



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 11.3 – The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper

The Real Presence of Christ’s Body and Blood in the Lord’s Supper

The words that Jesus used in instituting the Lord’s Supper are simple. As He gave the bread to His disciples, He said plainly: **“This is My body.”** As He gave them the wine in the cup, He said to them: **“This is My blood.”** Therefore, in order to be faithful to what Jesus said, we must say that Jesus gave His disciples His true body and His true blood when He gave them the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper. We do not have to ask how this is possible. Jesus is the Son of God; He is God Himself. What He says is the truth, and what He says He is doing, He can do.

It looks like bread and wine; it tastes like bread and wine; it is bread and wine. But at the same time that it is bread and wine, it is also Christ’s body and Christ’s blood, according to His own words. And since Jesus told His disciples: **“Do this in remembrance of Me”** (Luke 22:19), the same thing that is true of the first Lord’s Supper is true of every Lord’s Supper eaten and drunk by Jesus’ disciples in accordance with His teaching. The visible elements in the Lord’s Supper are bread and wine; the invisible elements are Christ’s body and blood.

The apostle Paul calls the relationship between the bread and Christ’s body a **“communion”**. He also calls the relationship between the wine and Christ’s blood a **“communion”**: **“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). This means that we cannot separate the bread from Christ’s body in the Lord’s Supper. We cannot separate the wine from Christ’s blood. As we eat the bread, we are partaking of Christ’s body. As we drink the wine, we are partaking of Christ’s blood. This is what is meant by the term **“real presence”** when we speak of the Lord’s Supper. Christ’s body and Christ’s blood are truly present in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

That is why the apostle Paul says that those who partake of the Lord’s Supper unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord: **“Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of our Lord”** (1 Corinthians 11:27). They could not be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord if the body and blood of the Lord were not really present in the Lord’s Supper. Paul adds this word of warning: **“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 11:28-29). This means that even those who partake of the bread and the wine in an unworthy manner still receive Christ’s body and blood, even though they do not realize that the body of Christ is present. Christ’s body and blood are truly present in the bread and the wine by virtue of Christ’s powerful words spoken at the first Lord’s Supper: **“This is My body”** and: **“This is My blood”**. Those who partake unworthily still receive the Lord’s body and blood, not for their benefit, but for their harm. That is why Paul tells everyone to examine themselves before partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

Martin Luther was being faithful to Scripture when he defined the Sacrament of the Altar in this way in his Small Catechism: *“What is the Sacrament of the Altar? Answer: It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and the wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink”* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 362). Likewise, in his Large Catechism Luther wrote: *“Here is Christ’s word: ‘Take, eat; this is My body.’ ‘Drink of this, all of you, this is the New Testament in My blood,’ etc. Here we shall take our stand and see who dares to instruct Christ and alter*

what He has spoken. It is true, indeed, that if you take the Word away from the elements or view them apart from the Word, you have nothing but ordinary bread and wine. But if the words remain, as is right and necessary, then by virtue of them the elements are truly the body and blood of Christ. For as Christ's lips speak and say, so it is; He cannot lie or deceive" (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 468).

The term used in our Lutheran confessions for the union between the bread and Christ's body and for the union between the wine and Christ's blood is "sacramental union". Thus, one of our Lutheran confessions, the *Formula of Concord (Epitome)*, says: "*We believe, teach, and confess that the words of the testament of Christ are not to be understood in any other way than the way they literally sound, that is, not that the bread symbolizes the absent body and the wine the absent blood of Christ, but that they are truly the true body and blood of Christ because of the sacramental union"* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 505, no. 2).

Questions

1. What did Jesus say when He gave His disciples the bread of the Lord's Supper?
2. What did Jesus say when He gave His disciples the cup of wine?
3. What is meant by the term "communion" in 1 Corinthians 10?
4. What is true of the person who partakes of the Lord's Supper unworthily?
5. What should we do before we partake of the Lord's Supper?
6. What is Martin Luther's simple definition of the Lord's Supper?
7. Are Christ's body and blood present or absent at the Lord's Supper? Explain your answer.