

Six Chief Parts Of Luther's Small Catechism. The Lord's Supper

Text: 1 Cor 11:26

Suggested Hymns:

326, 260, 343, 292, 510

- 1) The Lord's Supper is a meal
- 2) The Lord's Supper is a mystery
- 3) The Lord's Supper is a memorial
- 4) The Sacrament is Gospel
- 5) The Lord's Supper is communion
- 6) The Lord's Supper calls for faith
- 7) The Lord's Supper and eternity

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Corinthians 11:26, ***26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*** (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Luther's treatment of the sacraments led him to speak of two sacraments instead of the Roman system of seven. The term "sacrament" is not found in Scripture, so the church has the freedom to use the term as it will.

However, what the church claims for these sacred acts must be determined by Scripture itself. It was at this important point, that Luther confined himself to, when speaking of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as the only two sacraments.

For Luther it was essential that the sacraments be related to the Gospel, that is, that they offer and convey the forgiveness of sins. To do this they must be connected with the Word of God. If they are to be essential to the life of the church, they must be instituted or ordained by God Himself. Otherwise the church would be free to use, or not to use them.

The sacrament should also be connected with visible elements that sign or signal to us God's action in the sacrament. The sacraments should be the deeds of God for us in the same way that God used signs and means throughout the history of His people.

So in summary, a sacrament is a sacred act, ordained by God, with visible means present which are connected to God's Word and conveys the forgiveness of sins.

Today we are considering the sixth chief part of *Luther's Small Catechism, The Lord's Supper*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. The Lord's Supper Is A Meal

As water in Baptism is the sign to us that we have been washed and cleansed in the blood of Christ, so bread and wine in the Lord's Supper are signs to us that God nourishes the new life He has given us. The Lord's Supper is just that, a meal which we are to eat and to drink.

The elements of bread and wine in the sacrament are not to be worshiped and adored as symbols or idols. Bread and wine are given to us as the means in which our Lord communicates to us His body and His blood. He does this for us again to accommodate our need for the assurance of His Presence in our lives and to taste of His mercy.

The temptation of Adam and Eve was to taste of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that they might be "*like God.*"¹ Eating of that forbidden fruit they tasted of sin and received judgment and death.

But in the Sacrament of the Altar God offers us the fruit of the field and the fruit of the vine, together with His promise, that we shall receive the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. The act of eating and drinking involves our total person, our desire and all our senses.

So as the first act of sinning enslaved the total person in sin and death, this sacramental eating and drinking incorporates the total person in the forgiveness and life which Christ has won for us.

What Adam and Eve had disbelieved was that because they were created in the image of God, they were as God. In the Sacrament we are now reminded that we may be refashioned in the image of Christ by receiving His righteousness and holiness.

2. The Lord's Supper Is A Mystery

Luther was particularly well suited for understanding the nature of the sacraments, because of his insight into Hebraic thought. Hebrew is an action

language. The language of the Scriptures, in the New Testament as well as the Old, is very concrete. It is so because God comes into our lives using words and means to give Himself to us. Yet when He comes, we are always involved in mystery as to how He can employ the means He does.

Thus Luther refused the temptation to try and give a scientific explanation as to how Christ comes to us in the Sacrament under the forms of bread and wine. Others had tried. The doctrine of transubstantiation was the attempt to guarantee the Real Presence of Christ by saying the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Christ.

Others tried to explain that Christ is spiritually present and that bread and wine only symbolise Christ. Against both, Luther insisted that we know Christ is present in the Sacrament because He promises to be present and says, ***“This is My body. This is My blood.”***

Christ’s Real Presence in the Sacrament is offered to us because He offers it. To convey this truth, Luther used the words that Christ’s body and blood are given to us *“in, with, and under”* the bread and the wine. One could use as many prepositions as he wished to convey the thought that Christ comes to us through these means. However, one could never explain how He comes. Faith allows the mystery to stand and takes to itself the blessings which come by His Real Presence.

3. The Lord’s Supper Is A Memorial

As the understanding of Hebrew thought helps us to appreciate how God acts through means in the sacraments, so the Hebrew assists us with the Word of Christ, ***“This do in remembrance of Me.”***² This is not memory simply in the sense of recalling something. Nor does it mean that we offer up Christ again or re-present the offering of Calvary.

Remembrance in the Hebraic sense is to be at the event itself as if it was happening now. It is to be a part of the original event with all the force and power that the initial event itself conveyed.

Thus to read the words of Moses in Israel was to listen as though Moses was announcing them for the first time. To celebrate the Passover was to be a part of the Exodus with one’s fathers. To remember Christ in the Sacrament is to

witness the life of Jesus. It is to witness His one-for-all life, death, and resurrection as though it were happening for the first time.

In the Sacrament we are in Bethlehem, Calvary, the empty tomb, and at the Ascension. The church year and the liturgy are designed so as to permit our remembrance in the Sacrament a celebration of these events with our involvement in them now with all the freshness and reality of them happening for the first time.

4. The Sacrament Is Gospel

The Lord's Supper is not a variation of the forgiveness of sins, but it is the offer of the same forgiveness which God grants in the sacrament of Baptism, absolution, and the proclamation of the Gospel.

What the Sacrament does is to impress us with the fact that our gracious God has created a variety of ways in which He can offer us the blessings of His Gospel. God makes the effort to cover all contingencies to guarantee us the blessings of His love.

In the Lord's Supper He gives us this dramatic expression of His grace. This feeding and nourishing gives us something to grow on. This is the satisfaction for spiritual hunger. The Israelites called the manna in the wilderness, the gift of God's grace, "*angel's food*."³

Here we receive the food of the Son of God. As God gives daily bread for the sustenance of our bodies that it might enter the bloodstream to be translated into energy, so God gives us His Son that He might become a veritable part of our being that we should rely on His righteousness to give service to the world.

Luther laid particular stress on the fact that God goes to such great lengths to personalise the Gospel for us. In the Christmas story Luther cannot emphasise enough that the Christmas angel says "*to you*" is born a Saviour.

Here he is impressed with the fact that our Lord said, "*This is My body which is given for you. This is My blood which is shed for you.*" God could not be more personal. We are singled out to be guests at His table, to be the recipients of this unique meal in which He hands to us the blessings of His grace.

5. The Lord's Supper Is Communion

This blessed meal is called by several names. We call it the *Eucharist*, which means a thanksgiving, because it becomes the occasion for us to thank God for the benefits of His love.

We also call the meal “*Communion*.” We do so, because the meal is a partaking of, or Communion with our Lord Jesus Christ under the forms of bread and wine.

It is also a Communion, because we are made one with one another in this meal. This was another of Luther’s emphases. He was greatly distressed by the many private celebrations of the Sacrament and discouraged them, because he saw them as an abuse of one of the important facets of the Sacrament.

He was so strongly convinced that the Lord’s Supper was a congregation action that he advised that in extreme cases where the family did not have the services of a pastor, they should not celebrate the Sacrament of the Altar.

As a communal act of the congregation, however, he saw the blessing of the family of God united around the Sacrament. In the Sacrament, he said, God bakes us altogether in one loaf. As we all partake of the elements we are all made one in Christ. As God makes us His family by the Gospel, so now He sets us as His family at one table to host us as a testimony of our oneness. So we also testify to our oneness and our fellowship in Christ when we accept His invitation to come and sit together at this table.

6. The Lord’s Supper Calls For Faith

As we have noted previously that all expressions of the Gospel in Baptism and absolution are not dependent on our worthiness or our faith, so it is with the Lord’s Supper. Faith does not make the Sacrament valid. It is God’s Word and promise used with the bread and the wine that constitute the Sacrament.

Nor do we make ourselves worthy communicants by fasting and bodily preparation, says Luther. However, faith is the means whereby we receive and take for ourselves the blessings of the Lord’s Supper.

The words “*for you,*” says Luther, “*require all hearts to believe,*” and “*he who believes these words has what they say and express, namely the forgiveness of sins.*” When one has the forgiveness of sins he has the additional blessing, “*for where there is forgiveness of sins there is also life and salvation.*”

Because the Sacrament is the occasion for faith we do not administer the Sacrament to those who are unable to discern the presence of Christ in the Sacrament, and we would withhold the Sacrament from those who clearly express that they do not believe in the blessings of the Sacrament or have refused to repent.

However, where there is faith, the Lord's Supper is surely a joyful experience. The sacraments have been called the "Visible Word." This is to say, they hold before us the signs which confirm for us what our hearts already believe. The sign confirms what our Lord Himself says in His Testament for us. It is His last will signed by His own blood that by the gift of His forgiveness we shall share life with Him forever.

7. The Lord's Supper And Eternity

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is always an anticipation of eternity. The Supper makes new for us over and over the once-for-all redemption which Christ has won for us. The Supper also guarantees Christ's real presence for us now.

However, the Supper also looks forward to His coming again in glory. The apostle says, "*For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*"⁴

Our Lord Himself said, "*I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*"⁵ Until that day it is only fitting that we should partake of the Sacrament at every opportunity we have. For every celebration is the occasion for us to ask ourselves whether we need the Sacrament.

Who can suggest that he does not need the Sacrament? Rather he does need the Lord's Supper for the strengthening of his faith, for the assurance of forgiveness, and for the sense of communion with his brothers. He needs to ask himself, why did Christ have to die, and what is it that He offers in the Sacrament?

When we answer these questions we ought to come running frequently. Luther cautioned that unless a person went to the Sacrament at least some four

times a year he was in danger of his heart turning to stone. Who would run that risk? Rather let us heed our Saviour's invitation, "*Do this often.*" Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Genesis 3:5

² Luke 22:19

³ Psalm 78:24

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:26

⁵ Matthew 26:29