

# HOW IS CHRIST THERE?

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# HOW IS CHRIST THERE?

FROM MARTIN LUTHER'S  
*Sermon on the Sacrament of Christ's Body  
and Blood against the Fanatics*

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# FOREWORD

What more is there to be said about the Lord's Supper? It is not that the more needs to be said, but the essence of the Lord's Supper, the heart of the matter, needs to be understood. Unfortunately, in the plethora of writings on the sacrament that have appeared among Lutherans since the end of World War II, such understanding has been lost, both among Christian academics as well as the basic person in the pew.

This work from Martin Luther, originally appearing in 1526, remedies this situation by providing a clear and precise explanation of not only the Lord's Supper, but also confession, both public and private. Here is found not a tome of ethereal theological ruminations, but a booklet using simple, down to earth examples, as tools for understanding how Christ can truly be present in the Lord's Supper with His body and blood "for us Christians to eat and drink" wherever and whenever it is celebrated throughout the Church.

More need not be said. The work speaks for itself. The greater historical and current theological context of the original work are provided by the translator, Holger Sonntag, in an extensive Afterword.

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Paul Strawn

# 1

## INTRODUCTION

There are two aspects of the Lord's Supper which should be understood and taught. The first is what is believed about it. This is called the object of faith (in Latin: *objectum fidei*). The object of faith is that which is believed. It is that to which we are to cling in faith.

The second aspect of the Lord's Supper to be understood and taught is faith itself. In other words: How is that which is believed used as it should be?

The object of faith is something outside of man, something man sees, namely, the Lord's Supper itself. We believe that there Christ's body and blood are truly in the bread

and wine.

Faith, however, is inside of man. It cannot leave man's heart. Faith consists in how the heart considers the Lord's Supper which is outside of man.

Up until now, I have not said much about faith's object, the Lord's Supper. I have instead written much about faith, which is certainly no bad thing!

Currently, however, many are maligning the Lord's Supper itself. Highly respected preachers are of various opinions concerning it. As a result, a large number of people have become utterly convinced that Christ's body and blood are not in the bread and wine. So it is this aspect of the Lord's Supper which must now be addressed.

From the outset it should be said: If a person is caught in this error, I would advise him not to take part in the Lord's Supper until he strongly believes Christ is present there with his body and blood. After all, the Words of Christ are simple and clear: "Take, eat; this is my body which is

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***They abandon clear words and follow their own ideas.***

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given for you. Drink of it all of you; this is my blood that is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me" (Matt. 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:18-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

We must insist on these words. They are spoken simply and clearly. Denying such simplicity and clarity takes great effort, as those who do readily admit.

Still they abandon clear words and follow their own ideas. They thereby turn light into darkness.

The person who wants to do the right thing and avoid

trouble beware! The devil has aroused much hairsplitting in the world concerning this subject. He would like nothing better than to suck the egg empty and leave us with only a shell. In other words, the devil would like nothing better than to remove the body and blood of Christ from the Lord's Supper, so that all that we receive is common bread and wine like what we have at home.

Those who reject the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine call us cannibals and vampires. They even call us worshipers of a baked god.

In this they are like the Arab philosopher Averroes (1126-1198). At one point he had been a Christian, but came to ridicule and blaspheme believers in Christ saying: "There is no people on earth that is more wretched than the Christians. They devour their god. No other people have ever done such a thing."

Admittedly this would be an excellent argument. It is this very argument the devil now advances everywhere against us

But God delights in doing what the world considers foolish and offensive. So Paul in 1 Cor. 1:23: "We preach the crucified Christ, an offense to the Jews, a foolishness to the Pagans" and in verse 21: "Because the world did not recognize by its wisdom God in his wisdom, God was well pleased to save by means of foolish preaching all who believe in it."

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***God delights in doing  
what the world  
considers foolish***

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So let anyone who does not believe the body of Christ to be present in the bread of the Lord's Supper believe it is

simply bread or even something else. It doesn't really matter what such a person believes. Like a person who drowns, whether it occurs in a creek or a river the result is the same.

So such people: If they abandon the Word concerning the Lord's Supper let them believe whatever they want and split into smaller factions whenever they wish. Already six or seven sects have formed on account of the Lord's Supper. They agree only that Christ's flesh and blood are not there.

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1. What are the two aspects of the Lord's Supper that should be understood and taught?
2. What is the difference between the object of faith, and faith itself?
3. Which one is outside of man? Which one is inside of man?
4. Which object of faith does Luther address in this book?
5. What were some in Luther's day teaching about the Lord's Supper?
6. Which of the words of Christ are simple and clear?
7. What did the Arab philosopher Averroes say about Christians?
8. What is it that God delights in doing in the world?
9. So what really is the heart of the matter?

# 2

## READING WITH TINTED GLASSES

Those who deny that the body and blood of Christ are in the Lord's Supper have not remained with the words of Christ. They have instead thought it over and come up with this line of reasoning: Should Christ really be in bread and wine? Would he not be spread all over the world? Should each Christian actually eat Christ? This would truly be strange!

So their presuppositions. From the outset they are wearing a pair of tinted glasses which cause the words of Christ to mean what they want them to mean.

But this is what all factious people do! First they come

up with an idea. Then if they like it, they brazenly conform Scripture to it.

Whoever would receive the true faith from the Word of God, however, believes in this way: “May God grant that Christ crawl into the bread or the wine or wherever he wants to be. If I have the Word I will look or think no farther. I will stick with what Christ says.” This is how a person wraps himself in the Word, is not diverted from it, and is preserved by it.

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***If I have the Word  
I will look or think  
no farther.***

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These words of Christ are not, after all, hard to understand. If these words are not clear, then I do not know how one can speak clearly.

Would I be confused if someone were to place a roll in front of me, saying: “Take, eat; this is bread?” Likewise: “Take and drink; this is a glass of wine?” Accordingly, when Christ says, “Take, eat; this is my body,” even a child clearly understands that Christ speaks about what he is offering.

It is common for someone to point to something while speaking, so that another person knows what he is saying. If I now am to throw such words into question, and invent some sort of subtlety, I am simply fooling myself.

All these words are clear and simple: “Take bread;” “give thanks;” “break;” “give;” “eat and drink;” “this is my body;” “this is my blood.” Yet all that our opponents with all their efforts can do is come up with their own ideas and consequently split into factions. Apparently these words mean whatever each of them has decided they mean.

This is why we simply stick with the words and close our

eyes and ignore our senses. For everyone knows what this means: “This is my body,” especially when he adds, “... that is given for you.” We surely know what Christ’s body is, namely, that which was born of Mary, suffered, died, and rose.

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***We simply stick with the words and close our eyes and ignore our senses***

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1. Do those who deny that Christ is present with his body and blood in the Lord’s Supper do so on the basis of Christ’s words?
  2. What reasons are given for such a denial?
  3. Is it possible for a person to conform Scripture to his own ideas?
  4. How does a person “Wrap himself in the Word?”
  5. Are Christ’s words concerning his supper complex or simple?
  6. Why were the opponents of Luther splitting into factions?



# 3

## LIKE THE INCARNATION?

Two objections are raised to the presence of Christ's body and blood in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. First and foremost: It does not make sense that Christ's body and blood should be in bread and wine. Second: It is not necessary for his body and blood to be there.

In response to the first objection, I might as well say: It also does not make any sense that God should descend from heaven and enter a womb. How is it that he, who feeds, sustains and understands the entire world, should be fed and understood by Mary?

Likewise, it also does not make sense that Christ – a

King of glory before whose feet all the angels fall down (Ps. 97:7; Heb. 1:6; Phil. 2:10) and before whom all creatures tremble – subjects himself to mankind. He lets himself be nailed to a cross as the worst of criminals. He even allows it to be done by the most desperate of all men. I might as well conclude from this contradiction alone that God did not become man. Or that the crucified Christ was not God.

In just such a way it is asserted that it makes no sense that God should do more miracles in the Lord's Supper than anywhere else. They deem as nonsense the fact that we believe the one body of Christ to be in as many places as the bread is broken. And in that no one sees or notices the broken legs of the crucified Christ in that bread, they assert that a great miracle must have occurred!

They fail to see that all such lines of reasoning are useless. If such a standard would be applied consistently, no created thing could exist. If I could and even would measure created things, describing them with words, then miracles that are as big as, or even bigger than what you find in the Lord's Supper, would be discovered.

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***They fail to see that  
all such lines of  
reasoning are useless.***

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Take, for instance, the soul. It is only one created thing, yet it is present throughout the entire human body, even in the smallest toe. If I would prick the smallest member of the body with a needle, I would hit the entire soul causing the whole person to twitch. Now, if a soul can be in all the parts of the body at once, should not Christ, then, be able to be in the Lord's Supper in all places?

What is more, my soul can both think and speak at the same time. It can see, hear and feel while speaking. While doing all this, it can also digest food and make it into blood, flesh, bone, urine, and dung.

No one considers this to be a miracle because we see it daily and we are used to it. These people have never closely looked at any creature, as we will see below.

Look also at the wheat growing in the field and tell me: How it can be that the stalk grows out of the soil? How is it that a single kernel bears so many little kernels in the head and gives each its proper form? There are many, many miraculous works in a single little kernel of wheat! They neither notice nor appreciate any of them.

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***There are many,  
many miraculous  
works in a single little  
kernel of wheat!***

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Moreover, how can it be that I have only two eyes, yet am able to see thousands of kernels of wheat at once? In fact, I can do this just as well with one eye! Therefore, a single eye can focus upon a thousand little kernels of wheat, and again, a thousand eyes can focus upon a single little kernel.

And take an example from the word that I speak. It is a poor, miserable voice and, considered this way, the lowliest of all created things, no more than the wind. As soon as the mouth is closed, the word ceases. There is nothing weaker nor more fragile. And yet, the spoken word is so powerful that I could rule an entire country by the voice!

And how is it that I can capture so many hearts by speaking? I have a little voice, and there are hundreds or thousands of ears. And yet, each ear captures my entire,

complete voice.

I do not distribute my voice so that each ear gets only a small part of it. Each ear hears the entire voice.

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***How is it that I can  
capture so many  
hearts by speaking?***

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My opponents see this and do not consider it to be a miracle. And admittedly, if we ourselves had never seen this, it would be deemed the greatest of all miracles!

Now, if my voice is able to fill every ear, and every ear receives as much as the other, and the word spreads so far, should then not Christ be able to do more than this with his body? How much more splendid a thing is a glorified body than the human voice?

Many more such miracles are found in creatures. Whoever properly considers a creature will therefore not be confused in this article of faith.

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1. Which two objections are raised to the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper?
  2. Does it make sense that God should enter the womb of Mary?
  3. Does it make sense that the King of Creation should become a subject to mankind?
  4. How is the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper miraculous? How is it not?

5. How are the workings of the human soul miraculous?
6. What about a kernel of wheat?
7. Or the human eye or ear?
8. How is the power of the human voice miraculous?
9. So again: Compared to what is found in creation itself, how miraculous is the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper?



# 4

## LIKE HE DWELLS IN OUR HEART?

And consider this: I preach the gospel concerning Christ, and with the bodily voice I bring Christ into your heart so that you form him within you (cf. Gal. 4:19). If you believe rightly, so that your heart grasps that Word and the voice dwelling within it, then tell me: What do you have within your heart? You must admit that you have the true Christ (cf. Eph. 3:17).

Of course, Christ does not sit in your heart as someone sits in a chair. Since Christ is at the right hand of the Father, you simply cannot comprehend how this occurs. By the experience of faith, however, your heart truly experiences

the presence of Christ.

Now, if by a spoken word I can occasion the entrance of the one Christ into so many hearts, so that all who hear and

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***Your heart truly  
experiences the  
presence of Christ.***

---

receive the sermon comprehend him whole in the heart, then we must confess that this is a daily miracle. It is as great as the one in the Lord's Supper. So how should it not make sense that

Christ distributes himself also in bread?

So what happens when I bring Christ into the heart? Does he, as they imagine, descend on a ladder?

The one Christ who fills heaven and earth remains seated at the right hand of the Father—and is also in your heart. I preach that Christ sits at God's right hand and rules over all creatures, sin, death, life, world, devil, and angels. As soon as you believe this, you already have him in your heart.

This is why your heart is also in heaven (cf. Eph. 2:6). Not apparently, as in a dream, but truly. Where Christ is, there you are as well.

This is how Christ dwells in your heart (John 17:23). And he still does not leave the right hand of God.

Christians openly feel and experience this. Yet our opponents do not grasp any of these things. They do not fathom the wonder that Christ dwells in the heart of the Christian, that he imparts himself there whole, and is spread about by the Word.

Whoever can believe this about Christ can therefore, without difficulty, believe that his body and blood are in the Lord's Supper. If the same reasoning for rejecting the pres-

ence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper would be applied here, however, then it must be concluded that Christ also does not dwell in the hearts of believers.

If the weak bodily voice is able to bring the whole Christ first into the ear, then into the heart of all who hear and believe, should it not be so miraculous that Christ is found in bread and wine? Is the heart not more delicate than bread?

You do well to leave such a thing alone and not to try to fathom how this is possible. So just as you are unable to say how it can be that Christ is in so many thousands of hearts, dwelling

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***This is why your heart is also in heaven.***

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there as he died and rose, so no one can understand how this happens in the case of the Lord's Supper.

But I do know that this word is here: "Take, eat; this is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me." Even though it is a mere word and voice you hear, **when we speak the words over the bread, then Christ is truly present.** As he enters into the heart without making a hole, but is only comprehended in the word and hearing, so Christ also enters into the bread. He need not first make a hole into it either.

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1. What created thing is used to bring Christ into our hearts?
  2. Does Christ dwell in our hearts as someone sits in a chair?

3. Besides our hearts, where also is Christ?
4. By what does our heart truly experience the presence of Christ?
5. Do we receive Christ into our hearts only partially?
6. If Christ is dwelling in our hearts, where also are our hearts?
7. So how is the dwelling of Christ in our hearts, and the presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper related?

# 5

## LIKE THE ANNUNCIATION?

Another example? How did Christ's mother, Mary, become pregnant? That a woman becomes pregnant by a man is miraculous in itself. But God himself was born of a virgin.

Yet how does this happen? Mary did not know any man. Her entire body was inviolate. And yet, she became pregnant with a true, natural child, with flesh and blood, in her body.

Is this not a greater miracle than bread and wine? How did it happen?

The angel Gabriel brought the Word (Luke 1:31): "Behold, you will become pregnant and give birth to a Son,"

etc. With these words, Christ not only enters her heart, but also her body, as she hears, grasps, and believes them.

Here no one can deny that the power comes through the Word. So just as **you cannot deny that Mary became pregnant by the Word**, and no one knows how this can be, so also the same occurs in the Lord's Supper. For as soon as Christ speaks: "This is my body," his body is present by the Word and power of the Holy Spirit, Ps. 33:9.

If the Word is not there, it is plain bread. But when the Word is added, it accomplishes what it declares.

What is more: We believe that Jesus Christ, *insofar as he is man*, has been placed above all creatures, Eph. 1:20f., and fills all things, as Paul says in Eph. 4:6ff. Christ is Lord over all things, sustains all things, and is present everywhere, not only insofar as he is God, but also *insofar as he is man*.

If I would believe those who say "That doesn't make sense!" I would deny Christ. We read that Stephen said in Acts 7:55: "I see the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of the Father." How does Stephen see Christ? There was no need for Stephen to lift his eyes heavenward: Christ surrounds us and is in us, in all places.

Our opponents do not understand this. They believe that

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***Christ surrounds us and is in us, in all places.***

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Christ has ascended and sits at God's right hand. But they do not know what it means. It assuredly is not like climbing into a house with a ladder. Rather Christ's ascending and sitting means that he is above, inside and outside of all creatures. His bodily ascension signified this.

He now has all things before his eyes, even more than

I have you before my eyes. Christ is closer to us than any creature is to another.

It is speculated, however, that Christ ascends and descends from heaven through the air. Moreover, he allows himself to be pulled down into bread when we eat his body. The source of such thoughts is none other than foolish reason and the flesh.

The words we speak need not pull Christ down from heaven. They are there to assure us that we know for certain where to find him.

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***The words we speak  
need not pull Christ  
down from heaven.***

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Even though Christ is present throughout creation, and I might find him in fire, in water, or even in a rope, he does not want me without the Word to seek him in such created things by throwing myself into fire or water, or clinging to a rope. He is present everywhere, but he does not want me to grope for him everywhere.

Rather, where the Word is, there grope for him! Then you grasp Christ properly. Otherwise, you only tempt God and practice idolatry.

This is why Christ has instituted for us specifically how and where we are to seek and find him. And this manner is the Word (cf. Acts 17:26-31).

Those who say that Christ's presence in the bread and wine does not make sense do not understand or comprehend this at all. They also do not grasp the meaning of Christ's kingdom or the sitting at God's right hand.

If Christ were not with me in a dungeon, in suffering and death, where would that leave me? He is present there

with the Word, though not in the same way as he is present in the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper, Christ by the Word, unites his body and blood to bread and wine to be received also bodily.

When we believe this, then this is also easily comprehended and believed. Heaven and earth are Christ's sack.

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***Heaven and earth  
are Christ's sack.***

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As wheat fills the sack, so he fills all things. And as a single kernel of wheat produces stalk, ears, and many little grains; as a single pit of a cherry, planted in the soil, produces a tree with so many blossoms, leaves, bark, fiber, and cherries; and as my voice enters so many ears: In just such a way Christ can distribute himself whole and undivided in so many little pieces.

Our opponents use human reason to determine what truly matters to God in all of this. Well, just let them deceive themselves. You remain with the fact that Christ does all this by the Word.

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1. How did Mary become pregnant?
  2. Was that pregnancy a miracle?
  3. Can anyone explain how it happened?
  4. What does it mean that Christ, insofar as he is man, is "placed above all creatures"?
  5. Is the ascension of Christ like someone climbing into a house with a ladder?

6. What is the right hand of God?
7. Is Christ then, present in all of creation?
8. Where does Christ want to be found in his body and blood?
9. What did the opponents of Luther use to determine what matters to God?



# 6

## **ALL BY THE WORD!**

There are countless miracles which Christ does every day by the Word. Shouldn't he then know how to do such a thing by that same power in the Lord's Supper? Christ is comprehended in the Word, and by means of the Word, Christ is also comprehended in the bread.

If Christ can enter the heart and spirit and dwell in the soul, then it should be much easier for him to enter into even less delicate created things. Yet he retains the smaller miracles so that he might remind us thereby of the greater miracles. For it is a much greater miracle that Christ enters into the heart through faith than that he is present in the

bread. In fact, Christ uses the bread of the Lord's Supper for the sake of faith.

If we wanted to think about this in the right way, we should reconsider what truly is miraculous. However, if a person wants to follow Christ by means of reason and human thinking, then we also must say of faith itself that no one can believe. For faith too goes far beyond all reason.

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***God's Word is true.  
Your ideas, therefore,  
must be false.***

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In summary, it is asserted repeatedly that the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Lord's Supper does not make sense and on the basis of reason, simply cannot be true. We want to turn this around and say: God's Word is true. Your ideas, therefore, must be false.

Should it make no sense simply because you think it doesn't? And because you believe that the Word cannot be right? And that your ideas are far greater than the Word?

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1. How many miracles does Christ do every day through his Word?
  2. How is Christ comprehended?
  3. How is Christ comprehended in the bread?
  4. Which is the greater miracle: The entry of Christ into the heart through faith, or his presence in the bread of the Lord's Supper?
  5. Is faith in Christ truly reasonable?

# 7

## WHAT REALLY IS NECESSARY?

Another reason given for rejecting the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper is this: It is not necessary. (Here Christ must allow himself to become a student and be taught correctly. The Holy Spirit has apparently not expressed himself clearly.)

Why? If I believe in Christ who has died for me, what need is there for me to believe in the baked god? (A baking will indeed one day take place and it is the crust of those who assert such things that will burn!)

Who raises such an objection? God? Or man? It is man!

Why? They have become possessed by Satan! Having learned nothing more than to recite and preach that Christ has died for us, they feel nothing of this in their hearts!

Do you really want to instruct God, teaching him what is necessary and what is not, deciding this question on the basis of your own ideas? It certainly would be more just to turn this around and say: God wants to have it this way; this is why your ideas are wrong.

Who are you that you are allowed to question what God considers to be necessary? You are a liar, and so God is truthful (cf. Rom. 3:4).

It could also then be asserted: Because faith justifies, Christ himself is not necessary. So let's tell God this: "You had sin, death, the devil, and all things in your power! Why was it necessary for you to send your Son, allowing him to be treated and die so cruelly? You could just as well have left him in heaven! It would not have taken you more than a word, and sin, death and the devil would have been destroyed. For you are almighty"

Similarly we might then want to conclude that Christ was not born of a virgin. After all, was that really necessary? Couldn't God have let Christ be fathered by a man while creating him so that he would have been conceived without sin and remained innocent?

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***This is how the devil blinds people so that they cannot rightly see God's work.***

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We could go even further and say: It is not necessary that Christ be God. He could have risen from the dead by the power of God and redeemed us as a mere man.

This is how the devil blinds people so that they cannot rightly see God's work. They ignore the Word and use only their heads to figure out everything.

But if you would ever fully comprehend even a little grain in the field, you would be so amazed you would die. God's works are unlike our works.

So this is why you should say in response: Why should I care whether the presence of the body and blood of Christ in the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper is necessary or not? God knows how or why it should and must be this way. When God says that it is necessary, then all creatures are silent.

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***Why should I care  
whether the presence  
of the body and blood  
... is necessary or not?***

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Now, because Christ says here in clear words: "Take, eat; this is my body," etc., it is my part to believe these words as firmly as I must believe all the words of Christ. Even if Christ handed me a straw as he spoke these words, I should believe it. This is why one must close mouth, eyes, and all senses and say: "Lord, you know better than I!"

It is the same way with baptism: The water is in baptism, and in baptism is the Holy Spirit. There you also might say: "Why is it necessary to baptize with water?" Yet the Spirit says: "Listen! Here is God's will and word! Stick to it and forget your ideas!"

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1. Is it necessary for the body and blood of Christ to be present in the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper?

2. Who objects to such a presence: God or man?
3. Was it necessary for Christ to die on the cross?
4. Was it necessary for Christ to be born of a virgin?
5. Was it necessary for Christ to be God as well as man?
6. Who really is behind such questions of necessity?
7. What should be the Christian's response?
8. What are we to do with the words of Christ?

# 8

## WHAT IS THAT TO YOU?

Two reasons are given for not believing that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Lord's Supper. The second, that of a lack of necessity, is emphasized.

Now these reasons may indeed move pious hearts. They have done so in the past. I myself was preoccupied for a time by the question of necessity.

I also questioned how a full-sized human body could be present in such a small piece of bread. And how it also could remain undivided yet present in every piece.

Yet if a kernel of wheat or the pit of a cherry is properly considered, a lesson is learned.

For why does God feed us by bread or under the bread? He could as well do it by the mere Word, without any bread at all.

Why doesn't God today create man instantly as he made

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***For why does God  
feed us by bread or  
under the bread?***

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Adam and Eve in paradise? Why does it take so long? Why do man and woman have to come together? Why must they raise a child with so much toil and labor?

Yet Christ says (John 21:22): "What is that to you? In the beginning, I made Adam and Eve one way. Now I want to do it differently. I let a Son be born of a virgin one time. This I also do not want to do again."

But this is how people want to subject God to their laws. It is just the same as if I would say: "Why have you given that person a big body and me a small body? Why do you give black hair to one person, blond hair to another? Why brown eyes to this, gray eyes to that?"

So in summary: See to it that you pay attention only to God's Word! Remain in it as a child in a cradle! If you let it slip for a moment, then you have fallen away from it. It is the exclusive business of the devil to tear people away from God's Word. God's will and work are then measured only by reason.

At the least, however, the hearts preoccupied with these two questions possess reason. They are still open to advice.

Others, however, are total fanatics. They go so far as to chop up and stretch out Christ's words. In fact, they are true hyper-fanatics who have nothing to support their position.

The former, at least, still have reason in their favor. Yet when considering how the latter tear apart the words of Christ and force their own ideas upon those words, then even reason can see that they are fools.

There are only four words in the sentence: “This is my body.” Yet one of these hyper-fanatics changes the meaning of the word “this,” tearing it away from the bread, so that one should interpret it to mean: “Take, eat. This is my body.” It is as if I said: “Take and eat,” and then said: “Here sits John wearing a red jacket.”

Another fanatic concentrates upon the word “is.” For him, “is” means “signifies.”

A third says that the phrase, “This is my body,” means something like: “This is a symbol of my body.”

In such a way they all posit such dreams of theirs without any foundation in Scripture. But these hyper-fanatics do not cause me any trouble. They are also not worth the argument. They are coarse, grammatical fanatics. The others at least are subtle philosophical fanatics.

Let them go their way. And let us remain with the words as they read: Christ’s body is truly in the bread and Christ’s blood is truly in the wine.

This is not to say that he is not also elsewhere with his body and blood. Christ is, after all, present in a complete way with flesh and blood in the hearts of all believers.

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***Let us remain  
with the words as  
they read.***

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But Christ wants to make us certain where and how we are to lay hold of him. There is the Word that says: “When you eat the bread, then you eat his body that is given for

you.” If it were not for the Word, I would not regard the bread as something special either.

Let this be enough concerning the first part.

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1. Must God use bread to feed us?
2. Why doesn't God create us as he created Adam and Eve?
3. What is the point Luther makes by asking these questions?
4. How do people want to subject God to their laws?
5. Why do we need to remain in God's Word?
6. What are the three arguments of the hyper-fanatics?
7. How is Christ present in the heart of all believers?

# 9

## USE AND ENJOY THE SACRAMENT!

The question now is how the Lord's Supper should be used and enjoyed. It is, after all, not enough simply to know what the Lord's Supper is, namely, that Christ's body and blood are truly present there. It is also necessary to know *why* Christ is there and *for what reason* or *for what purpose* he is given there to be received by us.

Here, however, heartache abounds. The devil cannot leave the Lord's Supper alone. He must twist what God says and does. And if the devil cannot completely destroy the workings of God, he simply makes of them a hollow shell.

Unlike the pope, who has taken away from us the cup,

these fanatics leave us with both the bread and the wine. But they drill a hole in the shell so that the body and blood of Christ are lost. Neither the pope nor the fanatics, therefore, properly use the Lord's Supper.

Thinking back I must plainly admit that when it came to the use of the Lord's Supper, we used to torture ourselves and feared that we would not go to this sacrament worthily. ("Going to the sacrament worthily" is what we now call the use of the Lord's Supper.)

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***It is also necessary  
to know why  
Christ is there.***

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Back then, we were taught to beat ourselves up with many difficult tasks, fasting, and confession. We prepared ourselves to use the Lord's Supper only as a work. The papists had pushed matters to this point. However, the gospel, Scripture, baptism, and the Lord's Supper remained unchanged as to what they are in themselves. It was just that the proper use was destroyed and taken away from us.

We must reestablish the proper use and preserve it, as we have done up to this point. For when I preached against abuse, I did not anticipate the heresy of the fanatics that is now overtaking the world. I only battled the papists regarding the proper use.

So far, I have taught that the sacrament should not be used as a good work. The papists taught that the person who went to the sacrament, having confessed properly and being unaware of a mortal sin did a precious, holy work by which he earned heaven.

However, the person who wants to use the Lord's Supper properly must not receive it in such a way that he says

“I have done this,” as if he had done some other work like fasting or attending a vigil. Rather, you should believe not only that Christ with his body and blood is there, but also that there he is given to you, always relying on the words: “Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; drink, this is my blood which is shed for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

In these words Christ’s body and blood are given to us as a gift. There are, thus, two parts to be believed here: That Christ’s body and blood are truly present (which the papists believe as well) and that they are given to us as a gift (which they do not believe).

The Lord’s Supper is therefore to be used as a gift. You hear it spoken clearly and plainly: Christ tells you to take his body and blood. But *why?* And for *what purpose?* So that the body is given *for you* and the blood is shed *for you*.

There our new preachers must cause trouble. They want to take this away from us. They treat the sacrament so cruelly that this makes me think that the devil here tries his best and the Last Day is not far away.

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***In these words  
Christ’s body and  
blood are given to  
us as a gift.***

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I would rather be dead than hear how Christ is blasphemed among them.

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1. Is it enough to know that Christ’s body and blood are truly present in the Lord’s Supper?
  2. What also is necessary?

3. What does the devil do if he cannot destroy what God says and does?
4. How had Luther been taught to view the use of the Lord's Supper?
5. Does the improper use of a thing change the thing itself?
6. What are the two parts of the Lord's Supper which are to be believed?

# 10

## **MORE THAN A COMMON SERMON**

Some say that the Lord's Supper is only meant to be a sign. It is celebrated in order to know who are Christians and who are not. But nothing is received from such a celebration but the hollow shell of the sacrament.

Such people come together and eat and drink simply in order to think about Christ's death. In such thinking is supposed to lie great power. Consequently the bread and wine become no more than a standard or flag by which others can tell that we are Christians.

Why do they do this? Because they reject these words out of hand: "Eat, this is my body which is given for you."

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***In such thinking  
is supposed to lie  
great power.***

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These words mean nothing to them. They utterly ignore them. The celebration of the Lord's Supper for them is to be nothing more than the proclamation and preach-

ing of the death of Christ.

To be sure, the death of Christ is to be proclaimed. We have indeed preached it, and have done so more boldly than they ever did. Indeed, if the fanatics had not learned it from us, they would not know anything about it, for the papists never talked about it.

The fanatics, therefore, have no need to teach us these things and boast about them as if they had come up with something new. We also preach the death of Christ, according to these words: "Do this in remembrance of me."

Yet there is a difference. When I preach Christ's death, then this is in a public sermon in the congregation where I do not direct it to anyone in particular. He who grasps it grasps it.

However, when I distribute the sacrament, then I give it to a specific person who takes it. I give to that one person the body and blood of Christ so that he might have the forgiveness of sins acquired by Christ's death and proclaimed in the congregation.

This is something more than a common sermon. Certainly the same gift is given in the sermon and in the sacrament. And yet, in the sacrament there is the advantage that it there is given to a specific person.

In the sermon, one does not aim at one person in particular. But in the sacrament, the gift is given to you and

me in particular, so that the sermon is driven home to us. For when I say: “This is the body which is given for you; this is the blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins,” then I remember Christ and speak of his death not to all people in common, but apply it to you alone.

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***In the sacrament the gift is given to you and me in particular.***

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Thus, Christ has ordained that when we come together as a group, each is to take of the bread and cup, and then preach about him. Why? Because the sacrament is not to be given to anyone but to Christians who have already heard the preaching of Christ.

The sermon or proclamation is for all in common, even for those who are not yet Christians. But the Christians are the only ones who are to enjoy the sacrament. Yet at the same time, they are also to remember Christ in preaching so that they may increase in number.

The reason that Christ is to be proclaimed and remembered publicly is so that those who do not know him might also eventually take part in the Lord’s Supper. The opponents hold such remembrance only in private. But this is useless. It is to happen publicly before the congregation. And there is always to be preaching with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

This is why the phrase, “Do this in remembrance of me,” means as much as: “As often as you do it, preach about me.” This is how Paul interprets it in 1 Cor. 11:26, where he calls it: “Proclaim the death of Christ.” He uses the word “proclaim” in order to indicate that it is not to take place

privately only among Christians who already know about it and who do not need proclaiming but admonishing, but publicly in the crowd of those who do not know it.

Proclaiming and remembering, then, do not mean anything other than preaching the public sermon about Christ, as is done in all sermons.



1. Is the Lord Supper merely a sign?
2. If it were, what would be meant by its celebration?
3. Is the Lord's Supper to be simply a proclamation of the death of Christ?
4. What else is it to be?
5. Where else in the service is the death of Christ proclaimed?
6. What is the purpose of proclaiming Christ's death publicly?
7. What is the purpose of receiving Christ's body and blood individually?
8. Is the Lord's Supper to be given to everyone present?

# 11

## A PERSONAL GIFT

Those who participate in Lord's Supper should believe and be certain they receive Christ's true body and blood in the bread and wine. Also that it is given to them as a gift to be their own.

Why? Not for the sake of money or merit, as a work, as the monks and priests hold the mass. But it is "for us, for the forgiveness of sins."

We know what forgiveness of sins means. When God forgives, then he utterly forgives everything. Nothing is left unforgiven.

Now, when I am rid of sin, then I am also rid of death,

devil, and hell. Then I am a son of God, a lord of heaven and earth.

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***When God forgives,  
then he utterly  
forgives everthing.***

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Especially when plagued by affliction and suffering persecution, I should be able to respond by saying: “I understand these words to mean that in the Lord’s Supper Christ’s body and blood are given me as a gift for the forgiveness of sins.”

This is why every Christian must know these words verbatim:

“There my Lord has given me his body and blood in bread and wine which I should eat and drink and which should be mine, so that I am certain that my sins are forgiven me and that I am to be rid of death and hell and that I have eternal life and am God’s child and an heir of heaven. I go to the sacrament to seek these gifts. I am a poor sinner. I have death before me and must suffer death. The devil attacks me. I find myself in all sorts of trouble and danger. I am in sin, a captive of the devil and death. I feel that I am weak in faith, cold in love, strange, impatient, envious, sin encompassing me constantly. This is why I come to where I find Christ’s Word and hear that the forgiveness of sins is to be given to me on account of his blood and death.”

Having received this gift in this way, we are then also to proclaim it so that we might bring other people to it as well. This is how one should instruct children and the

simpleminded concerning the sacrament so that they might know what they are to find there.

This is what we now call the right use. The right use is not simply to participate in the Lord's Supper out of obedience to the church. If this were so, then a sow might also come to the sacrament.

The Lord's Supper is not about the mere performance of the work of going to the sacrament. The main point is the strengthening of the heart, as the words proclaim: "Which is given for you; which is shed for you."

And even if these words were not written there – Paul leaves them out – the body which has died for your sins and the blood which is shed for this purpose is still there. Yet when Christ is given as a gift, then also the forgiveness of sins is given as a gift, and everything that has been acquired by that treasure.

Once it is grasped by the heart—as it cannot be grasped in any other way—and believed, then it must be said: "No work, no deed, helps me to get rid of my sins. I have a different treasure, my Lord's body and blood, given for me for the forgiveness of sins. This is the one treasure and forgiveness and there is no other in heaven or on earth," Acts 4:12.

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***I have a different  
treasure, my Lord's  
body and blood.***

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1. What should those who participate in the Lord's Supper believe?
  2. What is the meaning of the forgiveness of sins?

3. If we are rid of sin, what else follows?
4. For what reason should we go to the Lord's Supper?
5. Being in sin, to whom are we captive?
6. What is the result?
7. What is the right use of the sacrament?
8. Can any work help us to get rid of sin?
9. What then is the Christian's treasure?

# 12

## HEALING OUR BROKENNESS

So for some people the Lord's Supper is a useless remembrance. It is useful neither for you nor for anybody else.

Therefore, beware! May God protect us as he has so far. The devil has nothing else to do than to hack and slash where the gospel has taken root.

This is why we must have a good foundation in the words of Christ and insist on them. Then we can give a good answer to those who teach falsely about him.

For the words are clear and plain enough. They mean, in summary, first, that in the Lord's Supper we receive forgiveness of sins as a gift. Second, that we then preach and

proclaim the same. That is the distinction between what the remembrance is and how we are to use and enjoy it.

This is done in no other way than by healing our brokenness and failures. We share certain kinds of brokenness with other people. And certain kinds of brokenness are peculiar to each individually.

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***Our brokenness is the reason why we come to the sacrament.***

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Our brokenness is the reason why we come to the sacrament. We seek strength there. This is why this sacrament is called a food for hungry and thirsty souls who feel their misery and

would gladly be helped out of death and all misfortune.

Of course the papists used to teach: Be careful! Do not go unless you are pure and have no evil conscience! Christ must have a pure dwelling!

By this teaching they made poor souls timid and afraid! Those souls fled the sacrament which they were forced to take. They took it with such trembling that some would have rather entered a fiery furnace!

We are indeed to be pure, but in such a way that we are sorry for our sins and would like to be rid of them. We are to be aggrieved by the fact that we are such poor people – as long as such grief is real, without any false pretense. However, no one will get to the point that he is utterly free from sin. If this were our condition, we would not need to go.

The Lord's Supper has been instituted for the sake of the weak. This has been said about the use of the sacrament to strengthen the conscience against all trouble and affliction.

1. What does the devil do when the gospel takes root?
2. How can the devil's actions be countered?
3. How many kinds of brokenness are there?
4. What kinds of brokenness do we share with others?
5. What kinds of brokenness may be unique to individuals?
6. For what reason do we go to the sacrament?
7. How are we to be pure?
8. Will we ever be utterly free from sin?
9. For whom has the Lord's Supper been instituted?



# 13

## THE FRUIT OF THE SACRAMENT

What is the fruit of the Lord's Supper? This fruit is nothing else than love.

The ancient church fathers repeatedly emphasized this fruit. This is why they called the sacrament *communio*, that is, fellowship. The fruit of fellowship is presented to us in this sacrament in two ways.

First, by way of an example. The bread and wine are like a marker or sign so that every Christian, no matter how crude he might be, can grasp in the sacrament Christian doctrine in its entirety, both what is to be believed and what is to be done by faith.

For everyone needs to know that Christ has given his body, his flesh and blood on the cross. What also needs to be known is that this is a treasure for us. It is vital for the forgiveness of sins, that is, for our salvation, and so our redemption from death and hell.

This is the first chief part of Christian doctrine, which is presented to us in Christ's words. And as a marker and for safety's sake he has also given us his body and blood to be received bodily.

To be sure, Christ accomplished and acquired the forgiveness of sins on the cross. But Christ lets it daily be offered, distributed, and fulfilled by preaching. He commands that we should remember him always and not forget him.

The second chief part of Christian doctrine is love. It is indicated primarily by the example Christ left us. As he gave himself for us with his body and blood in order to redeem us from every danger, so we also should give ourselves to our neighbor in whatever way we can with whatever we can do.

He who knows this and lives accordingly is holy. He does not need to learn much more. And he will also not

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***He who knows this  
and lives accordingly  
is holy.***

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find anything more throughout the entire Bible than the two chief parts that are here found in one place. Just as if they were painted on a table, that they should always be kept before our

eyes and be our daily practice.

The second way the fruit of fellowship is presented to us in the Lord's Supper is as a figure or symbol. This also

has been noted frequently. Christ wanted to give his body and blood under the form of that which consists of many individual ingredients that have come together to form one single thing.

For example, a loaf of bread consists of many little grains from which dough is made. A loaf of bread is called nothing else than many little grains baked together: “Thus, also we who are many (says Paul in 1 Cor. 10:17) are nonetheless one bread and one body.” So as each individual grain loses its form and becomes part of the one form—to the point that

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***There is no distinction. Everyone helps as he is able with his body, life, goods, and reputation.***

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you cannot see or separate one grain from another, all being the same and yet all individually part of the whole—so also Christendom is to be one without any sects. This is so all things may be in common, as are faith, gospel, baptism, heart, mind, and will, Eph. 4:5.

This is what a Christian does. He knows nothing but that the goods that belong to him are given to his neighbor. There is no distinction. Everyone helps as he is able with his body, life, goods and reputation.

The same image is also depicted by the wine: There are many grapes crushed together which become one juice so that each grape individually loses its form. To be sure, all the grapes are in the wine. But there is no way one could be distinguished from another. They have all come together into one liquid and have become one juice and drink.

In this way, then, Christ has given us a lovely picture

and image of the entire Christian life. No more books are needed except those which emphasize this fact so that everyone hears and grasps it well. It is a lesson a whole lifetime would be needed to study. Don't worry about what others don't know. The sects of the fanatics are, after all, constantly inventing something new.

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***You will never be perfect in faith, love, and patience.***

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Here you have it all: No matter how long you learn, you always will remain flesh and blood. You will never be perfect in faith, love, and patience. This is how the Lord's Supper is a disciplinarian by which we direct our lives and through which we learn for as long as we live.

Why is it that people strive to be the first to know something unique, while the most important thing remains unknown? He who knows this thing knows everything he needs to know.

Without this thing every other bit of knowledge is nothing, 1 Cor. 13:2: "If I could prophesy and knew all the secrets and all knowledge, etc., and did not have love, I would be nothing."

But this is how the devil misleads people so that they ignore the chief part. Instead, they want to find something better and produce something unique. In so doing, they lose the highest and only treasure.

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1. What is the fruit of the Lord's Supper?

2. What did the ancient church fathers call the Lord's Supper?
3. In how many ways is the fruit of fellowship pictured for us in the Lord's Supper?
4. What does everyone need to know?
5. How was the forgiveness of sins won once? How is it daily offered, distributed and fulfilled?
6. What does the figure or symbol of the bread of the sacrament represent?
7. No matter how long we learn, what will we remain?
8. Will we ever be perfect in faith, love or patience?
9. Without the knowledge of faith and love, what does all other knowledge remain?



# 14

## CONFESSING BEFORE GOD

In addition to the proper understanding and use of the Lord's Supper, something must be said about confession. We ourselves were formerly tortured and tormented by its practice to the extent that there truly had not been a more difficult command since the creation of the world.

There are three kinds of confession. One kind of confession takes place before God. It is after all necessary from the outset that I recognize that I am a sinner before God. So the gospel concludes, Rom. 3:23 and John 3:5: "Unless someone is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Now, he who confesses that he is born of a woman must

give glory to God and say: “I am nothing but a sinner.” This is what David sings in Ps. 51:5: “Behold, I was brought forth in sin, and in sin my mother conceived me,” as if he wanted to say: “I surely must be a sinner; I have been born this way.”

As soon as I was conceived in my mother’s womb, I was a sinner. The flesh and blood from which I was made was sin. As it is said: Bad skin and fur do not make for a good pelt. Accordingly, the clay from which we are made is not good. What mother and father add to it is already sin.

Whoever does not want to admit this, whoever does not want to be a sinner, whoever still wants to have his free will, whoever still thinks something good is within him, blasphemes God and calls him a liar. That person simply wants to be right and will not accept God’s judgment.

This is why the prophet says again (Ps. 51:4): “Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil before you. This is why you will be right in your words and will be found innocent when you are judged.” It is just as if he wanted to say: “I will not argue with you, God, but accept your word as right. I confess myself to be in the wrong, so that you are truthful. Yet those who judge you want to have a light from reason. They want something by which to earn your grace. Before them you will surely remain innocent.”

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***Lord, before you I  
am a scoundrel in  
human skin.***

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This kind of confession we must practice for as long as we live. We must always say: “Lord, before you I am a scoundrel in human skin.”

Admittedly this can be con-

fessed by a pagan, all the while being denied in the heart. No one makes such a confession from the heart except a true Christian, as it says in Ps. 32:5-6: “I said: I will confess my transgressions to the Lord; then you forgave the evil deed of my sin; therefore, all the saints will pray before you at the proper time.”

All the saints, however many there are, have this virtue that they confess their sin to God and pray for it. This is why no one makes this confession except those who are Christians and holy.

It truly is strange that he who is pious before God and has the Holy Spirit should declare that he is a sinner. Yet such a person is right. He confesses what he once was and what he still is. He has the Holy Spirit, but on account of the flesh, he remains a sinner.

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***This is why all the saints complain about the flesh.***

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This is why all the saints complain about the flesh. What is more, the devil is not far away. He sees to it that he leads the flesh into sin. This is why this is a lofty and great confession.

Others say that they are sinners. But when they actually are called sinners, they do not want to hear it. Yet the saints, when they are told that they are sinners, or when God punishes them on account of their sin, say simply: “Indeed, it is true.” Hypocrites are quite able to beat themselves up. But they stop whenever they please. And they certainly do not want to be reproved and taught by others.

This is what the priests and monks do. They say that they are sinners, but when anyone else says it they do not

want to hear it. This is why God does not care for such superficial confessing.

But confession to God is commanded and remains necessary. And while the whole world ought to make it, no one but Christians makes it.

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1. How many types of confession are there?
2. What is the first type?
3. What should be the content of that confession?
4. When a person refuses to admit he is a sinner, what is he doing?
5. Must we practice this type of confession our entire lives?
6. Who is the only one who makes a true confession from the heart?
7. Why do all the saints complain about the flesh?
8. What does Luther note as being truly strange?
9. Is it right for God to punish Christians?

# 15

## CONFESSING BEFORE OUR NEIGHBOR

The second kind of confession is that which is made before our neighbor. Christ speaks about this type of confession in Matthew 5 and 6. James also writes about it in his letter, James 5:16: “Confess your sins to one another.” This is to say, behave in such a way that if one of you has offended another, humble yourself before that person and confess your guilt.

There are two kinds of offending: The common and the individual. The common kind of offending, I am afraid, is shared by all of us. The Lord’s Prayer casts us into it. This common offending is that we do not help our neighbor as

we are obligated to help him with counsel, preaching, advising, comforting, money, goods, honor, our body, and life.

Such a standard is so high that no one is holy enough to attain it. This is why we all must say to one another: "I am indebted to you. You are indebted to me."

And it is especially true that he to whom God has given much is indebted to many. I myself am indebted to more than twenty or even a hundred other men. God will demand

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***I owe everyone.***

***Everyone owes me.***

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it from me. It can be no other way. He will ask for an account to the last penny, how I have invested it and used it.

This guilt is so common that it affects no one in particular. I owe everyone. Everyone owes me comfort and assistance when I am in trouble and need help.

Yet we are not eager enough to seek out the people who need us. And to offer our service is also too much for us.

So when we look at the ledger and see how much we owe, we must shudder and lament. There is no better advice here than to say: "People do owe me. I have to settle accounts with others as well. But I will forgive them their debts. I therefore ask you, Lord, that you would also forgive me."

This is how it is crossed out and erased. If we did not have this advice, then we would be in a bad situation.

This is why the Lord's Prayer must remain in use. This is why it is necessary that we should forgive our debtors if our debt is to be forgiven, as Christ teaches in the gospel, Matth. 18:22ff.

This is, then, the one kind of confession which must be made in public with guilt freely admitted. Before God I

am not pious. Before the world, and according to the common guilt, each person has a claim on the other, and no one does enough. This is why one person must ask another to forgive him.

Yet this kind of confession is also made by no one but Christians. The godless cannot tolerate the idea that their lack of service to their neighbor is sin. They cite canon law that says: "To each his own."

They believe that they have the goods which they own for their own sakes. This is why they use so many of their possessions only for their own glory and delight. Solomon described it this way in Proverbs (cf. 10:16): "The godless has food only for sin, but the righteous is kind."

The godless uses his goods, intelligence, skill, and honor to derive his own delight and advantage from it. This is sin. And it is a kind of sin which the godless does not consider to be sin, but a right.

God has created us to be our neighbor's steward. But we all certainly fall short of this.

Yet we at least recognize it and are saddened by it. We strive to do more each day. We fear God. We do as much as we can and are allowed by the old Adam.

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***God has created us  
to be our neighbor's  
steward.***

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God crosses out what we do not do beyond this, as has been said. We do not dare to reimburse him. It is way too much. This is why we say: "Forgive me; I will forgive in return."

Beyond this common kind of offense and indebtedness, there is also an individual offense and indebtedness. Christ

speaks about it in Matthew 5:25. When one person in particular is offended, lied to, damaged, accused, or hurt by rumors, then one should confess this too and say that one has done what is not right and ask the neighbor for forgiveness.

Alas, it also hurts to break the old Adam in this way. It hurts to humble oneself before a poor person who is despised and to give to him justice and the highest honor and consequently, to suffer the greatest shame.

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***It also hurts to  
break the old  
Adam in this way.***

---

This used to be the custom in the monasteries. There the monks would be forced to do this. Yet it was all tomfoolery.

A godless person does not humble himself to the point of bringing shame upon himself. He does not see that this would be a great glory before God and before pious people.

To some extent, Christians can protect themselves against this kind of guilt, both for themselves and others. Let it be covered and punished where it is heard and seen in others. However, the common guilt no one can fend off.

But we do not mean to dwell on these two confessions at this point. Both are practiced throughout the year and not used just in preparation for the sacrament.

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1. What is the second type of confession Luther notes?
  2. How many types of offending are there?
  3. What are they?

4. What is the common kind of offense?
5. Is it only committed by some and not others?
6. What is the individual kind of offense?
7. What type of confession results from such an offense?



# 16

## PRIVATE CONFESSION?

Finally, a few words need to be said about private confession. I consider private confession to have developed out of the public confession in the following way.

Early Christians practiced the two kinds of confession we have explained above together. Everyone who wanted to go to the sacrament made a public confession before God and man. When Christians became fewer and fewer, however, each made this confession to one person in particular.

Only later did the categorization and enumeration of sins become part of private confession. Yet they certainly need to remain uncounted. You will never be able calculate

how much you ought to do to make up for your sins just so that you can slack off when you think you have done enough (cf. Luke 17:10).

About private confession we say this: When the first two kinds of confession are practiced publicly, then this third kind is not needed. God certainly knows your sins well. So long as you confess them before him and then before your neighbor, your sins are forgiven.

For the sake of those who would like to make use of it, however, private confession is by no means to be rejected. There remains great benefit and value to private confession.

First and foremost is the absolution spoken by your neighbor in God's stead. This is just as if God himself spoke to you. This should indeed comfort us. If I knew that God would be at a certain place and wanted to forgive me, I certainly would want to receive such forgiveness not just once, or in one place, but as often as possible. This is what God has now placed into the mouth of man. This is why it is comforting, especially for the burdened conscience, there to receive such a precious thing.

Secondly, private confession serves the simple at heart. The common mob is a lazy crowd that always listens to sermons but learns nothing from them. There is also no one at home teaching them anything. Therefore, even if it were

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***Private confession is  
good for teaching.***

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good for nothing else, private confession is good for teaching the people and for hearing what they actually believe, pray, learn, etc. Otherwise, they just go to

the sacrament like cattle.

This is why I have said that one should not give the sacrament to anyone unless he is able to give an answer concerning what he gets there and why he goes there. Now, this kind of instruction and examination can take place most fittingly in private confession.

Thirdly, there is comfort in private confession for anyone with a troubled conscience or some other issue or problem. Anyone who seeks advice can ask for it in private confession.

This is why we cannot despise private confession. For God's Word is there. It comforts and strengthens us in the faith. It instructs us and teaches us what we are lacking. It also gives good advice in times of need.

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***We cannot despise  
private confession.***

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This is also why no one but pious Christians practices private confession properly. In private confession people must be disposed toward advice and comfort.

Yet the problem has been that one has paid no attention to absolution, but only to our work. In other words, the practice became centered around how well and how purely sins were confessed. Sins also were counted, which is just not possible, and extremely hard to hear.

The best form of making private confession would be a short form: "Dear Brother, I come and want to lament my sin. I am a sinner before God and man. I am especially burdened by this or that matter, etc." (It is up to you whether you want to mention specific sins or not.) Then, in conclusion, simply say: "This is why I ask you to give me good comfort and strengthen my soul, etc." In this way, private

confession would be no effort or labor, even though it is a precious work which no one but a pious Christian does.

From all this it is seen that it actually comes from the devil when the pope commands everyone to make private confession and calls it a mortal sin, damning people to hell, if it is not done. However, it is not in our power to take away from God's Word or to add to it. For the Word is a gift from heaven, Jam. 1:17.

Since God has not commanded it, let no man command it either. Even if I forced every last person to make private

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***Since God has not  
commanded it, let no  
man command it either.***

---

confession, how many would there be who would make it gladly, making it unnecessary to force them? Not one in twenty thousand. As for the others, private confession

would be no more than mocking and horribly blaspheming God. For there the priest speaks a judgment in God's stead which would fail and not become true. For the unwilling person does not like to make a confession and does not like to hear absolution and does not believe it either. This is not the fault of the priest, but the fault of the one making the confession: He is being deceptive and does not wholeheartedly desire absolution.

Now, God does not delight when his Word is used in vain, Ex. 20:7. If you do not want to participate in private confession, then don't do it. In fact, leave all three kinds of confession undone. They only pertain to pious people. For other people, it is better to leave them undone. It would not be right but damnable.

Up until the present time we have made confession only to serve the pope, not our souls. This was rightly called obedience to the pope or the church. He received the benefit and glory from it, the others the damnation of their souls.

So here you have a brief and clear overview concerning both the Lord's Supper and confession. Both should be done willingly and with delight. Come of your own volition and present your sin, receiving comfort and strength. Then it is beneficial and blessed.

Tell the children and simple people to pay attention to these things, so that they would be taught and instructed. Do so with kind words instead of coercion. For private confession, as has been said, also serves this purpose in particular and should be in use for this reason. Amen.



1. In Luther's view, how did private confession develop?
2. Is private confession absolutely necessary?
3. So is private confession to be rejected?
4. Can only pastors forgive our sins in private confession?
5. What are the three benefits of private confession?
6. Can anyone other than a pious Christian practice private confession?
7. Why not?
8. Should Christians be forced to make private confession?



## AFTERWORD

### *The Argument of the Writing at Hand and Current Applications*

The work at hand by Martin Luther (1483-1546) was published originally in 1526, being based on three sermons which the Reformer preached at Wittenberg during the week before Easter of that year. They dealt with the Lord's Supper, confession and absolution. Due to medieval church laws, every Christian was obligated to go to confession and to the Lord's Supper at least once every year. This was to be done during that time of the church year when Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper on the night before his crucifixion. Even though the Lutheran reformation did away with this unscriptural church law, it is reasonable to assume that more people than usual would attend private confession and the Lord's Supper at that time. Luther, therefore, preached on these two important topics of the Christian faith at that time.

#### *1. On the Lord's Supper*

At the beginning of this booklet, Luther notes that a change in emphasis in his preaching and teaching on the Lord's Supper was necessary. Up to 1526, he had focused on how to use the Lord's Supper properly by faith in the gospel as this sacrament is, along with the preached gospel and baptism, a form of the gospel. This was done against the teaching then held by most, namely, that the Lord's Supper is a good work of the Christian and of the church which is offered to God like a sacrifice in

order to reap certain benefits from it for oneself and others.

The main benefit to be derived from this “sacrificing of the mass” as it was called, was the forgiveness of temporal punishment for the sins of oneself and others. The idea behind this was that while Christ’s death provided *forgiveness* for one’s guilt, the sinner himself was responsible for atoning for the *punishment* due for his sins. Attending and paying for masses was a main tool to pay for this punishment. It could be credited even to those believed to be in purgatory, that is, in a place where the remaining punishment for the sins of those who are heaven-bound was to be paid.

Because it was understood to be a sacrifice offered to God, it was taught that those coming to the sacrament had to be without (unconfessed) sin so that their work and prayer might be acceptable to God. Yet as Luther pointed out based on God’s Word, worthy participation in the sacrament consisted in recognizing one’s unworthiness and sinfulness. The sacrament, as well as the other forms of the gospel, are for the weak and sinful, not for the sinless who do not need the physician.

All Protestant reformers of the 16th century were agreed in their stance against the sacrifice of the mass. However, as early as 1524, this united front was shattered when one of Luther’s former fellow professors in Wittenberg, Andreas Karlstadt (1486-1541), published several treatises on the Lord’s Supper. In these writings, he denied that communicants receive more than bread and wine in the Lord’s Supper. Christ’s body and blood were, thus, no longer believed to be present in the consecrated bread and wine. This stance was embraced by the then leading reformer of Switzerland, Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531).

Because these ideas had caused some confusion among the laity, Luther addressed this issue in the sermons at hand. He writes them chiefly against the false teachings of those whom he calls “fanatics” (German: Schwärmer or Schwarmgeister) because he puts them into the broad class of teachers who,

disregarding the external Word, are unable to arrive at certainty about anything spiritual; yet at the same time, they also wildly flutter to and fro (schwärmen) in their opinions. They either expect (new) direct revelations of the Spirit or simply subject the interpretation of the Word to their own spirit.

However, Luther does not leave out a reaffirmation of his earlier teachings against the papal theologians. Against the latter he zeroes in on the heart's faith in the promise as opposed to man's own works and preparations. Against the former he emphasizes what is outside of man: The object of faith that is believed by the heart (the presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament's bread and wine).

Up to this point in time, the teaching of this presence had remained largely unchallenged in the Church. This is why Luther at first did not think it necessary to defend it. Consequently, his early writings on the issue contain only a few remarks about the essence of the sacrament. However, now that it was being challenged, even by "highly respected preachers," he was forced to pick up his pen to do his duty as a pastor, doctor, and professor of the Church in defense of Christ's sacrament.

The point of departure for Luther's argument is not the previous consensus of the Church in the matter but Christ's own words of institution, as they are recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul. Even if, as in this case, the consensus of the post-apostolic Church agreed with the genuine meaning of these words, the foundation remained God's biblical Word. Only it can establish articles of faith. Only it can be the touchstone that proves what has been taught by the Church later on to be true or false. This basic approach was uncontroversial between Luther and his fellow Protestant reformers, with whom he would disagree on the true meaning of Christ's words.

However, Luther did not regard this disagreement to be a minor matter that could be overlooked in view of some agreement on the inspiration of Scripture or even on the gospel itself.

Deviating from the Word of God by changing the original meaning of Christ's words is the work of the devil, as Luther asserts. It is counter to the foolishness of the gospel willed by God's wisdom to humble man's fallen reason and wisdom. Instead of conforming their ideas to God's clear Word, Luther accuses his opponents of conforming God's Word to the ideas of their reason because it does not make sense to them how Christ's real body and blood can possibly be in the sacrament's bread and wine.

Luther identifies and answers the following as the two main counterarguments of the opposing party to the presence of Christ's true body and blood in the sacrament: First, it is absurd that Christ's body and blood should be in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Second, it is not necessary that Christ's body and blood are in the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord's Supper.

In response to the first argument, Luther points out that making man's reason the chief criterion in this way not only destroys the incarnation of God's Son but also all creation, wonder-filled as it is. What is more, clinging to a rationalistic understanding of both the ascension of Christ and his sitting at the right hand of the Father which locks Christ up in a locally understood heaven, the opponents fail to grasp the true scriptural meaning of these realities and the power of God's Word: As the gospel-word preaches the true Christ in his two natures into the believer's heart, so the words of institution consecrate Christ's true body and blood into the sacrament's bread and wine. For, as Luther carefully distinguishes the various modes of presence applicable to the divine-human Savior, Christ, even as he is present everywhere with both of his natures, has made himself available for us in his Word and sacraments, to be in the hearts of believers even in dungeons and death.

In response to the second argument, Luther again demonstrates that little if anything of the biblical gospel will remain

if it is applied consistently: Was it really necessary that God's Son became man, was born of a virgin, and died on the cross? Could God not have saved the world by some almighty decree, without the shedding of his Son's blood? Aren't we justified by faith alone? Why does God sustain our bodies by bread, why not with his mere Word? Why the Lord's Supper, why not the Lord's Straw?

In reply to these probing questions, Luther does not develop a grand theory that "explains" the true reasons behind all this. He simply directs all Christians to God's plain Word as their safe cradle: It tells them what God did and does. Childlike faith believes that it is necessary that God did that and does this, even if it does not understand. God knows best. This is true for the Lord's Supper as well as for the other deeds of God. Therefore, the plain words of institution occupy the central place in Luther's writings on the Lord's Supper, which is true also for his two catechisms.

Luther goes on to uncover that the papal theologians and the new deniers of the presence of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament's bread and wine have something in common: Both deny the proper use and benefit of the sacrament. While the former teach that it is man's work contributing to man's salvation, the latter teach that it offers no more than a preaching of the gospel. Yet Luther – also offering a basic rationale for the practice of closed communion – points out: Preaching is a remembrance and proclamation of Christ's death for all in common, believers and unbelievers alike; but the Lord's Supper offers the gospel's key gift of forgiveness – and with it, also life and eternal salvation – to the individual who is a well-instructed Christian already.

Luther concludes his discussion of the sacrament by pointing to the fruit of the sacrament in the life of the Christian. The sacrament is nothing other than the sum of the whole life of the Christian: Faith believes the gospel the cross acquired and the

sacrament today distributes and love serves one's neighbor in humility. As the grains and grapes are crushed to form a single loaf of bread or make a single batch of wine, so the believers and their possessions lose their individuality and come together to help one another. The Supper is for individuals so they cease to be individuals: One in Christ and one with each other (Acts 4:32).

## *2. On Confession*

The concluding section discusses confession. Luther there distinguishes three kinds of confession, two of which are commanded by God, one of which is a human regulation. The first two are confessing one's sins to God and to the neighbor. The first deals mostly with our original sin, our sinful nature, because of which there is nothing good in us; we deserve only God's punishment. The second deals with our actual sins, our sinful actions by which we offend against our neighbors.

These are twofold: First, everyone offends his or her neighbors by failing to help them as we ought to do. As this failure is shared by all Christians, the Lord's Prayer contains a public, common confession of it before one another. Second, we offend against our neighbor by particular sins. Here it is necessary to humble oneself before the offended neighbor and confess one's sin, asking for forgiveness. Luther notes that it is so easy to speak the right words that even hypocrites can recite them; but only Christians say the right words from a right heart.

The third kind of confession is private confession. Luther regarded it as having developed later as a church custom out of the original two mandatory forms of confession. While it is therefore clearly not obligatory, it is nonetheless not without its advantages and benefits. Luther names three: First, the absolving word of the neighbor – pastor and layman alike – is God's own Word in the mouth of a human being; second, private confession serves the purpose of teaching the Christian faith, especially in

view of partaking of Christ's body and blood in the sacrament; third, private confession is an ideal place for obtaining good advice and reliable comfort in difficult matters burdening the conscience. Absolution, God's Word, is the main thing in private confession, not our works of sorrow and enumeration of sins, as had been taught prior to the beginning of Luther's work of reformation. This kind of confession is also rightly used only by genuine Christians who come willingly.

### *3. Luther and Today's Lutherans on the Lord's Supper and Confession*

While Luther defended the sacrament instituted by Christ in numerous writings and sermons, his associate, Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), was more and more influenced by Luther's opponents. While the latter set forth Luther's teaching on the matter in the 1530 Augsburg Confession and its 1531 Apology and led Luther to believe that he continued to be in agreement with him, his private writings already in the early 1530s indicate that he too believed in the absence of Christ's body and blood from the consecrated bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. To teach more than a presence of "the whole Christ" for believers with the elements of bread and wine seemed unreasonable to him.

Until about 1544, two years before his death, this betrayal was not known to Luther. After Luther's death, Melancthon perfected the art of sounding like Luther while believing like Zwingli (or his successor in Switzerland, John Calvin (1509-1564)) to the point that his view on the matter became the opinion of the theological faculty at Wittenberg University. The ensuing "crypto-Calvinistic" controversy was answered by articles seven and eight of the 1577 Formula of Concord.

In the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, Melancthon's position on the Lord's Supper regained more and more support

among compromising Lutherans both in Europe and in North America. In the 20th century, Melanchthon practically became the bridge between most Lutheran and Reformed church bodies in those two parts of the world. The so-called Leuenberg Agreement – named after a little town on the outskirts of Basel, Switzerland – of 1973 paved the way for church fellowship between most Lutheran and Reformed churches in Europe. It was also embraced by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in its conversations with various Reformed bodies in the US. The Leuenberg Agreement teaches a presence of the whole Christ in the gospel with the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper. Luther’s main point, the presence of Christ’s body and blood in bread and wine, is officially given up. The only “eating” of Christ that takes place in the Lord’s Supper, according to Leuenberg, is faith’s “spiritual eating” (cf. John 6:35), just as Zwingli and his associates had insisted. Luther’s “bodily eating” of Christ’s body and blood is abandoned. This reinterpretation of Luther along the lines of Melanchthon’s 16th-century compromise can be traced all the way down to materials teaching Luther’s Small Catechism in the ELCA.

As for confession and absolution, there are, on the one hand, those who follow Zwingli also in this way that they basically reject any created means of grace. This means that if some form of confession and absolution is retained in the worship service and elsewhere, a human being’s absolution is not thought actually to convey the gift of God’s forgiveness, which is why it is then often formulated as a prayer. The argument for this position is typically couched in pious-sounding language, such as that only God can forgive or that no one can know someone else’s heart. How could one forgive sins if one is not God or if the person to be forgiven does not believe? Believer’s absolution thus corresponds to believer’s baptism. In other words, at most, the external act of absolution – as is the case in baptism and the Lord’s Supper – merely outwardly signifies the grace that

is already present inwardly by a direct operation of the Holy Spirit. It is no longer operative gospel that creates faith; it is a spiritually ineffectual ritual of the law that presupposes faith.

A variation of this position appears, on the other hand, also among some who want to be Lutheran in earnest. They claim that only private absolution, administered by the pastor, conveys actual forgiveness from God. Public rites of confession and absolution are often eliminated from the worship services. It is said that it would be irresponsible to absolve everyone present indiscriminately. Without a one-on-one conversation between parishioner and father confessor, it is said, it would be impossible to determine the presence of genuine repentance and faith in the one to be absolved.

What is overlooked in this argument is, again, the operative power of the gospel that is present not just in private absolution but in all the means of grace. If public rites of absolution are abolished, one might as well cease to preach the gospel “indiscriminately” from the pulpit. As Luther points out in the writing at hand, it is precisely the nature of remembering Christ by means of preaching that it is directed to everyone in attendance to bring all to faith in Christ.

What is overlooked, furthermore, is that for Luther, private confession to a third party, unlike confession to God and to one another, is not commanded by Christ. It would be a travesty to claim that that which is not commanded by Christ is actually the only effective channel for forgiveness as far as the various forms of absolution go.

What is finally overlooked is that Luther did not retain private confession and absolution to examine the hearts of the penitents, but to afford a voluntary opportunity for individual counsel, instruction, and comfort. For absolution, the bestowal of God’s forgiveness by a human being – not confession, the enumeration of sins (or the intense examination of the one confessing) – was the main thing for Luther when it came to

confession and absolution. Luther knew that there is always the real possibility of hypocrisy, that is, for a person's words and heart to be in disagreement. Yet this is not only the case in public rites of confession and absolution. This is also true in private confession and absolution, especially when it is made mandatory without any basis in God's Word.

This is why Luther was content with assessing the external fruits of faith in word and deed. For as the hypocrisy and absent faith of the person receiving the Lord's Supper or baptism does not invalidate these sacraments, so such things also do not invalidate the word of absolution spoken in private or in public. Faith does not constitute the gospel in any of its forms. Faith is necessary for the gospel to be received in a way that is saving.

These are just some of the contemporary applications that flow out of the wellspring of Luther's writing on the Lord's Supper and confession. Already these few examples show that Luther continues to have relevant and clarifying things to say to the Church today and that he is overlooked only to our detriment.

The Translator

# NOTES

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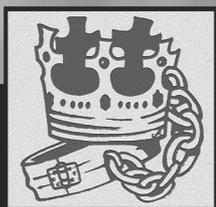
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