

Brief Explanation of The Lord's Supper

The Real Presence

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a partaking of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a partaking of the body of Christ? Because we, the many, are one bread, one body, for we all partake of the One Bread. I Corinthians 10:16-17 LITV

So, what exactly do we receive in the Lord's Supper? You know we start with a bottle of ordinary wine and some little pieces of unleavened bread. These elements are set apart for special use—consecrated—and the Words of Institution are spoken over them. These are the same words Christ spoke when He began—instituted—the Lord's Supper with His disciples.

Now, if you judge by your senses alone or let your reason rule, what would you say you receive in this Supper? Well, the elements still look, smell, taste and feel like ordinary bread and wine. Some church bodies would stop there. They would believe they only receive ordinary bread and wine. To them, they 'represent' or 'symbolize' something which is not truly present.

Other church bodies would teach that this bread and wine are changed into something else. They still have the same appearance, but they are actually changed physically into Christ's body and blood. Though what you receive seems to be bread and wine, you are not actually receiving those elements, but something else.

The Bible teaches neither of these things. It speaks of this cup which we bless and bread which we break. Thereby what we receive remains bread and wine. It is not changed into something else. Yet, the text also teaches that the cup is a "partaking" of the blood of Christ and the bread a "partaking" of the body of Christ. In receiving the bread and wine, we receive Christ's body and blood. We receive what was sacrificed for us upon the cross.

Christ is really present in this Sacrament. Even if we cannot fully understand how it happens, we accept by faith that He can accomplish whatever He promises. (Just like when Christ promised to be truly present with us whenever two or three gather in His Name.) This He does by supplying us with His true body and blood, in, with, and under the bread and wine. We come to the Lord's Table and receive from Jesus Christ—who offers the best for us—Himself. The next time you come to His Table **wear a big grin**—Jesus is really with you—in, with and under the bread and wine—to strengthen and preserve **your** faith!

Preparation to Receive the Supper

So that whoever should eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, that one will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and let him drink of the cup; for he eating and drinking unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord. For this reason many among you are weak and feeble, and many sleep. For if we discerned ourselves, we would not be judged. But being judged, we are corrected by the Lord, that we not be condemned with the world. I Corinthians 11:27-31 LITV

How shall we prepare to receive this awesome gift from our Lord? The text speaks of receiving the Sacrament unworthily which results in judgment. How do we then properly prepare? How can we make ourselves worthy?

That question must first be answered by saying that we cannot make ourselves worthy. We are unable to rid ourselves of sin. We cannot purify our hearts. Because we are unable, the Lord must make us worthy. This He did upon the cross. Now, those same elements of His sacrifice upon the cross are offered to us here—His body and His blood.

If we come to the altar feeling good about ourselves, thinking we are not poor, miserable sinners, then we are rejecting the gift offered at His Table. The gift is offered for sinners—sinners who are in need of forgiveness. If we judge ourselves as free from sin, we have no business coming to His Table. If we instead examine and judge ourselves and find that we are sinners in need of cleansing then the Lord makes us worthy to receive His body and blood.

The text mentions failure to discern the Lord's body and blood which simply means to not recognize what you are receiving. This is the second part of our preparation for receiving the Lord's Supper—that we understand what we are receiving. This is why we instruct our youth (and adults) in confirmation classes prior to serving them.

It was the custom in the past that church members would visit with the pastor before receiving the Supper. This allowed the pastor to prepare them both by hearing individual confession and by examining their knowledge of the Supper and of Christian teaching in general.

Today, we must then ask ourselves if we are really prepared. Each of us ought to make a deliberate effort to prepare ourselves—which can include a visit with the pastor. In any case, let us prepare ourselves by examining our own condition and discerning what we are receiving in His Supper. Then, let us come joyfully to receive the gifts prepared for us from our Lord, Jesus Christ.

Close Communion

And they were continuing steadfastly in the doctrine of the apostles, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. LITV Acts 2:42

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and giving thanks, He broke and said, Take, eat; this is My body which is broken on behalf of you; this do in remembrance of Me. In the same way the cup also, after supping, saying, This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; as often as you drink, do this in remembrance of Me. For as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim the death of the Lord, until He shall come. LITV I Corinthians 11:23-26

NOTE TO VISITORS Our Lord's Body and Blood are offered in, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion to all repentant, baptized Christians who discern His real presence. Raise your index finger if you prefer grape juice. [LCRL Sunday Bulletin]

Why do we not just invite everyone in our Sunday service to the Lord's Table? To adequately explain and defend the practice would require much more space. Yet, it is a crucial part of what it means for us as Lutherans to come together to receive the Lord's Supper.

Let's examine what the Scriptures teach about receiving the Lord's Supper. The text from Acts points out that the early Christians were steadfast in the apostle's doctrine and fellowship along with the breaking of bread. The breaking of bread is a reference to partaking of the Lord's Supper. These people were joined in doctrine and fellowship along with the reception of the Lord's Supper.

Further, the text from I Corinthians indicates that in receiving the Lord's Supper, we are "proclaiming the Lord's death." In other words we make a statement about what we believe when we receive the Supper. We make a public confession of what we believe when we receive Holy Communion in this church or another church.

Being a member of a church indicates to other people that you agree with what that church teaches—a public confession of what you believe. Paul said if there is a sincere dispute as to the interpretation of Scripture, we should let God judge at the end (I Corinthians 4:5). However, you cannot agree with two different teachings. And these differences are important, for we are commanded to guard the precious Gospel by remaining true to what Scripture teaches (I Timothy 1:3).

Close communion, therefore, is a comforting practice, because we who believe what our church teaches to come together—as one—in fellowship at His Table to be blessed by the receiving of the very body and blood of Jesus Christ.

Blessings of the Lord's Supper

And as they ate, taking the bread and blessing it, Jesus broke and gave to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And taking the cup, and giving thanks, He gave to them, saying, Drink all of it. For this is My blood of the New Covenant which concerning many is being poured out for remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not at all drink of this fruit of the vine after this until that day when I drink it new with you in the kingdom of My Father. And singing a hymn, they went to the Mount of Olives. Matthew 26:26-30 LITV

In the last section we learned what we are given in the Lord's Supper: the very body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, what blessings do we receive at His Table?

The first and foremost benefit is mentioned by Christ in His institution in the words of the text: "*My blood of the New Covenant which concerning many is being poured out for remission of sins.*" It is the remission (or forgiveness) of sins that is delivered to us by our Lord, through His own body and blood.

Now, you might wonder why this extra step is needed. Didn't Christ do all that was required to forgive my sins when He died on the cross? Yes, He did. Yet, the gift which Christ secured there He wants to deliver to us again and again in a personal and visible way through the Supper. We receive it in an individual, one-on-one basis. This forgiveness is "for you." This is in contrast to our group general confession and absolution, where you receive forgiveness as a

group. In the Lord's Supper, it comes to you individually—for you—by way of eating and drinking.

This forgiveness then provides a multitude of further blessings. Luther says this in the Large Catechism, "For here in the sacrament you receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and conveys God's grace and Spirit with all His gifts, protection, defense, and power against death and the devil and all evils." This gives us power to live our daily lives, knowing our sins are forgiven and that we are God's blessed children.

This supper also strengthens our faith. I Corinthians 11:26 says, "*For as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim the death of the Lord, until He shall come.*" In the Supper, our Lord holds before us the very price that was paid to secure the promises He makes to us. Christ paid with His body and blood, and in receiving them we are reminded of the promises of our Lord. This causes us to be renewed and strengthened in our faith in Christ and His promises. Thanks be to the One who comes to us in His very body and blood—Jesus Christ!