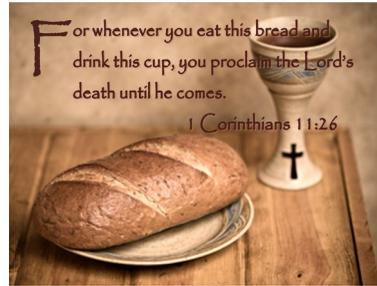


The Lord's Supper

Part 4



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How can bread and wine do such great things?

Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: “Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: “forgiveness of sins.”

See question 297.

What does it say about the power in this Sacrament?

From where does that power come?

Read Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14, 20,24, 26

Through what did God display His power?

Read 2 kings 20:9-11

Through what did God display His power?

Read Mark 2:9-12

Through what did God display His power?

Read John 11:43-44

Through what did God display His power?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Read question 364.

What two things are needed according to Jesus teaching?

or

What makes this a Sacrament?

In your own words, why do you think so many have such a hard time believing in the true physical presence of Jesus’ Body and Blood in this Sacrament?

In your own words, how could you answer those questions?

Confidence and assurance in matters of faith are important.
What happens if God's Word becomes questionable or unreliable?
What happens to faith when God's Word cannot be trusted?

Read question 365.

What does the unbelieving person receive?

Physically:

Bread, wine, Jesus' Body, Jesus' Blood

Spiritually:

unforgiveness, eternal death, and condemnation

Read question 366.

What does the believing person receive?

Physically:

Bread, wine, Jesus' Body, Jesus' Blood

Spiritually:

forgiveness, eternal life, and salvation

Satan's greatest assault is on God's Word. If he can tear that down everything else will fall with it. God's Word is the foundation upon which our faith and His Church is built. The reason our church takes heresy, false doctrine and false teaching so seriously is because such things are the demise of faith.

Luther's Large Catechism

It is the Word, I say, that makes this a Sacrament and distinguishes it from ordinary bread and wine, so that it is called and truly is Christ's Body and Blood. [*St. Augustine said*], "When the Word is joined to the external element, it becomes a Sacrament." This saying of St. Augustine is so appropriate and well put that he could hardly have said anything better. The Word must make the element a Sacrament; otherwise, it remains an ordinary element. Now, this is not the word and ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the Divine Majesty at whose feet all creatures should kneel and confess that it is as is said, and they should accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility.

With this word you can strengthen your conscience and declare: "Let a hundred thousand devils, with all the fanatics, come forward and say, 'How can bread and wine be Christ's body and blood?' Still I know that all the spirits and scholars put together have less wisdom than the Divine Majesty has in the littlest finger. 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.'

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; Christ cannot lie or deceive.

Hence it is easy to answer all kinds of questions that now trouble people. For example: whether even a wicked priest can administer the Sacrament, and similar questions. Our conclusion is: Even though a scoundrel receives or administers the Sacrament, it is the true Sacrament (that is, Christ's Body and Blood), just as truly as when one uses it most worthily. For it is not founded on human holiness but on the Word of God. As no saint on earth, yes, no angel in heaven can make bread and wine into Christ's Body and Blood, so likewise can no one change or alter the Sacrament, even through misuse.

For the Word by which it was constituted a Sacrament is not rendered false because of an individual's unworthiness or unbelief. Christ does not say, "If you believe or if you are worthy, you have My Body and Blood," but rather, "Take, eat and drink, this is My Body and Blood." Likewise, when He says, "Do this" (namely, what I now do, what I institute, what I give you and bid you take), this is as much as to say, "No matter whether you are worthy or unworthy, you have here His Body and Blood by the power of these Words that are connected to the bread and wine." Mark this and remember it well. For upon these Words rests our whole argument, our protection and defense against all errors and deceptions that have ever arisen or may yet arise. Thus we have briefly considered the first part, namely, the essence of this Sacrament.

Now we come also to its power and benefit, for which purpose the Sacrament was really instituted. For it is most necessary that we know what we should seek and obtain there. This is clear and easily understood from the Words just quoted: “This is My Body and Blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” That is to say, in brief, that we go to the Sacrament because there we receive a great treasure, through and in which we obtain the forgiveness of sins. Why? Because the Words are there, and they impart it to us! For this reason Christ bids me eat and drink, that it may be mine and do me good as a sure pledge and sign—indeed, as the very gift He has provided for me against my sins, death, and all evils.

Therefore, it is appropriately called food of the soul, for it nourishes and strengthens the new creature. For in the first instance, we are born anew through Holy Baptism. However, our human flesh and blood, as I have said, have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and attacks of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint and at times even stumble. Therefore the Lord’s Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may be refreshed and strengthened and that it may not succumb in the struggle but become stronger and stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and makes progress. But it has to suffer a great deal of opposition. The devil is a furious enemy; when it sees that we resist it and attack the old creature, and when the devil cannot rout us by force, it sneaks and skulks about at every turn, trying all kinds of tricks, and does not stop until it has finally worn us out so that we either renounce our faith or lose heart and become indifferent or impatient.

For times like these, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord’s Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment. Here again our clever spirits contort themselves with their great learning and wisdom; they rant and rave, “How can bread and wine forgive sins or strengthen faith?” Yet they have heard and know that we do not claim this of bread and wine—for in itself bread is bread—but of that bread and wine that are Christ’s Body and Blood and that are accompanied by the word.

These and no other, we say, are the treasure through which such forgiveness is obtained. This treasure is conveyed and communicated to us in no other way than through the words “given and shed for you.” Here you have both—that it is Christ’s Body and Blood and that they are yours as a treasure and gift. Christ’s Body cannot be an unfruitful, useless thing that does nothing and helps no one. Yet, however great the treasure may be in itself, it must be set within the Word and offered to us through the Word, otherwise we could never know of it or seek it.

Therefore it is absurd for them to say that Christ’s Body and Blood are not given and poured out for us in the Lord’s Supper and hence that we cannot have forgiveness of sins in the sacrament. Although the work took place on the cross and forgiveness of sins has been acquired, yet it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How should we

know that this took place or was to be given to us if it were not proclaimed by preaching, by the oral word? From what source do they know of forgiveness, and how can they grasp and appropriate it, except by steadfastly believing the Scriptures and the Gospel?

Now, the whole Gospel and the article of the Creed, “I believe in one holy Christian church... the forgiveness of sins,” are embodied in this Sacrament and offered to us through the Word. Why, then, should we allow such a treasure to be torn out of the Sacrament? They must still confess that these are the very words that we hear everywhere in the Gospel. They can no more say that these words in the Sacrament are of no value than they can dare to say that the whole Gospel or Word of God apart from the Sacrament is of no value.

So far we have treated the whole Sacrament from the standpoint both of what it is in itself, and of what it brings and benefits. Now we must also consider who the person is who receives such power and benefit. Briefly, as we said above about Holy Baptism and in many other places, the answer is: It is the one who believes what the Words say and what they give, for they are not spoken or preached to stone and wood but to those who hear them, those to whom He says, “Take and eat...” And because Christ offers and promises forgiveness of sins, it is part and parcel of the Sacrament that it be received by faith.

This faith Christ demands in the Word when He says, “given for you” and “shed for you,” as if He said, “This is why I give it and bid you eat and drink, that you may take it as your own and enjoy it.” All those who let these Words be addressed to them and believe that they are true have what the Words declare. But those who do not believe have nothing, for they let this gracious blessing be offered to them in vain and refuse to enjoy it. The treasure is opened and placed at everyone’s door, yes, on the table, but it is also your responsibility to take it and confidently believe that it is just as the Words tell you.

Now this is the sum total of a Christian’s preparation to receive this Sacrament worthily. Because this treasure is fully offered in the Words, it can be grasped and appropriated only by the heart. Such a gift and eternal treasure cannot be seized with the hand. Fasting, prayer, and the like may have their place as an external preparation and children’s exercise so that one’s body may behave properly and reverently toward the Body and Blood of Christ. But the body cannot grasp and appropriate what is given in and with the Sacrament. This is done by the faith of the heart that discerns and desires such a treasure.

This is enough on this Sacrament, as far as is necessary for general teaching purposes. What else there is to say about it belongs at a different time. In conclusion, now that we have the correct interpretation and teaching concerning the Sacrament, there is also great need to admonish and encourage us so that we do not let this great a treasure, which is daily administered and distributed among Christians, pass by to no purpose.

What I mean is that those who want to be Christians should prepare themselves to receive this blessed Sacrament frequently. For we see that people are becoming lax and lazy about its

observance. A great number of people who hear the Gospel, now that the pope's nonsense has been abolished and we are freed from his compulsion and commands, let a year, or two, three, or more years go by without receiving the Sacrament, as if they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it. Others let themselves be kept and deterred from it because we have taught that none should go unless they feel a hunger and thirst impelling them to it. Still others pretend that it is a matter of liberty, not of necessity, and that it is enough if they simply believe. Thus the great majority go so far that they become quite barbarous and ultimately despise both the Sacrament and God's Word.

Now it is true, as we have said, that no one under any circumstances should be forced or compelled, lest we institute a new slaughter of souls. Nevertheless, it must be understood that such people who abstain and absent themselves from the Sacrament over a long period of time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ did not institute the Sacrament for us to treat it as a spectacle, but He commanded His Christians to eat and drink it and thereby remember Him and all He taught. Indeed, true Christians who cherish and honor the Sacrament should of their own accord urge and constrain themselves to go. However, in order that the simple people and the weak, who would also like to be Christians, may be induced to see the reason and the need for receiving the Sacrament, we shall talk a little about this.

As in other matters that have to do with faith, love, and patience, it is not enough just to teach and to instruct, but there must also be daily exhortation, so that on this subject we must be persistent in preaching, lest people become indifferent and bored. For we know and feel how the devil always sets itself against this and every other Christian activity, hounding and driving people from it as much as it can.

In the first place, we have a clear text in the very Words of Christ, "Do this in remembrance of Me." These are words that instruct and command us, urging all those who want to be Christians to partake of the Sacrament. Therefore, whoever wants to be a disciple of Christ—it is those to whom He is speaking here—must faithfully hold to this Sacrament, not from compulsion, forced by humans, but to obey and please the Lord Christ. However, you may say, "But the Words are added, 'as often as you do it'; so He compels no one, but leaves it to our free choice." Answer: That is true, but it does not say that we should never partake of it. Indeed, precisely His Words "as often as you do it" imply that we should do it frequently. And they are added because He wishes the Sacrament to be free, not bound to a special time like the Passover, which the Jews were obligated to eat only once a year, precisely on the evening of the fourteenth day of the first full moon, without variation. He means to say: "I am instituting a Passover or Supper for you, which you shall enjoy not just on this one evening of the year, but frequently, whenever and wherever you will, according to everyone's opportunity and need, being bound to no special place or time."

Thus you see that we are not granted liberty to despise the Sacrament. For I call it despising when people, with nothing to hinder them, let a long time elapse without ever desiring the Sacrament. If you want such liberty, you may just as well take the further liberty not to be a Christian; then you need not believe or pray, for the one is just as much Christ's commandment as the other. But if you want to be a Christian, you must from time to time satisfy and obey this commandment. For such a commandment should always move you to examine yourself and think: "See, what sort of Christian am I? If I were one, I would surely have at least a little desire to do what my Lord has commanded me to do." Indeed, because we show such an aversion toward the Sacrament, people can easily sense what sort of Christians we were under the papacy when we went to the Sacrament purely from compulsion and fear of human commandments, without joy and love and even without regard for Christ's commandment. But we neither force nor compel anyone, nor need anyone do so in order to serve or please us.

What should move and induce you is that God desires it, and it pleases God. You should not let yourself be forced by human beings either to faith or to any good work. All we are doing is to urge you to do what you ought to do, not for our sake but for your own. Christ invites and incites you, and if you want to show contempt for His Sacrament, you must answer for it yourself. This is the first point, especially for the cold and indifferent, that they may come to their senses and wake up.

It is certainly true, as I have found in my own experience, and as everyone will find in one's own case, that if one stays away from the Sacrament, day by day one will become more and more callous and cold and will eventually spurn it altogether. To avoid this, we must examine our heart and conscience and act like a person who really desires to be right with God. The more we do this, the more our heart will be warmed and kindled, and it will not grow entirely cold. But suppose you say, "What if I feel that I am unfit?" Answer: This is my struggle as well, especially inherited from the old order under the pope when we tortured ourselves to become so perfectly pure that God might not find the least blemish in us. Because of this we became so timid that everyone was thrown into consternation, saying, "Alas, you are not worthy!" Then nature and reason begin to contrast our unworthiness with this great and precious blessing, and it appears like a dark lantern in contrast to the bright sun, or as manure in contrast to jewels; then because they see this, such people will not go to the Sacrament and wait until they are prepared, until one week passes into another and one half year into yet another.

If you choose to fix your eye on how good and pure you are, to wait until nothing torments you, you will never go. For this reason we must make a distinction here among people. Those who are impudent and unruly ought to be told to stay away, for they are not ready to receive the forgiveness of sins because they do not desire it and do not want to be righteous. The others, however, who are not so callous and dissolute but would like to be

good, should not absent themselves, even though in other respects they are weak and frail. As St. Hilary [*of Poitiers (310– 367)*] has also said, “Unless people have committed such sins that they have to be expelled from the congregation and have forfeited the name of Christian, they should not exclude themselves from the Sacrament,” lest they deprive themselves of life. People never get to the point that they do not retain many common infirmities in their flesh and blood.

People with such misgivings must learn that it is the highest art to realize that this Sacrament does not depend on our worthiness. For we are not Baptized because we are worthy and holy, nor do we come to confession as if we were pure and without sin; on the contrary, we come as poor, miserable sinners, precisely because we are unworthy. The only exception would be the person who desires no grace and absolution and has no intention of improving. But those who earnestly desire grace and comfort should compel themselves to go and allow no one to deter them, saying, “I would really like to be worthy, but I come not on account of any worthiness of mine, but on account of Your Word, because you have commanded it and I want to be your disciple, regardless of my worthiness.”

This is difficult, however, for we always have this obstacle and hindrance to contend with, that we concentrate more on ourselves than on the Words that come from Christ’s lips. Nature would like to act in such a way that it may rest and rely firmly on itself; otherwise it refuses to take a step. Let this suffice for the first point.

In the second place, a promise is attached to the commandment, as we heard above, which should most powerfully draw and impel us. Here stand the gracious and lovely words, “This is My Body, given for you,. This is My Blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” These words, as I have said, are not preached to wood or stone but to you and me; otherwise Christ might just as well have kept quiet and not instituted a Sacrament. Ponder, then, and include yourself personally in the “you” so that He may not speak to you in vain.

For in this Sacrament Christ offers us all the treasures He brought from heaven for us, to which He most graciously invites us in other places, as when He says in Matthew 11[:28]: “Come to Me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.” Surely it is a sin and a shame that when Christ so tenderly and faithfully summons and exhorts us for our highest and greatest good, we regard it with such disdain, neglecting it so long that we grow quite cold and callous and lose all desire and love for it. We must never regard the Sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine that aids you and gives life in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body is helped as well. Why, then, do we act as if the Sacrament were a poison that would kill us if we ate of it? Of course, it is true that those who despise the Sacrament and lead unchristian lives receive it to their harm and damnation.

To such people nothing can be good or wholesome, just as when a sick person willfully eats and drinks what is forbidden by the physician. But those who feel their weakness, who are anxious to be rid of it and desire help, should regard and use the Sacrament as a precious antidote against the poison in their systems. For here in the Sacrament you are to receive from Christ's lips the forgiveness of sins, which contains and brings with it God's grace and Spirit with all God's gifts, protection, defense, and power against death, the devil, and every trouble. Thus you have on God's part both the commandment and the promise of the Lord Christ.

Meanwhile, on your part, you ought to be induced by your own need, which hangs around your neck and which is the very reason for this command, invitation, and promise. For Christ Himself says [Matt. 9:12], "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick," that is, those who labor and are burdened with sin, fear of death, and the attacks of the flesh and the devil. If you are burdened and feel your weakness, go joyfully to the Sacrament and let yourself be refreshed, comforted, and strengthened. For if you wait until you are rid of your burden in order to come to the Sacrament purely and worthily, you will have to stay away from it forever. In such a case He pronounces the verdict, "If you are pure and upright, you have no need of Me and I also have no need of you." Therefore the only ones who are unworthy are those who do not feel their burdens nor admit to being sinners.

Suppose you say, "What shall I do if I cannot feel this need or if I do not experience hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?" Answer: For those in such a state of mind that they cannot feel it, I know no better advice than that they put their hands to their bosom to determine whether they are made of flesh and blood. If you find that you are, then for your own good turn to St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians and hear what are the fruits of your flesh: "Now the works of the flesh (he says) are obvious: adultery, fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, murder, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these."d For this reason, if you cannot feel the need, at least believe the Scriptures. They will not lie to you, since they know your flesh better than you yourself do. Yes, and St. Paul concludes in Romans 7[:18], "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh." If St. Paul speaks this way of his own flesh, let us not wish to be better or holier. But the fact that we do not feel it is all the worse, for it is a sign that ours is a leprous flesh, which feels nothing although it rages with disease and gnaws away at itself.

As we have said, even if you are so utterly dead in sin, at least believe the Scriptures, which pronounce this judgment upon you. In short, the less you feel your sins and infirmities, the more reason you have to go to the Sacrament and seek its help and remedy. Again, look around you and see whether you are also in the world. If you do not know, ask your neighbors about it. If you are in the world, do not think that there will be any lack of sins and needs. Just begin to act as if you want to become upright and cling to the Gospel, and see whether you

will not acquire enemies who harm, wrong, and injure you and give you cause to sin and do wrong.

If you have not experienced this, then take it from the Scriptures, which everywhere give this testimony about the world. Moreover, you will surely have the devil around you, too. You will not entirely trample the devil underfoot because our Lord Christ could not entirely avoid it. Now, what is the devil? Nothing else than what the Scriptures call the devil: a liar and a murderer. [*John 8:44-45*] A liar who entices the heart away from God's Word and blinds it, making you unable to feel your need or to come to Christ. A murderer who begrudges you every hour of your life. If you could see how many daggers, spears, and arrows are aimed at you every moment, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as you can. The only reason we go about so securely and heedlessly is that we neither imagine nor believe that we are in the flesh, in the wicked world, or under the kingdom of the devil.

Try this, therefore, and practice it well. Just examine yourself, or look around a little, and cling only to the Scriptures. If even then you still feel nothing, you have all the more need to lament both to God and to your brother or sister. Take the advice of others and ask them to pray for you: never give up until the stone is removed from your heart. Then your need will become apparent, and you will perceive that you have sunk twice as low as any other poor sinner and are desperately in need of the Sacrament to combat your misery. This misery, unfortunately, you do not see, unless God grants grace so that you may become more sensitive to it and hungrier for the Sacrament. This happens especially because the devil besieges you and continually lies in wait to trap and destroy you, soul and body, so that you cannot be safe from it for even one hour. How suddenly can the devil bring you into misery and distress when you least expect it!

Let this serve as an exhortation, then, not only for us who are old and advanced in years, but also for the young people who must be brought up in Christian teaching and in a right understanding of it. With such training we may more easily instill the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer into the young so that they will receive them with joy and earnestness, practice them from their youth, and become accustomed to them.

We cannot perpetuate these and other teachings unless we train the people who come after us and succeed us in our office and work, so that they in turn may bring up their children successfully. In this way God's Word and a Christian community will be preserved. Therefore let all heads of a household remember that it is their duty, by God's injunction and command, to teach their children or have them taught the things they ought to know. Because they have been Baptized and received into the people of Christ, they should also enjoy this fellowship of the Sacrament so that they may serve us and be useful. For they must all help us to believe, to love, to pray, and to fight against the devil.