "Baptism is not just water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with His Word." The Word that is to be connected with the water and which makes it a powerful means of grace is found in the baptismal institution: "Go therefore ... baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The baptismal formula used is: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen." Chemnitz summarizes the essential parts of Baptism thus:

- I. The element of water (Jn 3:5; Eph 5:25-26; Acts 10:47).
- II. The Word of God (Eph 5:26: Cleansing with the washing of water by the Word--namely the command of Christ regarding the conferring of Baptism, Mt 28:19, and the very promise of grace, Mk 16:16). For that word of the command and promise of God is a true consecration or sanctification by which Baptism becomes a clean water (Eze 36:25), in fact a water of life (Eze 47:9; Zch 14:8) and a washing of regeneration (Tts 3:5). (MWS 112)

B. The Blessings of Holy Baptism

1. Baptism as Full Forgiveness

Baptism is not a mere rite which we must perform because of God's command nor is it merely an action by which we symbolically show what happened to us when we came to faith, as the Reformed teach. Rather, Baptism is a divine work apart from all human action. Here God offers and gives full forgiveness of sins. (Acts 2:38; 22:16) St. Peter says that Baptism saves us. (I Peter 3:21) This does not mean that there is another way to be saved besides trusting in Jesus' forgiveness won on the cross. Rather, Baptism unites us with Christ's cross. Baptism is a means

through which the treasure of salvation is brought to us. On the cross Jesus won forgiveness for all people. Yet that forgiveness will do us no good unless it is brought to us who are living in the twentieth century. This is the purpose of Baptism. Baptism works like a pipeline bringing forgiveness of sin from its source, the cross, to each of us personally at the baptismal font.

Luther at times pictures the baptismal font as a fountain filled with the Messiah's blood. "This is not a common bath of water ... but it is a Baptism of blood or a blood bath (*Blutbad*) which Christ alone, the Son of God Himself, prepared through His own death." (St. L. XII, 538; see also LW 51:324-326) Because Baptism offers and gives the forgiveness won on the cross through Christ's blood, Luther sees Baptism as a bath in the rose-colored blood flowing from the dear Savior's veins. It can indeed wash away each stain and mark, each spot and wrinkle. Though our sins are as scarlet, they are as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they are as wool, for here we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, having received His full forgiveness at the font. This beautiful comforting picture language Luther uses in his great baptismal hymn:

The eye of sense alone is dim
 And nothing sees but water;
 Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him
 The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
 It sees the cleansing fountain, red
 With the dear blood of Jesus,
 Which from the sins, inherited
 From fallen Adam, frees us
 And from our own misdoings.
 (ELS *Hymnal Supplement*, Hymn 111)

Because Baptism effects the forgiveness of sin, it delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation. Death no longer has any power over us for it has lost its sting. (I Corinthians 15:56) It is no longer the terrible end of everything, but it has become a restful sleep and the gateway to eternal joy in the mansions of the Father. (John 11:25-26; 14:1-6) As certainly as Baptism brings us into communion with Christ's redemptive death, giving us forgiveness, so certainly it unites us with His resurrection, giving life and salvation. (Romans 6:3-11) Concerning Baptism's power to conquer death and give eternal life Luther concludes in the *Large Catechism*:

Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man's door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men. (LC IV 43, p. 442)

Baptism delivers us from the devil. On account of our sins Satan has power over us. We are by nature his slaves doing his every bidding. But when our sins were forgiven in baptism we were freed from his domination. To emphasize this liberation certain of the old Lutheran agendas included an exorcism in the baptismal liturgy: "I adjure you, you unclean spirit by the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit that you go out of and depart from this servant of Jesus Christ. Amen." (*Kirchen-Agenda* p. 4; see also LW 53:96)

The ultimate purpose of Baptism is eternal salvation. Baptism indeed saves us! (I Peter 3:21) In Baptism we were marked with the holy cross and sealed as the Lord's. We became the children of God, heirs of heaven. Our Baptism shows that the Father is always extending His loving arms to us that we may repent and return to Him. The confession "I am baptized" assures

us that the Lord is with us all the way in this life, never leaving nor forsaking us, and that at last He will carry us home to the heavenly fatherland above.

2. Baptism as the New Birth

The baptismal font is full of Christ's forgiveness and salvation. It is a wonderful treasure in every way. This treasure is received and made our own by faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9) Yet this faith is impossible for humanity by itself for "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit. (I Corinthians 12:3) Faith is worked alone through the means of grace.

This Baptism which requires faith also creates such faith. Baptism is regenerative. St. Paul writes, "God saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit." (Titus 3:5) Baptism is here called a washing that regenerates and renews because it creates faith making us spiritually alive and thus saves us. Likewise St. Paul shows that in Baptism we are risen with Christ through faith. (Colossians 2:12) St. John declares that we are born again by the water and the Word which is Baptism. (John 3:5) To be born again means to come to faith in Jesus and His forgiveness for salvation. Therefore Baptism works faith. This has always been the doctrine of the Christian Church:

Justin Martyr (100-166 A.D.) says: "Then they are brought by us where there is water and are regenerated in the same manner in which we were ourselves regenerated. For, in the name of God, the Father and Lord of the universe, and of our Savior Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, they then receive the washing with water. For Christ also said, 'Unless you are born again, you can not enter the Kingdom of heaven.'" (Roberts and Donaldson, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 183)

Since Baptism brings to us all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and creates the faith to receive these benefits, it should not be withheld from our children. They are included in the "all nations" of the baptismal institution. (Matthew 28:19) They are born dead in trespasses and sins as all humanity (Ephesians 2:1), and Baptism is the only means whereby infants, who too must be born again, can ordinarily be regenerated and brought to faith. (John 3:5, Titus 3:5) In the Scriptures Baptism is compared with circumcision. (Colossians 2:11-13) As little children were circumcised in the Old Testament, so they should now be baptized. Also the assumption that little children should not be baptized because they can not believe must be rejected, for the Scriptures clearly speak of little ones who believe in Christ and who are part of Christ's kingdom. (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42, Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15) When an individual has already been brought to faith through the Word, then Baptism strengthens and seals that faith. An unbelieving child is usually brought to faith through Baptism and an unbelieving adult through the Word, but in both cases it is the same almighty miracle, for both by nature are dead in sin and can not come to faith by themselves.

3. Baptism as Dying and Rising in Christ

The most comprehensive statement concerning Baptism in the New Testament is found in Romans 6. Here St. Paul shows that in Baptism we were united with Christ and His cross. Our old sinful flesh was nailed to the cross and we died to sin. We were buried with Christ in the tomb. Because we have participated in the death of Christ through Baptism we were freed from sin and delivered from death and the devil. (Romans 6:7) All our sins were washed into the depths of the sea through Jesus' blood. As Jesus arose triumphant that first Easter morning, so we arose to new life in Baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection. (Romans 6:5; Colossians 2:12; I Peter 3:21) Faith in Christ's cross was created in our hearts, we received new resurrection life in Him, and we

were incorporated into His body, the church. (I Corinthians 12:12-13) Therefore our Baptism gives us all of the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection and the absolute certainty of salvation.

Baptism is not merely a one time occurrence in the past without any real meaning for the here and now. No, it has value each and every day of our life. Each day we need to die and rise again in Baptism. Through Christ's resurrection, Baptism is the power source of our new life, our resurrection life right now, so that we can daily crucify the flesh and arise to new life, that is, we can daily put off the old man and put on the new man. Each day in true repentance we will throw our sins of pride, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, and greed back into the baptismal font and drown them. Then through the word of absolution given us in Baptism, our new resurrection life will come forth strengthened to live a more God pleasing life. This is the daily use of Baptism to which Luther refers in his *Small Catechism* under the "Meaning of Baptism."

C. Holy Absolution is the Continuum of Holy Baptism

As was shown above, because of our definition of a sacrament Lutherans do not usually speak of Holy Absolution as a sacrament. Yet as a continuum of Holy Baptism, we hold it in high regard. "You see that Baptism, both by its power and by its signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, formerly called Penance, which is really nothing else than Baptism. (LC IV 74, p. 445) Absolution continues the dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. In confession we drown our sins in the baptismal font and in absolution we receive Jesus' forgiveness flowing to us in the baptismal water.

Absolution is the administration of the Keys, the dispensing of the Gospel of forgiveness, be that to many or to the individual. Christ said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." (Matthew 18:18) Again He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any they are retained." (John 20:23) This is the wonderful comforting word, "Son be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you." (Matthew 9:2) Some may ask, "How can a man forgive sins; isn't that a prerogative of God alone?" On the cross Christ won full and complete forgiveness for all people. (I John 2:2) It was done once and for all. But He did not distribute or give that forgiveness on the cross. He distributes it through Holy Baptism, through the Lord's Supper and through the word of absolution spoken by men in Christ's stead. (LW 40:213-214) He commanded men to speak His forgiveness in His place. (John 20:23; Luke 10:16) Therefore when in the Divine Liturgy we hear the pastor say, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we should be absolutely confident of forgiveness, since it is as certain as if Christ spoke the words Himself. Our Confessions teach, "Our people are taught to esteem absolution highly because it is the voice of God and is pronounced by God's command." (AC XXV, pp. 61-62)

This consoling power of absolution has been given to the entire church and to each Christian individually. Therefore each Christian has the right and responsibility to announce forgiveness to a brother or a sister weighed down by sin. The public administration of absolution in the church is normally carried out through God's called servant, for He has instituted the Office of the Public Ministry, where one speaks in the name of Christ and in the name of the congregation. (Titus 1:5-7; LW 36:155) The pastor offers and gives this forgiveness through preaching the word of the cross, through counseling and evangelism, and through Public and Private Absolution. Regardless of which form the absolution may take, it is always the same comforting forgiveness of Jesus. It is not that the preaching of the Gospel only tells us about forgiveness whereas Public and Private Absolution really bestows it; rather, Christ's forgiveness is distributed to us in all the means of grace.

Public Absolution and Private Absolution are preceded by the confession of sins. Thus our Catechism says, "Confession consists of two parts: one that we confess our sins; the other that we receive absolution or forgiveness." The individual must have true sorrow over his sin and faith in

Jesus' forgiveness which is given him by the pastor in order to appropriate that forgiveness as his own. Still neither his sorrow over sin nor his faith causes that forgiveness to be present for him. It is there whether he receives it or not, since Holy Absolution is entirely a work of God.

Public Absolution, Individual Absolution of our Danish Order, and especially Private Absolution are so important because here the forgiveness of Christ is personalized. In John 20:23, Jesus speaks of forgiving the sins of individuals. He does this because He knows that we need that forgiveness applied to us personally. We can so easily think, "I am just too great a sinner to be forgiven. How can God forgive someone like me? The forgiveness in the sermon is for the other people, not me." Therefore the forgiveness of sin is announced to everyone personally in Public Absolution and Individual Absolution, and the person who is burdened by his sin has the right to go to his pastor for Private Absolution, where he will confess his sins and will receive absolution individually. This absolution is as certain as if Jesus pronounced it Himself. When we make confession to God by ourselves it is at times hard to experience the intended confidence and security of forgiveness, but when the word of God's grace is spoken to us by another it is a powerful assurance of forgiveness. Thus our Confessions say: Since absolution or the power of the keys, which was instituted by Christ in the Gospel, is a consolation and help against sin and a bad conscience, confession and absolution should by no means be allowed to fall into disuse in the church, especially for the sake of timid consciences and for the sake of untrained young people who need to be examined and instructed in Christian doctrine. (SA III VIII 1, p. 312)

Dr. C. F. W. Walther explains the great benefits of Private Absolution in his sermon on the Gospel pericope for the Nineteenth Sunday after Trinity. He uses this illustration: the citizens of a city rebelled against their king. They were defeated and had to flee. First, all of them were condemned to death, but later the king issued a decree granting full pardon. Trusting this general pardon, the majority returned. But suppose that the ringleaders had committed several murders. Might they not think, "Perhaps we are not included in this pardon"? Then would it not be especially consoling if they received a separate pardon, one drawn up especially for them showing that the pardon was theirs? Likewise it is of special comfort for a Christian who is burdened by his sins to hear not only the general word, "All believing sinners, be of good cheer," but also the specific declaration, "You (*du*, thou) be of good cheer, your sins are indeed forgiven." (C.F.W. Walther, *Evangelien Postille*, p. 320)

V. The Lord's Supper: God's Gift To You

A. The Command and Institution of The Lord's Supper

1. The Scriptural Basis of the Sacrament

The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and in I Corinthians 11:23-25. The historical setting of the Supper was the Passover, the most solemn meal for God's Old Testament people. In the meal where 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, Jesus the very Lamb of God gave New Testament believers not only a picture of His flesh and blood with bread and wine, but 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 likely a large flat loaf of unleavened bread, the matzah, for only unleavened bread was used in the Passover. He took the bread and gave thanks or blessed it. After our Lord blessed the bread, He broke it. This breaking was of practical necessity because of the size of the loaves. They had to be broken into fragments to be eaten, even as one would slice a loaf of bread today. This breaking was not an integral part of the institution. There is no need for a rite of fraction in order to have a valid Sacrament. In fact German Lutherans in general avoided the fraction because the Reformed emphasized the breaking in the interest of their symbolism. (C.F.W. Walther, *Pastorale*, p. 169)

This blessed and broken bread Jesus gave to His disciples saying, "Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." These are the words Christ gave to the church so that in our Lord's Supper celebration the Word may be joined to the elements effecting the presence, as St. Augustine says, "If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament" (*Accedat verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum*). Now, whether Jesus distributed to each disciple individually or whether he simply passed it around cannot be ascertained. Nor is it important. But what is important is Jesus' word concerning what was distributed, "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." This is the confession of the Lutheran fathers: "Our churches teach that the body and blood of Christ are truly present and are distributed to those who eat in the Supper of the Lord." (AC X, p. 34)

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 this third cup of the Passover, which 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 covenant (testament) in My blood." St. Matthew explains further, "which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." The 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. 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. (LS 100-102). The Words of Institution summarize the blessings of this Sacrament with the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," which shows that all the treasure house of salvation is offered in this Supper, as Luther says 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 only a one time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory. (I 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.

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," do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty words of consecration, "This is My body, This is My blood," which effect the presence, and distribute His true body and blood. "If we are to do what He did, then indeed we must take the bread and bless it, and break and distribute it saying, 'This is My body.' For all this is included in the imperative word, 'Do this.'" (LW 37, 187)

Another portion of Scripture which is important in the study of the Lord's Supper is I Corinthians 10:16-17: "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a participation in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all partake of the one bread." 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 participation in, a partaking of Christ's body and blood.

In I 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. All three parts of the sacramental action are mentioned in this passage: the blessing or consecration (verse 16a), the breaking or distribution (verse 16b), the partaking of the elements (verse 17). This shows that the entire action of the Sacrament must occur, otherwise there is no Sacrament, that is, no real presence.

Since the Lord has commanded that the bread and wine be blessed in order to have a valid Sacrament, what is the blessing that the Lord desired His church to use? In close proximity to this Scripture, where St. Paul particularly asserts that Christ's followers bless the elements, he also gives the church a Word of the Lord in liturgical form concerning the Lord's Supper, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, etc." (I Corinthians 11:23) These words, which Christ gave to St. Paul, He wanted delivered to the church for the celebration of the Supper. Then the blessing of the Lord which fulfills the "Do this" is none other than the Words of Institution as St. Paul recorded them in I Corinthians 11:23-26. Our Lutheran fathers clearly express this understanding in the *Formula of Concord*: "...The cup of blessing which we bless, which happens precisely through the repetition and recitation of the Words of Institution." (FC SD VII 82, p. 584)

2. The Effectual Cause of the Presence

The Holy Sacrament is the true, essential, natural body and blood of Christ. It is the very same body which 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. This Supper bestows upon us all the blessings of salvation. Because it is such a treasure, Christians will want to be certain that they have the Supper in their midst. How do we know that we have the true Supper? What causes Christ's body and blood to be present in the Sacrament or what effects the presence? It is not any power or work of man but alone the Word and institution of Christ, as is the case in Holy Baptism. It is that all-powerful Word which God spoke at the creation and it was done. St. Paul says that by blessing with those words commanded in Christ's institution we have "a participation in the blood of Christ" and "a participation in the body of Christ." (I Corinthians 10:16) Then it is the Words of Institution by virtue of Christ's original command which effect the presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper.

In regard to this scriptural doctrine of the consecration Luther places himself in agreement with St. Augustine and the whole Ancient Church.

It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament which is rightly called Christ's body and blood. It is said, ... "When the word is joined to the external element, it becomes a sacrament." This saying of St. Augustine is so accurate and well put that it is doubtful if he has said anything better. The Word must make the element a sacrament; otherwise it remains a mere element. (LC V, 10-11, p. 448)

Luther specifically says that the Words of Institution spoken by the minister in each celebration of the Sacrament effect the presence. "If they now ask: Where is the power that causes Christ's body to be in the Supper when we say, 'this is my body'? I answer: Where is the power to cause a mountain to be taken up and cast into the sea when we say, 'Be taken up and cast into the sea'? Of course, it does not reside in our speaking *but in God's command who connects his command with our speaking.*" (LW 37, 184) In his study of St. John's Gospel Luther emphasizes the power of the Word in Baptism, Lord's Supper, and Absolution:

When the Word is joined to the elements, then a Sacrament comes into being; the Baptism becomes a "washing of regeneration" (Titus 3:5). If the Word is not present, bread remains bread, and water is water. However, when the Word is added: "This bread is My body; the cup is My blood. This do in remembrance of me," then it is a Sacrament. When you go to confession do not focus your thoughts on your confession and contrition but on the words spoken by the pastor: "I announce the forgiveness of sins to you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then you may know that your confession is based solidly on the Word of God. (LW 22, 515-516)

The Lutheran Confessions likewise declare that the Words of Institution cause the presence of Christ's body and blood. "For wherever we observe His institution and speak His words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ Himself is still active *through the spoken words by virtue of the first institution, which He wants to be repeated.*" (FC SD VII, 75, p. 583) It is alone the almighty Word of Christ which causes His presence and not our action or doing, as is stated in Thesis Seven of the ELS Lord's Supper Statement: We hold that the Words of consecration repeated by the minister in a proper celebration of the Sacrament are the effective means by which the real presence of Christ's body and blood is brought into being. (*ELS Synod Report*, 1981, p. 76) We, therefore, assert the absolute necessity of employing the Verba in every administration (celebration) of the Lord's Supper. At the same time we maintain that the entire sacramental action (consecration, distribution, reception) must be carried out or there is no Sacrament. If there is no distribution and reception there is no real presence. The whole sacramental action must be kept as a unit.

B. The Proper Preparation for the Supper

In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper we need to be well prepared to receive it worthily, for St. Paul says, "He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." (I Corinthians 11:29) This, however, is not a worthiness brought about by the Law, but by the Gospel, and it does not consist of 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, that we confess them, striving to do better, and earnestly long for forgiveness of sins.

At the same time this worthiness includes a confident faith in Jesus the Savior who paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross with His body and blood and who gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. With these questions Christians should examine themselves before coming to the Lord's Supper:

- a. Am I truly sorry for all my sins in thought, word and deed?
- b. Do I believe that Jesus my Savior paid for all these sins on the cross?
- c. Do I believe that Jesus gives me in the Supper His body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins, life, and salvation?
- d. Do I sincerely desire with the aid of the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend my sinful life?

C. The Blessings of the Sacrament

1. The Supper Gives the Forgiveness of Sins

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 flows all the other blessings of the Supper.

The Holy Sacrament assures each individual personally of the Gospel declaration of forgiveness. 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. As a kidnapped child is bought back by its 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, receiving this Sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven, for within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely His true body and blood. (C.F.W. Walther, *Brosamen*, pp. 108-117)

Orthodox Lutherans have always rejected the Roman concept of sacrifice in the Sacrament and rightly so. It is a terrible insult to Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross. Yet there is an inseparable connection between the cross and the altar. The power and efficacy of the Lord's Supper is derived ultimately from Christ's redemptive sacrifice at Calvary. The Lord's Supper is a presentation of His atonement offering among His people. The Sacrament brings to us the sacrifice of Calvary and gives us all its blessings, forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. (Ex. 2:491)

2. *The Supper Gives Life*

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:

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, p. 449)

Our 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, p. 606) 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 life-giving bread and 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." (Ex. 2, 491)

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 strengthens us to live a holier life and empowers us to walk in His loving footsteps. (LS 191)

As the Christian travels in this life, he faces problems and troubles all the way. There are often financial difficulties in our home, bitterness in our family, conflicts with our friends, sickness, 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 and troubles of life and to do all things through Him. Come to this refreshing repast. Here is the nourishment, the heavenly manna we need all the way through the journey of this life. (LC V 66-70, p. 454)

Luther says that the Sacrament is a "wholesome, comforting, remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body." (LC V 68, *Triglotta*, p. 769) Chemnitz says that the Supper is "a heavenly and spiritual nourishment for both body and soul of the believer unto eternal life." (LS 61) Because of this, believers in every burden and conflict of life will come to the Supper. This will also be the case in physical need 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 blood as the soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in soul and body.

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.

This incorporation into Christ which the Lord's Supper grants constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of His body. 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. St. Paul says, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." (I 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 one body by partaking of His one body. Receiving His one body in the Sacrament, we become His one body, the church. 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. We will regard each other as members of Christ. (LW 35,54) Also 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.

3. *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 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. "Thus the Sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life." (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 this 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, and 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 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) Again he says: "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; see also 37, 132; Ex 2, 233-234)

St. Paul says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." (I Corinthians 11:26) Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but it 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 the whole Ancient Church 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 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.

Soli Deo Gloria

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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
- SA - Smalcald Articles
- 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
- LS - Lord's Supper