



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 11.5 – The Doctrine of the Lord's Supper

### Our Celebration of the Lord's Supper Today

As in the case of baptism, it is important that we distinguish between what our Lord has told us about the Lord's Supper and the various customs that have developed through the years in different parts of the world. These customs should not become things that we must do and we dare not overlook the things that our Lord has told us in order to retain human customs.

Since Jesus used unleavened bread and grape wine when He first instituted the Lord's Supper, the surest way that we can follow his instruction, **"do this"**, is to use bread or wafers without yeast and grape wine in our celebration of the Lord's Supper. It has been the practice of some Christians at various times in history to use leavened bread rather than unleavened bread or to use grape juice instead of grape wine. If the reason for using grape juice rather than wine is the belief that the use of alcohol is sinful, we need to resist that notion, as it is contrary to the plain teaching of the Bible. We know that Jesus Himself changed water into wine at a wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11), and that the Christians in Corinth used wine in the Lord's Supper because some of them took too much and became **"drunk"** (1 Corinthians 11:21). Drunkenness is a sin, but the use of alcohol in moderation is not a sin.

At the first celebration of the Lord's Supper, the bread was in the form of a loaf that was then broken into pieces as it was distributed. Among Lutherans in America the usual custom is to use pre-cut pieces of bread in the form of flat wafers, and the wine is generally distributed either in a common cup that is given in an orderly way to each communicant or in small glasses that have been pre-filled with a small amount of wine that are then taken by each communicant. The distribution of the wine in individual cups has been introduced as a way of showing love to those communicants who are troubled by drinking from the same cup as others who may have a contagious disease.

Probably other methods of distributing the bread and wine have been used in various parts of the world. It is important that we do not insist that there is only one way that is the right way and that all other ways are wrong. Just as there are many different ways of applying the water of baptism, so there are many different ways of distributing the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. What is necessary is that those who partake actually eat of the bread and drink of the wine.

Of course, not all bread is Christ's body, and not all wine is Christ's blood. In order to let everyone know that we are celebrating the Lord's Supper when we eat the bread and drink the wine, it is necessary that Jesus' words of institution be clearly spoken in a language that the people understand before the distribution takes place. In this way we set aside the bread and the wine for this special use in accordance with our Lord's instructions. The apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: **"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 person administering the Lord's Supper does not have special power to join Christ's body with the bread or Christ's blood with the wine. It is Christ Himself who makes the bread a communion with His body and the wine a communion with His blood by His words of institution that are repeated in our celebration. We do not have to trouble ourselves by the question of the precise time when Christ's body and Christ's blood begin to be present. All we need to know is that as we eat of the bread and drink of the cup according to our Lord's instruction, we are indeed partaking of Christ's body and Christ's blood.

Even though we take with our mouths Christ's body and Christ's blood according to His words, we are also at the same time eating bread and drinking wine in a physical sense, and our bodies digest this bread and wine as they digest other bread and wine. We should not think of this eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood in a gross, physical sense, as though we were imitating cannibals eating human flesh and drinking human blood. When Jesus referred to believing in Him as eating His flesh and drinking His blood, some of His audience seemed to have this same idea when they said: **"How can this Man (Jesus) give us His flesh to eat?"** (John 6:52).

In connection with our celebration of the Lord's Supper today it is important to remember the apostle Paul's words: **"Let all things be done decently and in order"** (1 Corinthians 14:40). The Corinthians were not following orderly practices in their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Therefore, he wrote to them: **"When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk"** (1 Corinthians 11:20-21). They were not showing love to one another. Some were taking it all for themselves and getting drunk and others were not receiving anything at all. It is good for every Christian congregation to establish an orderly way to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

In our American congregations, the usual pattern is to celebrate the Lord's Supper once or twice a month in a regular church service after Scripture has been read, hymns have been sung, and the pastor or church leader has preached a sermon or given a Bible lesson to those who are present. Then, after the words of institution are spoken, the pastor or leader invites those who are communicants to come to the front of the group and form a row, as directed by ushers. The pastor then goes down the line and first gives the bread to each individual and then he goes down the line a second time and gives the wine to each individual. It is customary for the pastor to say words such as these as he is distributing the bread and wine: "Take, eat; this is the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given into death for your sins" and "Take, drink; this is the true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for the remission of all your sins." After distributing the bread and the wine to the group, he then says: "May this true body and true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you in the true faith unto life everlasting. Go in peace."

### Questions

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1. What were the food elements Jesus used when He instituted the Lord's Supper?
2. Why is it important that we distinguish between what we must do to follow our Lord's instructions and human customs we may create?
3. What should we say to those who insist on using grape juice instead of grape wine?
4. What is it that makes the bread and wine Christ's body and blood?
5. What is the customary American way of celebrating the Lord's Supper?
6. What is the way in which the bread and wine are distributed in your locale?
7. How did the Christians in Corinth abuse or misuse the Lord's Supper?