



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

## A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics) Lesson 11.7 – The Doctrine of the Lord’s Supper

### The Lord’s Supper as a Means of Grace and a Sacrament

The Lord’s Supper was instituted by Christ Himself for the purpose of conveying the forgiveness of sins. The promise of forgiveness is attached to the use of the earthly elements of bread and wine. Therefore, there is no doubt that the Lord’s Supper is a sacrament on the same level as baptism. The Lord’s Supper is a true means of grace. Jesus specifically said to His disciples as He gave them the cup of grape wine: **“Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins”** (Matthew 26:27-28). The new covenant itself is the promise of forgiveness of sins, as foretold already by the prophet Jeremiah: **“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant... This is the covenant that I will make...I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more”** (Jeremiah 31:31-34). The letter to the Hebrews refers to this prophecy of Jeremiah as it sets before us the blessings of the new covenant (Hebrews 8:7-13; 10:15-22).

The Lord’s Supper is a blessing from the Lord for us sinners. Jesus specifically said: **“This is My body which is given for you”** (Luke 22:19) and also: **“This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you”** (Luke 22:20). Every time we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are reminded of what our Savior did to save us from our sins; He gave His body into death and poured out His blood as a sacrifice to atone for our sins and set us free from sin, death, and the power of Satan. Not only are we reminded of what Jesus did for us, each one of us is given through the bread and wine the very body He gave into death for us and the very blood He poured out for us.

Martin Luther wrote in his Small Catechism: *“What is the benefit of such eating and drinking? Answer: The words ‘given for you’ and ‘shed for you’ for the forgiveness of sins show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation”* (Book of Concord, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 362). Thus, the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is to give the individual communicant the assurance of the forgiveness of sins. The blessing we receive is not something different from the blessing given to us in the Gospel Word, but it is given in a different way.

Since the Lord’s Supper conveys the forgiveness of sins, it also conveys other benefits, such as the strengthening of the communicant’s faith and love, the public confession of Christ and His atoning work on the part of the congregation, and the declaration of confessional unity of the participants against the idolatry, impenitence, or the support of false teaching of those not participating. This last benefit is lost, however, when the Lord’s Supper is opened up to idolaters, the impenitent, or those who support false teaching by their membership in heterodox church bodies.

Most Protestant church bodies consider the Lord’s Supper a sacrament, or at least an ordinance of Christ, but, for the most part, they are unwilling to call it a means of grace that actually conveys the forgiveness of sins to those who partake of it. They insist that the Holy Spirit works directly on the human heart without the use of means, but this robs the communicant of the comfort and assurance that our gracious Lord wants to give us through this sacrament.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the ordination of a priest gives him the power to change the bread and wine into Christ’s body and blood, and therefore only an ordained priest may administer

the Lord's Supper. Canon 10 of the Seventh Session of the Council of Trent declares: "If anyone says that all Christians have power to administer the word and all the sacraments, let him be anathema."

But since Jesus gave the keys of heaven to *all* Christians, anyone whom Christians call to administer the Lord's Supper in their behalf may do so, as long as this call is carried out in accordance with love and good order. Ordained pastors ordinarily administer the Lord's Supper among us, but it is not the ordination that makes them qualified to do so. It is the call from the congregation of Christians, that qualifies them to administer it, even if that call is limited to one celebration of the Lord's Supper as in an emergency. A man from the congregation may also be chosen or called to administer the Lord's Supper to the pastor without being ordained. Some Lutherans today have begun to speak of ordination as a sacrament and to insist that only ordained pastors may administer the Lord's Supper, but this is not a teaching of Scripture. Remember the apostle Paul's words: "**Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers (servants) through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?**" (1 Corinthians 3:5). "**Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God**" (1 Corinthians 4:1).

Does the efficacy of the Lord's Supper depend on the faith of the person administering it or the faith of the recipient? No, the Lord's Supper depends on the Word of God. If the Word of God is spoken and the Lord's Supper is distributed according to the Lord's instructions, it is indeed the Lord's Supper of Christ's body and blood even if the administrator is an unbeliever and the participants are unbelievers also. The communicants truly receive Christ's body and blood. If the communicants themselves are unbelievers, however, they receive Christ's body and blood for their harm, not for their good. In other words, the forgiveness of sins is offered to them in the Lord's Supper but their lack of faith in Jesus and His words means that they will be harmed by their partaking of Christ's body and blood. They will be partaking in an unworthy manner.

There are some Protestant church bodies that use the Lord's words as they celebrate the Lord's Supper, but, at the same time, their public confession gives Jesus' words a different meaning from what the words say. The *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord* quotes Martin Luther as follows: "*In the Sacrament of the Altar the true body and blood of Christ are orally eaten and drink in the bread and wine, even if the priests who distribute them or those who receive them do not believe or otherwise misuse the sacrament. It does not rest on human belief or unbelief but on the Word and ordinance of God – unless they first change God's Word and ordinance and misinterpret them, as the enemies of the sacrament do at the present time. They, indeed, have only bread and wine, for they do not also have the words and instituted ordinance of God but have perverted and changed it according to their own imagination*" (*Book of Concord*, Kolb-Wengert Edition, p. 598).

## Questions

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1. What is our definition of a sacrament?
2. What is our definition of a means of grace?
3. On what basis can the Lord's Supper be called a means of grace?
4. What is meant by the new covenant?
5. What are some of the benefits of partaking of the Lord's Supper?
6. Why do most Protestant church bodies reject the notion that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace?
7. In Roman Catholic doctrine who are the only ones who can administer the Lord's Supper?
8. Under what circumstances could an unordained Christian administer the Lord's Supper?
9. What do unbelievers receive when they partake of the Lord's Supper?