



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

**An Introduction to Lutheran Doctrine
and the Church of the Lutheran Confession
Lesson 8.2 – The Sacrament of the Altar**

VIII. The Sacraments of Baptism and of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar

The Sacrament of the Altar (Holy Communion/Lord's Supper) is administered in our congregations as it was instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ. The body and blood of Christ are really and truly present in the eating and drinking of the bread and wine. We believe, according to Scripture, that this Sacrament – like Baptism – is a Means of Grace giving the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. This Sacrament is given to those for whom Christ intended it – namely, to penitent sinners who recognize the presence of the Lord's body and blood and are able to examine themselves. We also believe that attendance at the Lord's Table is an expression of unity of faith and confession among those who partake. The Sacrament is therefore properly administered when participants are united in the confession of their faith. This is the "closeness" of Christian fellowship described by the Apostle Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17). We practice "close" Communion out of obedience to Christ's will for the proper use of this Sacrament and restrict participation out of love for souls, so that people do not partake of this Sacrament to their harm. This Holy Supper is a precious gift for our souls, worthy of frequent and sanctified use by all communicants.

1 Corinthians 11:23-29: For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

1 Corinthians 10:15-19: I speak as to wise men: judge for yourselves what I say. 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? For we, though man, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.

Comments:

On the night before His death Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the presence of His twelve apostles. He used the bread from the Passover meal, which was unleavened bread, and the customary grape wine, and He invited His apostles to eat the bread and drink the wine. This was much more than an ordinary meal! As Jesus gave them the bread to eat, He said: **"This is My body."** And as He invited them drink from the cup of grape wine, He said to them: **"This is My blood."**

In the Old Testament times the Israelites ate the Passover Lamb as their meal. This Lamb was a picture of the true Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. In the New Testament era, we actually partake of the real thing:

the Lord's body and the Lord's blood, given and poured out for us for the forgiveness of our sins. This is one of the ways in which our risen Savior comes down to us even today; He gives His body and blood to each communicant for the forgiveness of sins.

The Lord's Supper was not intended only for His apostles on that night. As He gave them His body with the bread, Jesus said to them: **"Do this in remembrance of Me"** (Luke 22:19). As He gave them His blood with the wine, He said to them: **"This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes"** (1 Corinthians 11:25-26). There are not many references to the Lord's Supper in the New Testament, but from the mention of it in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we can be sure that the Christian congregations in those days remembered their Lord by celebrating the Lord's Supper regularly. Our Lord has not prescribed any special time or times for celebrating the Lord's Supper, only that it should be done repeatedly.

In his first letter to the Christians at Corinth, Paul had to deal with their abuse of the Lord's Supper. It seems that they were eating it together with a common meal. Some of the communicants were drinking too much and getting drunk. Others came late, and when they got there, there was no food left. Because of their abuse of the Lord's Supper, Paul reminded them of Jesus' first institution of the Lord's Supper and warned them against some dangers. Of greatest importance was the fact that this was not an ordinary meal, but the Lord's meal, and at this meal, together with the bread and the wine, Jesus was giving them His own body and His own blood – the very body and blood that was given for them on the cross to take away their sins. Paul explained: **"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?"** (1 Corinthians 10: 16). The word "communion" refers to a sharing or participation. In other words, when we are eating the bread, we are partaking of the body of Christ. When we are drinking the wine, we are partaking of the blood of Christ. This is true because of Jesus' words: **"This is My body"** and **"This is My blood."**

Every communicant, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever, partakes of Christ's body and blood. But Paul says: **"Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord... For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body"** (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). So, there are two types eating and drinking: eating and drinking for a blessing – the blessing of Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins– and eating and drinking for our harm, that is, eating and drinking judgment for ourselves rather than receiving the Lord's blessing.

For this reason, Paul says: **"Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup"** (1 Corinthians 11:28). This self-examination should involve at least four questions that we ask ourselves:

1. *Am I a sinner?* If we are unwilling to confess our sins, there is no need for us to receive the forgiveness of our sins.
2. *Do I believe in Jesus as my Savior from sin?* If I do not partake of the Lord's Supper as a believer in Jesus, there is no way I can receive any benefit from it.
3. *Do I understand that with this bread and wine I am receiving the Lord's body and the Lord's blood as He says?* Our Lord wants us to recognize His body and blood in the bread and wine, that is, to realize that we are not eating ordinary bread and drinking ordinary wine, but with the bread and wine we are partaking of our Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins.
4. *Do I understand that forgiveness of sin does not give me license or permission to sin, but that I, with the help of the Holy Spirit working with the Word, need to struggle continually against my sinful flesh?*

Following our Lord's instructions, we restrict participation in the Lord's Supper and we do not invite everyone to share this meal with us. Although our Lord Jesus died for all and He wants all persons everywhere to believe in Him and be saved, He does not want persons to partake of the Lord's Supper for their harm. Therefore, we do not knowingly give the Lord's Supper to unbelievers, to those who refuse to confess their sins or refuse to repent of some sin, to those who are unable to examine themselves because of being too young, uninstructed or for some other reason, to those who think they are eating only bread and drinking only wine, or to those who support or promote any kind of false teaching. Our Lord says that we are to **"avoid"** false teachers (Romans 16: 17-18). In other words, when we gather at the Lord's Table, we are expressing our unity of faith and confession.

Questions

1. When did Jesus institute the Lord's Supper?
2. Who was present at this first Lord's Supper?
3. What did Jesus give them to eat and to drink?
4. What is the connection between the Passover and the Lord's Supper?
5. How do we know that the Lord's Supper should be repeated over and over?
6. How were the Christians in Corinth abusing the Lord's Supper?
7. Do all communicants partake of the Lord's body and blood?
8. Do all communicants receive the forgiveness of sins? Why or why not?
9. How do we examine ourselves in preparation for the Lord's Supper?
10. Why can we be sure the Lord's body and blood are really present when we partake of the Lord's Supper?
11. Why do we restrict participation in the Lord's Supper?
12. List the kinds of persons who should not partake of the Lord's Supper in our churches.