



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

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 11.4 – The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper

False Teachings Concerning the Lord’s Supper

The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian congregation: **“As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes”** (1 Corinthians 11:26). Therefore, Christians have continued to celebrate the Lord’s Supper from the days of the apostles until our own time, and in this way they have proclaimed the atoning and life-giving death of the Lord. But through the years Satan has succeeded in injecting false teachings and practices into the Christian celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In the time of the Reformation Martin Luther and his associates exposed these false teachings and practices.

There can be no doubt that Jesus intended His disciples to partake of both the bread and the wine, and thus to partake of both Christ’s body and Christ’s blood. But the practice had developed in the Roman Catholic Church for the priests to receive both the bread and the wine, but the rest of the participants would receive only the bread. One argument used for this practice was that Christ’s body contained His blood and, therefore, it was not necessary for the communicant to receive both Christ’s body and Christ’s blood. Christ’s body was sufficient.

This false teaching was easy to refute from Christ’s own words, for it is obvious that He gave both bread and wine to His disciples at the first Lord’s Supper. Mark reports: **“They all drank from it”** (Mark 14:23). It is also obvious from Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians that all the participants ate the bread and drank the wine. **“Do this”** and **“this do”** refer both to the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup (1 Corinthians 11:24-25).

In Luther’s view, the most dangerous false teaching brought into the Roman Catholic Church was the idea that the Lord’s Supper is not a gift from Christ to His Church, but an offering made by Christ’s Church to the Lord. The New Testament (especially the letter to the Hebrews) clearly teaches that there is only one sacrifice that can remove sin, and that is the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross. This is the only sacrifice that God regards as the payment for sin. It is the only sacrifice on the basis of which God forgives sins. We read: **“Once at the end of the ages, He (Jesus) has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself... Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many”** (Hebrews 9:26-28). Again we read: **“This Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God... Where there is remission of these, there is no longer an offering for sin”** (Hebrews 10:12-18).

But the Roman Catholic Church has taught and still teaches that an ordained priest is offering up to God a sacrifice to take away the sins of the people. when he consecrates the Lord’s Supper. Thus, the Lord’s Supper is changed from God’s sacrament that is His gift to us, to a sacrifice made by the priest for the Church to take away the sins of the people. The emphasis is taken away from what God gives to us in the sacrament and placed on what we are bringing to God as a sacrifice. In the Roman Catholic view the Lord’s Supper is an unbloody repetition of the sacrifice of Christ, offered by an ordained priest as a propitiatory sacrifice to atone for the sins of the living and the dead. Such an understanding of the Lord’s Supper permits the priest to offer up this sacrifice even when there are no participants. He may even be asked to say a Mass, as they call it, for the benefit of souls in purgatory – a place somewhere between heaven and hell, a place which Scripture knows nothing about and does not teach. This is really a teaching that denies Christ, for it declares loudly and clearly that what Christ did on the cross

was insufficient. But Jesus said: **“It is finished”** (John 19:30). He **“does not need daily, as those (Old Testament) high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself”** (Hebrews 7:27).

To explain how Christ’s body and blood can be given to us through bread and wine, the Roman Catholic Church came up with the idea of transubstantiation. This means that a priest has received the power through his ordination to *change* bread into Christ’s body and the cup of wine into Christ’s blood. After the priest has performed this miracle, the bread is no longer bread but Christ’s body, and the wine is no longer wine but Christ’s blood. This teaching has also led Roman Catholic members to give special honor to the bread, which they claim has been changed into Christ’s body, even when the Lord’s Supper is no longer being celebrated. But there is no Scriptural basis for such a belief. The apostle Paul speaks of bread and the cup; it is still bread and it is still wine, even though by virtue of Christ’s words it is also Christ’s body and Christ’s blood when the Lord’s Supper is being celebrated.

When Martin Luther and his associates removed these false teachings from their celebration of the Lord’s Supper, there were some among them who insisted they had not gone far enough. Their opponents claimed that the Lord’s Supper was simply a memorial meal of bread and wine. In their view Christ’s body and blood could not be present in the Lord’s Supper, for Christ had ascended to heaven and His body is now at the right hand of God. They argued that since Christ’s body is in heaven, it could not be on earth in the Lord’s Supper. Martin Luther called these false teachers **“Sacramentarians”**. Today almost all the Protestant churches agree with this false teaching that the Lord’s Supper is only bread and wine. They say that the bread and wine symbolize or picture Christ’s body and blood, but Christ’s body and blood are not truly present but absent. These Protestants do not understand Jesus’ words as they stand, however, but they explain them away. As we have already shown, Jesus said: **“This is My body”** and **“This is My blood.”** And the apostle Paul said that those who partake unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. He also said that the bread is the communion of the body of Christ, and the wine is the communion of the blood of Christ.

What about Jesus’ ascension to heaven? Does that prove that Jesus’ body and blood are absent from the Lord’s Supper? No, it does not. This is the way the apostle Paul explains Jesus’ ascension to heaven: **“He (God) raised Him (Christ) from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all”** (Ephesians 1:20-23). Christ’s ascension to heaven does not limit what Christ can do in any way. He is powerful and present everywhere, and therefore, if He wants His body and blood to be present in the Lord’s Supper with the bread and the wine, He can bring that about easily, for all things are under His feet. The apostle Paul also wrote that Jesus is the One **“who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things”** (Ephesians 4:10).

Regarding what the Bible says about the Lord’s Supper, Lutherans find themselves pretty much alone in their confession. We are not able to agree with the Roman Catholic teaching nor with the general Protestant teaching. It seems that the Roman Catholic teaching has developed, in part, from the view that Catholic priests have the special power to offer satisfactory offerings to Christ, even as Christ Himself did. The general Protestant teaching is derived from man’s reason or logic, which cannot understand how Christ’s body can be in the bread or how Christ’s blood in the cup of wine. In response to both of these views Martin Luther wrote: *“My dear Lord Jesus Christ, a controversy has arisen over Your words in the Supper. Some want them to be understood differently from their natural sense. But since they teach me nothing certain, but only lead me into confusion and uncertainty, and since they are not willing or able to prove their text in any way, I have remained with Your text as the words read. If there is anything obscure in them, it is because You wished to leave it obscure, for You have given no other explanation of them, nor have You commanded any to be given”* (Luther’s Works, Vol. 37, Confession Concerning the Christ’s Supper, p. 305).

Questions

1. How do we know that we should still celebrate the Lord's Supper today?
2. Why can we be sure that all participants should receive both the bread and the wine?
3. What is the one sacrifice that has taken away all sin forever?
4. How has the Roman Catholic Church changed the Lord's Supper from a sacrament to a sacrifice?
5. In what way has the Catholic Mass become a denial of Jesus Christ?
6. What is meant by transubstantiation?
7. How is transubstantiation contrary to Scripture?
8. What did the Sacramentarians teach concerning the Lord's Supper?
9. How did the Sacramentarians explain Jesus' ascension to heaven?
10. How did the apostle Paul explain Jesus' ascension to heaven?
11. Why did Martin Luther remain with the words of Jesus in the Lord's Supper?