

# The Lord Jesus Institutes Holy Communion

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## Introduction

Let God be thanked, let songs of praise be chanted!  
He himself to us has granted  
His very body and his blood to bless us.  
With this food, O Lord, refresh us!<sup>1</sup>

It is good to begin with thanks to our God for giving his church the sacrament of Jesus' body and blood in the first place. We also thank God for preserving the sacrament among us. That is not our doing, for "we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold," and must ask God to work among us:

In these last days of sore distress  
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness  
That pure we keep, till life is spent,  
Your holy Word and sacrament.<sup>2</sup>

It is entirely a work of grace that we have the sacrament of the Lord's Supper at all.

God does his gracious work of preserving the Lord's Supper through the content of the biblical accounts of the institution of the sacrament. Those accounts tell us what the sacrament is, how to administer and receive it, what benefits it provides, and how it is to be defended. Thus they are the natural starting point for any study of the Lord's Supper. That is true even though modern New Testament scholarship has suffered a massive loss of confidence in the details of the words of institution. Ulrich Kühn may serve as an example:

According to the position of historical research one cannot arrive at historical certainty about Jesus' last meal in general and in particular the words spoken there, least of all about the so-called command of repetition. Therefore a dogmatic teaching concerning the Supper can no longer proceed without further ado from an institution of the Supper by Jesus on the night he was betrayed.<sup>3</sup>

We are grateful that God has given us a higher regard for the words of institution. May he preserve that faith among us! And may he bless our study of the words of institution today as we examine them with old-fashioned, Spirit-given confidence.

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<sup>1</sup> From a pre-reformation hymn, *Gott sei gelobet und gebenedeiet*, incorporated by Luther in his communion hymn of the same name. Unless otherwise noted, translations are by the essayist.

<sup>2</sup> From Nikolaus Selnecker's *Ach bleib bei uns*, as it appears in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1993), Hymn 541, "Lord Jesus Christ, with Us Abide" (composite translation).

<sup>3</sup> *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. 1 (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1977), p. 199, s.v. *Abendmahl IV*.

What will we aim to do as we pay close attention to the biblical accounts? Perhaps it will be helpful to note some of the things we will *not* try to do.

We will not pit the New Testament writers against each other and try to discover contradictions among them. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul may have their own emphases and their own way of expressing the meaning of what Jesus said and did in the upper room, but they all write verbally inspired accounts. Some of Jesus' sayings and actions appear in one or two accounts but not in the others. That does not make them inauthentic. We can confidently include them in our composite picture of the institution of the Supper. Jesus said and implied much that evening, and the holy writers selected what they wished to commit to writing. By God's providence those written accounts complement each other and give us a fully adequate understanding of the institution. We have no reason to run to extra-biblical traditions to supplement the canonical record with additional sayings and actions.

On the other hand, we will not deal with the biblical texts in a slavish, unthinking manner. For one thing, we will not assume that the holy writers aim to give verbatim transcriptions of the sayings of Jesus. We will not assume that our Lord spoke Greek that evening. But the canonical Greek accounts faithfully represent the meaning of what Jesus said and implied, and the meaning is the essence of the Word of God. We do not need to reconstruct the exact words Jesus spoke in Aramaic or Hebrew, and we do not need to use the canonical Greek words when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. A celebration in English that faithfully represents the meaning of the Greek is just as valid and efficacious as the original Supper administered by Jesus himself.

Since we renounce a slavish, unthinking use of the biblical texts, we have no need for antiquarian fussiness, the desire to recreate as closely as possible the original Supper. We know many historical details about that occasion, but we do not need to reproduce them all in our celebration of the sacrament. We can, if we like, administer the sacrament in an upper room, in the month of Nisan, in the context of a Christian Passover meal. We can recline at a table, use a loaf of unleavened bread, and break it during the ceremony. We can distribute and consume the consecrated bread before we consecrate the wine. But we don't have to do it that way. Antiquarian fussiness may stimulate our historical imagination, but it adds nothing to the integrity and power of the sacrament.

Our goal rather is to bring our saying, doing, and believing in line with the intended meaning of the inspired accounts of the institution. When we do that, we know we have the genuine sacrament Jesus wants us to have and all its benefits.

### **The gathered disciples**

When Jesus instituted his Supper, he did it in the presence of his disciples. They had already been baptized. The new sacrament would thus serve as a means of growth for those who had already received the sacrament of initiation. Evidently the Supper was not instituted as an outreach event. The disciples had also received considerable instruction about God's plan of salvation and were capable of thinking coherently about the gospel. Although Jesus does not spell out any intellectual requirements for communicants, it is significant that he chose his instructed disciples as the first recipients. The significance is made clear when Paul writes, "Let a person examine himself and in this way (i.e., with proper self-examination) eat of the bread and drink of the cup" (1 Co 11:28). Paul's words help us see Jesus' intentions and recognize that there is in the words of institution no clear basis for giving the Supper to baptized infants and toddlers.<sup>4</sup>

It is also significant that Jesus instituted the sacrament in a *gathering* of his disciples. He could have taken Peter aside and given him something to eat and drink, thus instituting a meal for an individual to enjoy in his or her private devotional life. Or he could have instituted the sacrament by merely giving instructions

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<sup>4</sup> But it would be perverse to say, "The people communed by Jesus at the original Supper were all Jewish males, and therefore Jesus intends his sacrament only for Jewish males today." Neither Jesus nor the apostles say that the sacrament should be given only to Jewish or male recipients, and we cannot arrive at such a limitation by sound deductions from the things they do say. As we noted earlier, some details are true to the historical record but not normative for our celebration of the sacrament.

during a sermon or a walk through the countryside, leaving it up to us whether to observe the sacrament individually or in groups. But Jesus did neither of those things. He gathered his disciples for a meal and by his actions, words, and implications instituted this sacrament as a *group* meal.

Here again it is Paul who makes it very clear that the sharing of the Supper in a group is not an incidental feature of the original Supper but part of Jesus' intention. Paul writes, "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *joint partaking* (κοινωνία) of the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *joint partaking* (κοινωνία) of the body of Christ?"<sup>5</sup> Because there is one bread, *we, many as we are, are one body*, for we all get a share of the one bread" (1 Co 10:16-17). He also criticizes the Corinthians for practices that divide the church at the sacrament. It should be the "Lord's Supper," κυριακὸν δεῖπνον, shared freely by all the Lord's guests at his table, but the richer Corinthians were self-indulgently using the occasion to enjoy "their own supper," τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον (1 Co 11:20-21). If we disregard our fellow Christians and treat the Lord's Supper as something we can enjoy individually or in cliques, our self-willed action falls under the same condemnation.<sup>6</sup>

The character of the Supper as a group meal may lead us to ask, "Is it permissible to administer the Holy Supper to the sick in their homes?" Jaspas Brochmand, a Danish Lutheran and contemporary of Johann Gerhard, posed that question and properly answered, "Why not?" His reasons are that Jesus instituted the Supper in a private home, not the temple, and that the New Testament has removed the old distinction of places for worship (Col 2:16; Jn 4:21,23; 1 Ti 2:8); the holy gathering of God's people is to be found wherever two or three are gathered in Jesus' name (Mt 18:20).<sup>7</sup> At a bare minimum there could be two persons (a sick or shut-in communicant and an administrator of the sacrament) meeting in a home or hospital. They clearly have gathered in Jesus' name if they are there to celebrate his Supper. The sick person is there by necessity, not because he despises his fellow Christians and refuses to attend their regular assembly. The administrator is the church's minister, an official representative of the whole congregation. Under such circumstances there is no loveless, disorderly, separatistic violation of the sacrament but rather an adequate fulfillment of its character as a group meal.

The sharing of the meal by gathered believers is a precious feature of the sacrament. One of the reasons I regret the use of "continuous flow" arrangements for communing many persons quickly is that it diminishes the perception of the Supper as a group meal.

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<sup>5</sup> Some theologians explain κοινωνία here in a blurry way and give the impression that κοινωνία + genitive means (concretely) *a thing combined/united with* the thing mentioned in the genitive or (abstractly) a combination/union of the thing mentioned in the genitive with some other thing (here the bread or the wine). Neither of those meanings is in accord with ancient usage (though by inference from the passage one can arrive at the thought that the bread is in fact united with body of Christ and the wine with his blood). In addition to the standard dictionaries, there are valuable word studies by J. Y. Campbell, "Κοινωνία and its Cognates in the New Testament" (*Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 51, no. 4 [1932], 352ff.) and Heinrich Seesemann, *Der Begriff KOINΩΝΙΑ im Neuen Testament* (Giessen: Alfred Töpelmann, 1933). According to these studies, the most common ancient usage of κοινωνία + genitive is that the genitive refers to the thing shared in and the word κοινωνία itself means the sharing or partaking or having in common. That fits also in 1 Corinthians 10:16 once we recognize we have here a *metonymy of effect for cause/means*. Paul could have spelled out the relationship in full by saying that the bread we break is the *means* by which a joint partaking or sharing of the body of Christ takes place, but instead of using the word *means* as the predicate nominative he names the *effect* (the joint partaking itself) as the predicate nominative. Accordingly, Johann Gerhard explains the passage by bringing out the implied *means* idea: "the Eucharistic bread is being described from the standpoint of the function or purpose it has in sacramental use. The bread which we bless, break, distribute, and eat is a κοινωνία of the body of Christ; that is, the Eucharistic bread in sacramental use is an instrument, means, and ὄχημα (vehicle) through which the body of Christ is distributed and shared" (*Loci theologici*, XXI *De sacra coena*, para. 101).

<sup>6</sup> We confess with Luther, "Thus it is not right (even if everything else were otherwise in order) to use the common sacrament of the church for one's own devotional life and to play with it according to one's own pleasure apart from God's Word and outside the church community" (SA II, II, 9, cited from *The Book of Concord*, ed. Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000], p. 303).

<sup>7</sup> *Systema universae theologiae*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Joachim Moltken, 1638), article XXXVI *De coena dominica*, section VIII, pp. 2086-7. Jaspas Rasmussen Brochmand in Latinized form is Casparus Erasmus Brochmand.

## The earthly elements

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul all tell us that Jesus took “bread,” ἄρτον.<sup>8</sup> We know that only unleavened bread was used at the Passover, but none of the canonical accounts of the institution of the Supper specify the type of bread we are to use. Since our principle is fidelity to the intention of the words of Scripture rather than antiquarian fussiness, we are free to use leavened or unleavened bread. The type of grain used to make the flour doesn’t matter, either. In classical Greek ἄρτος is often wheat bread in contrast to μᾶζα, barley bread, but that distinction is not to be found in New Testament usage.<sup>9</sup> When you knead flour and water into dough and bake it, the result is ἄρτος, bread. It can be coarse or fine, large loaves or small wafers.<sup>10</sup>

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul also tell us that in the second half of the sacrament Jesus took “a/the cup,” (τὸ) ποτήριον. If there were no further indication of its contents in this context, we could celebrate the sacrament using water, milk, or any other drinkable liquid. But in Luke 22:18 Jesus says at the table, “From now on I shall surely not drink of *the fruit/product of the vine* (τοῦ γενήματος τῆς ἀμπέλου) until the kingdom of God comes.” Matthew is even more pointed: “*this fruit of the vine*” (26:29).

Judging by the relevant ancient usage, I conclude that the phrase “the fruit of the vine” here means wine, not grape drinks in general. The ancient usage of the phrase in Greek is very limited. In fact, if there is any ancient Greek usage of the articular phrase τὸ γένημα τῆς ἀμπέλου apart from the words of institution and subsequent references to these words, it has escaped me. It does not seem to be an idiom native to the Greek language. But the phrase makes excellent sense as a translation of the words used in a traditional Jewish blessing spoken over wine. According to the Mishnah, over wine one is to bless God as the “Creator of *the fruit of the vine*” (בְּרַכָּה לַיַּיִן).<sup>11</sup> It is no surprise that Jesus, a Jew speaking to Jews, used a solemn liturgical formula Jews would recognize as an idiom for wine, the traditional drink at the Passover.

In the Passion history we have a further indication of what Jesus meant by “the fruit of the vine” as he made his avowal of abstinence at the Supper. If he wanted “the fruit of the vine” to refer to any drink made from grapes, including not just wine but also wine vinegar and unfermented grape juice, it is hard to see how he could drink wine vinegar (ὄξος, Mt 27:48 and parallels) on the cross. But there is no problem if τὸ γένημα τῆς ἀμπέλου and ὄξος refer to two different drinks derived from grapes.<sup>12</sup> “The fruit of the vine” in Jewish usage refers to wine, the heart-gladdening drink of celebration (Ps. 104:15), the drink that was present on the Passover table and thus a ready point of reference for understanding “*this fruit of the vine.*” Jesus vows emphatically<sup>13</sup> to abstain from this drink even as he tells us to use it in his Supper. But ὄξος in the Passion

<sup>8</sup> The witnesses to Luke’s text consistently have ἄρτον rather than τὸν ἄρτον. The article appears as a poorly attested variant in Mark and 1 Corinthians 11. Quite a few witnesses to Matthew’s text have the article, but they are generally late and too weak to establish τὸν ἄρτον as the original reading. Hence the canonical accounts do not even hint that we are to use “*the bread*” that Jesus used.

<sup>9</sup> In John 6:9 Andrew tells Jesus, “There is a boy here who has five *barley loaves*” (ἄρτους κριθίσιους). Clearly ἄρτος is not limited to wheat bread in the New Testament.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Johann Andreas Quenstedt, *Theologia didactico-polemica sive systema theologicum*, Part IV (Wittenberg: Matthaeus Henckel, 1685), chapter VI *De s. Domini coena*, section I, thesis VII, note 1, p. 478a. – Roman Catholic canon law insists that the bread is valid matter for the sacrament only if it is wheat bread; cf. the *New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, ed. John P. Beal, James A. Coriden, and Thomas J. Green (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000), p. 1116 (Canon 924 and commentary). The traditional reasons cited by Roman Catholics for insisting on wheat bread need not have anything to do with the words of institution. Thomas Aquinas, for example, appeals to John 12:24. He also says that the sacraments employ matter in common use, that wheat is preferred for common use in making bread, and that therefore Christ is believed to have used wheat bread at the Supper. He adds that the tough fiber of barley points to the old law, whereas wheat fits the sweetness of Christ’s yoke (*Summa theologica*, part III, question 74, article 3).

<sup>11</sup> *Berakhot* 6:1. The English translation comes from Jacob Neusner, *The Mishnah: A New Translation* (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), p. 9. The Hebrew phrase is quoted in Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus*, seventh ed. (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1982), p. 745.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Numbers 6:3, where there is a distinction between “wine” (יַיִן, LXX οἶνος) and “vinegar made from wine” (יַיִן מְצִיט, LXX ὄξος ἐξ οἴνου).

<sup>13</sup> Both Matthew and Luke have a Strong Future Negation, οὐ μὴ + the aorist subjunctive πίω: “I shall surely not drink.”

history refers to the sour, cheap, thirst-quenching, vinegary drink of soldiers and laborers, and that by contrast Jesus is willing to drink (Jn 19:29-30). Now if “the fruit of the vine” is not broad enough to include a vinegary drink made from grapes, it is quite arbitrary to say without clear evidence that it includes unfermented grape juice.

The evidence points toward the specific understanding that here “the fruit of the vine” is an idiomatic expression for wine. That is what should be used in the Supper.<sup>14</sup> We want to be sure that we have the sacrament Jesus instituted.<sup>15</sup>

### What Jesus did with the bread

While they were eating the Passover Jesus made sure that some bread would be available for the special use he had in mind. He “took” this bread (λαβῶν in Mt, Mk, and Lk; ἔλαβεν in 1 Co 11) in order to indicate what bread he was referring to when he gave thanks and then said, “*This* is my body.” He did not consecrate all the bread in the house or all the bread in Jerusalem but only the bread he “took” for use in the sacrament. In our circumstances we “take” bread by placing it on the altar or table(s) for use in the sacrament. It doesn’t matter whether we hold it directly in our hands or hold the paten or leave things where they lie during the consecration. Whatever bread we have taken to the altar or table(s) is the object of the consecration.

Then Jesus spoke a prayer which included both thanksgiving and blessing. Luke and Paul mention the former (εὐχαριστήσας, “having given thanks”), and Matthew and Mark the latter (εὐλογήσας seems to be the original reading in Mark and probably Matthew, too). The words of Jesus’ prayer are not preserved for us, but

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<sup>14</sup> What is the best way to deal with the rare cases in which a recovering alcoholic is unable to handle even a sip of wine? In such cases a pastor will strive for an evangelical practice that comes from a conscience bound by the Word of God, and there may be differences in the conclusions reached by conscientious pastors. It is clear that great Lutherans of the past have sometimes urged people unable for various reasons to drink the wine to abstain from the oral reception of the bread as well; cf. Hermann Sasse, *This Is My Body: Luther’s Contention for the Real Presence in the Sacrament of the Altar*, rev. ed. (Adelaide: Lutheran Publ. House, 1977), pp. 76-77. On the other hand it is conceivable that a pastor may decide in some circumstances to use unfermented grape juice to commune an alcoholic. But I think it matters how one defends such a practice. I cannot bring myself to subject the phrase “the fruit of the vine” to what I consider an unhistorical kind of exegesis, and therefore I have no confidence that the phrase was intended to include unfermented grape juice. But I note also what 2 Chronicles 30 reports: under extraordinary circumstances, Hezekiah celebrated the Passover on the fourteenth day of the *second* month, and ceremonially unclean people were permitted to take part (vv. 2-4, 18-20). Evangelical practice must reckon with the possibility that in extraordinary circumstances, a temporary departure from some detail in a divine institution may be appropriate. But it should be recognized as a departure and remain rare and temporary; we should not pretend that it is what God commanded in the first place. If we use poor exegesis to say that “the fruit of the vine” includes unfermented grape juice, we have nothing to prevent congregations from abandoning the use of wine altogether and using unfermented grape juice instead.

<sup>15</sup> It may be of interest to compare some views. 1) As I browse in the classic theologians of Lutheranism, I find that they frequently equate “the fruit of the vine” with wine without adding “or unfermented grape juice.” Johann Scherzer comes close to a straightforward endorsement of unfermented grape juice when he describes the earthly material in the cup as “wine, 1 Corinth. 10:16. Whatever truly is γέννημα τῆς ἀμπέλου, Matth. 26:19 [sic], such as juice which is pressed from ripe grapes and is called ordinary [ordinarily?] wine (*usuale vinum*)” (*Systema theologiae XXIX definitionibus absolutum* [Leipzig and Frankfurt: Heinrich Richter, 1685], *locus* XV, para. V, p. 380). I have not yet come upon a similar endorsement by a Lutheran before Scherzer, but I have not made a thorough search. In any case the classic Lutherans want to be very sure that they are using earthly elements that fit the words of institution so as not to jeopardize the integrity of the sacrament. 2) By contrast, some of the Reformed recommended the use of substitute elements if bread and wine were not available. Theodore Beza reportedly took that position (cited in Johann Gerhard, *Loci theologici*, XXI *De sacra coena*, para. 22). That is not surprising. In the Reformed view the bread and wine are not vehicles for receiving Christ’s body and blood by a real sacramental union, and faith must ascend to the highest heaven to partake of Christ’s body and blood there spiritually. Some other earthly elements could in a pinch replace bread and wine as symbols, reminders, and pledges of faith’s communion up in heaven. 3) As for Roman Catholicism, “Canonists and theologians have commonly held that must (*mustum*), or the unfermented juice of ripe grapes, is valid matter for the Eucharist but is gravely illicit except in necessity” (*New Commentary on the Code of Canon Law*, p. 1117, on canon 924). The traditional arguments cited for the validity of must include the curious view of Thomas Aquinas that the sweetness of ripe grape juice indicates that fermentation has begun (*Summa theologica*, part III, question 74, article 5). That makes sweet grape juice essentially equivalent to wine in his view. Thomas does not argue that “the fruit of the vine” includes all grape juice or that fermentation is ultimately irrelevant.

we can draw some inferences. Neither Matthew nor Mark specifies an object for εὐλογῆσας. This verb can be used without an object, and it is possible that Matthew and Mark's εὐλογῆσας should be translated "having spoken a blessing" or "having uttered praise." But usually the verb has an expressed or understood object, and it is a bit smoother to let εὐλογῆσας have the same understood object as the verbs that follow. In other words, it seems better to translate Matthew and Mark this way: "having taken bread (and) having blessed *it*, Jesus broke *it* . . ." <sup>16</sup> So Jesus, having taken bread, said a prayer in which he gave thanks to God (εὐχαριστήσας in Luke and 1 Corinthians 11) and blessed the bread (εὐλογῆσας in Matthew and Mark), presumably by somehow expressing his desire that it should serve as the vehicle by which he would give his disciples his body. If so, Jesus' prayer played a role in effecting the real presence at the original Supper. <sup>17</sup> But the words of that prayer of thanksgiving and blessing are not recorded for us to repeat and are not needed by us. The original institution remains effective and we tap into it, so to speak, by doing and saying the things that have been recorded for us to do and say, not by trying to recreate a prayer of Jesus that has not been recorded.

The view that Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and blessing played a role in effecting the miracle of the real presence finds some confirmation in the Gospel accounts of the feeding of the five thousand. There the Evangelists go out of their way to include enough details to make the parallels with the Supper striking even if they do not use the exact words that occur later at the institution of the Supper. For example, Matthew could have simply said that Jesus multiplied the loaves to feed the five thousand, but instead he writes, "Having taken the five loaves and the two fish, having looked up into the sky, he blessed, and having broken he gave the loaves to the disciples. . ." (14:19). Luke makes it clear that the blessing included a blessing of the food: "he blessed them" (the loaves and fish, 9:16). Mark and John also narrate the scene in a way that reminds us of the Supper (Mk 6:41; Jn 6:11). John 6:23 says that the next day, "boats came from Tiberias near the place where they ate the bread, *the Lord having given thanks*" (genitive absolute, εὐχαριστήσαντος τοῦ κυρίου). "The place where they ate the bread" is a clear enough reference in context even without the added genitive absolute

<sup>16</sup> Some object that typical Jewish table blessings in Jesus' day began "Blessed art Thou, Lord . . ." They conclude that a blessing at a Jewish meal such as the Last Supper would necessarily be understood as a blessing of God and not a blessing of the food. But one cannot make all the evidence fit that pattern. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul says, "the cup of blessing which we bless," τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν. Here the suggestion to translate this as "the cup of blessing *for* which we bless (God)" or "the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks" (NIV) does unnecessary violence to the clear and simple grammar of transitive verb (εὐλογοῦμεν) and its accusative direct object (ὃ).

<sup>17</sup> Compare Martin Chemnitz's discussion of Matthew's account. Here Chemnitz implies that Jesus' prayer of blessing and thanksgiving was the turning point at the original Supper between ordinary bread and bread united with Christ's body, and that the words "This is my body" originally functioned primarily as a "demonstrative declaration" pointing out what Jesus was giving. Since J. A. O. Preus's translation of this passage is defective (Martin Chemnitz, *The Lord's Supper* [St. Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1979], p. 96), I offer this translation: "It belongs to the substance of the Lord's Supper that first common bread is taken, but that it is blessed by the giving of thanks by the words of Christ, as Mark and Paul explain; after the giving of thanks it is distributed by an external handing out, it is received, and it is eaten, that is, taken by mouth. Now it is asked, What is that bread which is handed out, received, and eaten in the Lord's Supper after the thanksgiving or blessing has taken place? The Son of God affirms with a demonstrative declaration that it is his body. Consider the contrast: Previously he had said of the morsel he dipped [and gave to Judas], 'He who eats my bread.' But concerning the bread of the Eucharist he says, 'This is my body.' Therefore it is not only bread which after the giving of thanks is handed out to those who eat and taken by mouth, but at the same time the body of Christ is handed out and received for eating. . ." (*Fundamenta sanae doctrinae de vera et substantiali praesentia, exhibitione, et sumptione corporis et sanguinis Domini in coena* [Frankfurt and Wittenberg, 1653; facsimile edition by the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, 2000], chapter VIII, p.26). Chemnitz speaks in a similar way of Christ's thanksgiving over the cup and the subsequent declaration, "This is my blood." He writes: "After he took the cup, he gave thanks—not the way he gave thanks over the five loaves (Mt 14:19), and not the way he had given thanks earlier at this Last Supper when he gave them an ordinary drink . . . Instead, [he gave thanks in a different way] in order that through this thanksgiving that fruit of the vine might by the word of Christ receive a new and different name, as Irenaeus says, namely, that of the blood of Christ. Moreover, after that thanksgiving was finished, he gave that cup to the disciples in such a way that they all took or drew some of it by mouth. For he says, 'Drink of it, all of you.' So far everything is plain and simple. Now the question is, What is that which is given to the apostles in that cup of blessing in the Supper and which they took or drew by mouth from it? It is certain that only the fruit of the vine was in the cup before the thanksgiving. But because by the words of Christ the thanksgiving is added, it is asked whether now it is only the fruit of the vine. Therefore the Son of God himself answers with a demonstrative declaration, using not a few obscure words but many clear ones, and thereby explains what is given in the cup of blessing and drawn from it by the mouth of those who drink. For he says, 'This is my blood'" (*Fundamenta*, chapter VIII, p. 27).

phrase. The only real purpose for adding that phrase is to indicate how the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand took place: *through* Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and blessing.<sup>18</sup> If Jesus' prayer of thanksgiving and blessing effected a miraculous feeding on that occasion, we can see a similar purpose in his prayer of thanksgiving and blessing at the institution of the Supper, particularly since the Evangelists draw some unmistakable parallels between the two events. No wonder some of the classic Lutheran exegetes made the connection.<sup>19</sup>

After taking the bread and blessing it in a prayer that included thanksgiving, Jesus broke it (ἔκλασεν in all four accounts). The essence of this act is to prepare the bread for distribution. That can be accomplished by preparing the bread in bite-size pieces (wafers) in advance. Those who insist on a literal act of bread-breaking during the ceremony are missing the point. Those are doubly wrong who insist on a literal breaking on the grounds that this is an act symbolical of Jesus' death or even say that it is the most significant action involving the bread. Jesus never said or implied that it was a symbolical action. If he wanted a clear symbol of his death, a broken piece of bread is much less fitting than a Passover lamb slaughtered like Jesus himself without the breaking of any bones (Jn 19:36). Besides, when he broke the bread he was reflecting a common Jewish custom. A typical shared meal among the Jews began with the head of the house praying and breaking bread to distribute to his family and guests. If Jesus was to invest that common act of breaking bread with special symbolism, he would need to indicate it clearly. And if a symbolical act of breaking was to be the focal point for the part of the Supper involving the bread, where is the corresponding act for the cup? Paul and Luke simply tell us that Jesus dealt with the cup "in the same way" (ὡσαύτως). If people insist on a literal act of breaking as essential, will they "in the same way" break the cup as well? All such nonsense disappears when we are convinced that the breaking of the bread was simply preparation for distribution.<sup>20</sup> (The corresponding act for the wine is to prepare for distribution by making sure there is enough wine and a suitable vessel or vessels to give each communicant a drink.)

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<sup>18</sup> The NIV gives the genitive absolute in John 6:23 merely temporal value: "after the Lord had given thanks." Luther's translation is better: the people ate the bread *through* the Lord's thanksgiving, "durch des HErrn Danksagung." Matthias Flacius comments on this verse, "Here I certainly take 'giving thanks' as a synecdoche meaning 'blessing' and thus by his blessing miraculously multiplying, just as in Matthew and especially Luke we read that he blessed the loaves themselves. And indeed this expression is not added here pointlessly, but it expresses the very effecting of the miracle" (*Glossa compendiarum* [Frankfurt: Johann Beyer et al., 1559], p. 373b).

<sup>19</sup> For Chemnitz's view, cf. note 17 and his discussion of Mark's account in *The Lord's Supper*. -- Johannes Brenz writes on John 6:11, "What John expresses with the words 'He gave thanks,' others express by saying 'He blessed.' For by this giving of thanks the five loaves and two fish were so blessed, increased, and multiplied that not only were five thousand men together with women and children abundantly fed with them but also twelve baskets were filled with the gathered fragments. So also at the Last Supper Jesus took bread, and where one Evangelist says, 'He gave thanks,' another says, 'He blessed.' For by this giving of thanks Christ blessed the bread and the cup of his Supper in such a way that they were for believers in Christ not only food and drink of the body to sustain bodily life but also food and drink of the soul, or rather of the whole man, to sustain spiritual and eternal life" (*Evangelion quod inscribitur Secundum Ioannem, centum quinquagintaquatuor homiliis explicatum* [Frankfurt: Peter Brubach, 1559], p. 331). -- Polycarp Leyser comments on the blessing of the loaves and the fish (Mt 14:19 and parallels), "*He blessed them*, not in the ordinary way, the way we are accustomed to bless a meal with prayers . . . rather it was a special εὐλογία and blessing, which effected that miraculous multiplication of both loaves and fish . . . just as the εὐλογία or blessing in the Eucharist was something peculiar, a blessing by which Christ brought it about that the bread was his body ἐν μυστηρίῳ . . ." (from chapter LXXVI of the Chemnitz-Leyser-Gerhard *Harmonia quatuor evangelistarum*, vol. 1 [Geneva: Peter Chouet, 1645], p.832b).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Johannes Behm's *TDNT* article on κλάω κλάσις κλάσμα: "The word group is used in the NT of the breaking of bread or bread thus broken in pieces. There was an ancient custom in Palestine (Jer. 16:7; Lam. 4:4) of breaking bread with the hands rather than cutting it with a knife. At meals, whether ordinary family meals, special meals with guests or ritual feasts, e.g., the Passover or the beginning of the Sabbath, the head of the house gives thanks, then breaks bread and hands the pieces to those who sit at table with him. The breaking of bread is simply a customary and necessary part of the preparation for eating together. It initiates the sharing of the main course in every meal. Thus Jesus faithfully follows the custom as head of the house and as host . . ." (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. III, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965], pp. 728f.).

Then Jesus gave the bread to the disciples and said, according to Matthew's account, "Take, eat, this is my body" (λάβετε φάψετε, τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου).<sup>21</sup> Luke has "This is my body, the one being given for you" (τοῦτό ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμά μου τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διδόμενον).<sup>22</sup> Here we have come to the real focal point of the first half of the sacrament.

### **The meaning of "Take, eat. This is my body, which is being given for you"**

These words must be taken in their simple, natural sense. There are several reasons.

First there is *the need for clarity*. The simple, natural sense is the starting point for clear interpretation in any passage and is to be abandoned only when there is sufficient reason to do so. Here the need for clarity is underscored by the fact that Jesus is giving his church a new point of doctrine and practice. Luther points out the need and notes what happens when interpreters refuse to let the words have their simple, natural meaning: "For the text must be quite unambiguous and plain, and must have one single, definite interpretation if it is to form the basis of a clear and definite article of faith. But they [Luther's sacramentarian opponents] have a great diversity of interpretations and texts, each interpretation contradicting the others."<sup>23</sup> Chemnitz makes much of the fact that the Supper is Jesus' last will and testament, and that a testament demands clear, unambiguous language.<sup>24</sup> A final consideration underscoring the need for clear, unambiguous language is the possibility of receiving the sacrament unworthily to one's judgment if one fails to recognize what the Supper is and how to use it.<sup>25</sup> Only the simple, natural sense of the words gives us the clarity we need here.

Second, we keep in mind *the attributes of the Speaker*. If an ordinary man had taken bread and said, "This is my body," we might regard him as a madman, deceiver, or abuser of language, and we might reject the simple, natural meaning of the words as impossible nonsense. But the Speaker here is the Son of God, who is utterly truthful and reliable and has the infinite wisdom and power to back up what he says by making his body truly present. References to Jesus' truthfulness, wisdom, and power occur like a refrain in Lutheran writing on

<sup>21</sup> Textual criticism notes several variant readings. One can accept the conclusion that "Take, eat" was not originally in Luke or Paul, and "eat" was not in Mark. Paul's word order has μου in second position after τοῦτο, but that is of no consequence; neither the pronoun itself nor the position is emphatic, and despite the separation μου is still a possessive genitive governed by σῶμα, "my body."

<sup>22</sup> Paul has a similar phrase after "This is my body," but in this case textual criticism makes it likely that Paul's text had no participle: "This is my body, the one for you." That is more awkward but intelligible all the same. It says that the incarnation was undertaken for our good; in that sense Jesus says, "This is my body, the one [which exists] for you [ever since I became incarnate]." But the goal of his incarnation was his sacrificial death ("The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many," Mk 10:45), and Luke's wording focuses on that purpose of the incarnation: "This is my body, the one being given [into death] for you." Thus Paul and Luke are saying essentially the same thing.

<sup>23</sup> *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, trans. Robert H. Fischer in *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1961), p. 163. In 1941 Hermann Sasse observed that modern scholarship by refusing the simple sense of the words had mired itself in the same chaos of conflicting interpretations: "In fact symbolic exegesis does not seem to have gotten beyond the situation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when Luther again and again had to point out that his opponents were united in only one thing: *that* the words of the Lord's Supper were to be understood symbolically, while they differed widely on the interpretation itself. What sort of a parable can it be when even learned exegetes cannot say with certainty what it actually means?" (from "The Lord's Supper in the New Testament" in *We Confess the Sacraments*, trans. Norman Nagel [St. Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1985], p. 69).

<sup>24</sup> Chapter I of his *Fundamenta sanae doctrinae* has the title, "The words of the Lord's Supper are not to be treated in a light or frivolous way, but with great reverence and respect and in the fear of the Lord, because they are the words of the last will and testament of the Son of God" (Preus's translation, *The Lord's Supper*, p. 25), and Chemnitz returns to that point repeatedly. It is fully valid even if we translate διαθήκη in the words of institution as "covenant" rather than "testament." Jesus was in fact anticipating his death and bequeathing his treasure to his family when he arranged for his church to receive his body and blood in the Supper.

<sup>25</sup> Chemnitz says, "Therefore if anyone departs from the true and genuine sense of those words, it is certain that he is not able to discern what he is eating in the Supper. But would this not simply be an innocent lapse? By no means, for he is eating to his own judgment and becomes guilty of the body of Christ, says Paul" (quoted from *The Lord's Supper*, p. 28; the Latin original is in *Fundamenta*, chapter I, p. 2b).

the Supper.<sup>26</sup> Special attention is given to the power which Jesus has as true God and which is shared with his human nature so that he can be present in various ways with his body wherever he wishes; in fact, the divine omnipresence communicated to Christ's human nature through the incarnation is cited, not as the mode of presence of his body in the Supper, but as an argument to demolish the absurd limitations of sacramentarian thinking about Christ's body.<sup>27</sup> Since Christ's body shares in this majestic and utterly incomprehensible omnipresence, it is folly to deny its capacity for the more limited, "definitive" mode of presence in the Supper.<sup>28</sup>

Third, the simple, natural sense of the words enjoys *apostolic confirmation in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11*, where Paul clearly teaches the real presence of Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament. In chapter 10 he doesn't speak in a merely general way about spiritual union or fellowship with Christ and other Christians, but he pointedly calls the sacramental bread a joint partaking (κοινωνία) of Christ's body and the sacramental cup a joint partaking (κοινωνία) of his blood. Why mention the body and the blood separately if all that matters is a spiritual union with the person of Christ or a participation in the power and benefits of his death? Why not simply call the Christians partners of Christ? That would have given perfect parallelism with the Jews whom Paul called "partners of the altar" (κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου, 10:18) and the pagans who were "partners of the demons" (κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων, 10:20). The answer is that Paul was less interested in creating perfectly parallel expressions and more interested in doing justice to the words of institution, which specifically and separately talk about eating Christ's body and drinking his blood. Since Paul is paraphrasing the words of institution, it is clear that here the two occurrences of κοινωνία refer to partaking by eating and partaking by drinking, not to some purely spiritual or symbolical association.<sup>29</sup> Paul's recognition of the decisive importance of the bodily eating and drinking comes through again in chapter 11 when he speaks of the sin of communing in an unworthy manner. He could have spoken only about acting lovelessly toward fellow communicants and sinning thereby against the *person* of Christ, but instead he focuses on the way their sinful attitudes and actions come to a head as sins against Christ's *body and blood* in the very act of *eating* the bread and *drinking* the cup (11:27). His pointed language makes no sense apart from the real presence of Christ's body and blood and the oral reception of them. Accordingly he urges us to differentiate the body of the Lord from ordinary food ("discern the body," 11:29) and treat it appropriately to avoid judgment.

These are, it seems to me, the chief reasons for insisting on retaining the simple, natural sense of Christ's words.<sup>30</sup> Let us review those words from that perspective.

<sup>26</sup> To take just one Lutheran exposition as an example, cf. FC SD VII, 22, 23, 26, 43, 46, 47, 75, 89, 96, 97, 106.

<sup>27</sup> FC SD VII, 94-103 is an extensive quotation from Luther on Christ's modes of bodily presence and their foundation in his incarnation.

<sup>28</sup> On the definitive mode of presence and the real presence of Christ's body as an example of it, cf. FC SD VII, 100.

<sup>29</sup> Chemnitz has a splendid exposition of 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 in chapter IX of his *Fundamenta*, pp. 41-46 (= *The Lord's Supper*, pp. 135-148).

<sup>30</sup> Other arguments are less important but still worth considering: 1) The same rationalistic arguments that have been used to undo the statement "This is my body" would have a similarly destructive effect on key Christological passages, such as "The Word was God." Attacks on the real presence have in fact sometimes led to attacks on the deity of Christ. 2) Starting from the false assumption that Christ's body is capable of only the normal mode of presence leads to trouble in other passages, such as Christ's appearance on Easter when the disciples were meeting behind closed doors. 3) A merely symbolical interpretation of the words of institution entails an attack on the character of the Supper as a means of grace. The words contain no statement that the bread and wine in themselves are to be means of conveying forgiveness. So if they are only symbols of the absent body and blood of Christ, how do we get forgiveness by eating and drinking mere symbols? That would be like expecting to get rich by symbolically entering a large sum of money in your bankbook when no real transaction has taken place. 4) Mere symbols exist to be contemplated, not eaten and drunk. Why is there so much emphasis on the eating and drinking if the bread and wine are mere symbols? 5) If symbolism is the point of the Supper, it is hard to see how it is an improvement on the Passover and the fellowship offerings of the Old Testament. 6) Paul knows the difference between a bodily presence and a spiritual one (1 Co 5:3). In 2 Corinthians 12:2-3 he is careful to point out even the possibility that his experience of the third heaven may have taken place through a merely spiritual presence so as not to deceive his readers. He does not so much as hint at such a thing when he discusses the Lord's Supper. 7) Although post-apostolic history does not determine doctrine, it is of historical interest that extra-biblical testimonies to the real presence are very ancient. We find both direct statements by early Christians and indirect testimony from their enemies, i.e., charges of cannibalism.

“Take, eat.” In a context where food is handed out and attention is drawn to it with the word “this,” the eating can only be a literal eating with the mouth, not a spiritual eating by faith. (Jesus points to the need for faith later on.)

“This” (Τοῦτο) refers to what Jesus has just handed or is still handing to his disciples. The pronoun Τοῦτο is neuter, but not much can be inferred from the gender. Although the word for bread is masculine (ἄρτος), here the pronoun gets its neuter gender by attraction to the neuter predicate nominative, τὸ σῶμα, “body.” Robert Hoerber notes, “The only grammatical implication in the attraction of the demonstrative pronoun to the gender of the predicate nominative is that the predicate nominative may have a slight stress instead of the antecedent. That is, the emphasis may be ‘This is My *body*’ rather than ‘*This* is My body.’”<sup>31</sup>

“Is” means “is.” But that does not require us to assume an absolute identity of subject and predicate and to infer that the substance of the bread is replaced by the substance of Christ’s body (transubstantiation). The linking verb can also be used to reflect the union or combination of two things, one visible and one hidden. When money is in an envelope, we can say, “Please accept this envelope. This is the money I promised you.” Another example: “Get rid of that can. It’s old paint.” The use of “is” implies some kind of union of envelope and money in the one case and of can and paint in the other. We have a similar usage here in the words of institution, and thus we speak of the sacramental union of the bread and Christ’s body (and of the wine and Christ’s blood). According to Luther, “This mode of speaking about diverse beings as one the grammarians call ‘synecdoche.’”<sup>32</sup> Chemnitz preferred to call it an unusual mode of predication. He called it unusual because even though it is common in popular speech, he did not find it much in polished authors; but it was not to be classified as figurative speech because it did not fit the rules logicians customarily used in analyzing figurative speech.<sup>33</sup> Whatever we call it, this interpretation is confirmed (and transubstantiation is refuted) by Paul’s repeated references to the *bread* that we eat (1 Co 10:16, 17; 11:26, 27, 28). It still is genuine bread at the time of reception, but it is bread united with Christ’s body.

“My body” has its proper sense: the body born of Mary, the body with which Christ walked, stood, sat, etc. This sense of “my body” is secured by the added phrase in Luke: “the one being given for you.” The text says “for you” (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν), not “to you” (ὑμῖν). In other words, the participle “being given” does not refer to what was happening in the sacrament, as though the meaning were, “This is the body being given *to you* right now with the bread.” Rather, the point is that Christ gave the disciples the body he was in the process of sacrificing *for them* by surrendering himself to his enemies and death. Jesus knew that Judas’s plot had already gone into motion and that the arrest squad was getting ready to make its move. The reference to his imminent sacrificial death on our behalf and in our place helps us see why the reception of his body and blood in the sacrament is to be treasured.

Though the wealth of earth were proffered,  
Naught could buy the gift here offered:  
Christ’s true body, for you riven,  
And his blood for you once given.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> “This Is My Body” in *Concordia Theological Monthly*, vol. 20, no. 5 (May, 1949). Hoerber’s article focuses on this matter of gender attraction and provides numerous examples in Latin and Greek. Many Lutherans have given faulty explanations of the gender of τοῦτο here, despite the fact that Chemnitz had it right and illustrated the point well by referring to the τοῦτο in Genesis 2:22f (LXX); cf. *The Lord’s Supper*, p. 95 (chapter VIII of *Fundamenta*, p. 26a).

<sup>32</sup> *Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, pp. 301f.

<sup>33</sup> Chemnitz discusses modes of predication and the appropriate terminology in chapter IV of his *Fundamenta* (= *The Lord’s Supper*, pp. 45-56; cf. especially pp. 46 and 55).

<sup>34</sup> From Johann Franck’s “Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness,” stanza 3 (trans. Catherine Winkworth, alt., in *Christian Worship*, 311).

Accordingly, our churches “teach concerning the Lord’s Supper that Christ’s body and blood are truly present and are distributed to those who eat in the Lord’s Supper; and they reject those who teach otherwise” (AC X, Latin text).

### **Jesus’ divine will effected the sacramental union through his Word at the original Supper**

In many situations in the Bible where God’s will to do something is expressed, we can recognize the words expressing that will as the powerful means by which he carries out his will. “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light” (Gn 1:3 NIV).

As noted above, there is reason to infer that Jesus’ will regarding the sacramental union of the bread and his body was expressed somehow in his prayer of thanksgiving and blessing before he broke the bread (and we can draw the same inference about the second prayer of thanksgiving before he distributed the wine). Furthermore, his will to impart his body in sacramental union with the bread was also expressed in the words, “Take, eat. This is my body.” I want to do justice to the power of Jesus’ words in both his prayer and his declaration “This is my body,” but I am not sure exactly how they related to each other in the effecting of the sacramental union. Consider two scenarios:

1) It seems possible that Jesus prayed that the sacramental union of the bread and his body would begin a few moments later when he said the words, “This is my body.” In that case the act of praying reflected the harmony of will between Jesus and the Father, but it was the declaration “This is my body” that actually initiated the sacramental union.

2) But it also seems possible that Jesus initiated the sacramental union while he prayed his prayer of thanksgiving and blessing. If so, the real presence was already in effect before Jesus began to say, “This is my body. . .” In that case the declaration “This is my body, which is being given for you” most obviously served to identify what the disciples were receiving, but it was nevertheless also a *powerful* word. It expressed Jesus’ powerful will to continue the real presence until the sacramental action was over. It powerfully conveyed to the disciples the blessings connected with Christ’s body and sacrificial death: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. And, coupled with the ensuing command, “Do this in remembrance of me,” it expressed Jesus’ powerful will to effect the sacramental union also at future celebrations of the sacrament.

Luther once said that “This is my body” is a “word of power” (*Machtwort*) that effects what it expresses, not a “word spoken after the fact” (*Nachwort*).<sup>35</sup> By saying that, Luther agreed with at least the last part of scenario No. 1. But I find it exegetically attractive to go with scenario No. 2 because the verb in “This is my body” is present indicative (“is,” ἐστίν). The most common function of a present indicative verb is to declare facts, not to effect changes. When we look at the miracles in the Gospels, we find that they were not always effected by audible words; but where miracle-effecting words are recorded, they are mostly in the form of commands (imperative mood or an equivalent expression) and sometimes in the future indicative. Only rarely do we find a miraculous event effected through a saying in the present indicative. Still, it remains possible that “This is my body” is another of those rare examples. That means I cannot be more precise in saying how and when Jesus initiated the sacramental union at the original Supper because he has neither spelled out the details nor provided the basis from which a sure decision between scenario No. 1 and scenario No. 2 could be deduced.

<sup>35</sup> The original text (part of *Vom Abendmahl Christi. Bekenntnis*) is in the Weimar Edition of Luther’s works, vol. 26, p. 283, line 4. I think Robert H. Fischer misses part of Luther’s point when he translates *Nachwort* as “word of imitation” (*Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, in *Luther’s Works*, vol. 37, p. 181). On the other hand, in the same writing Luther says that “This” in “This is my body” refers not to mere common bread but to the bread which is Christ’s body (*Confession Concerning Christ’s Supper*, p. 195). Is Luther here disregarding the timeline and speaking in anticipation of the effecting of the sacramental union through the words “This is my body”?

But either way, it is clear that “This is my body” had to be a true statement when Jesus uttered it. And since it was a statement in the present indicative, Jesus was saying that the real presence of his body was in effect, whether it began at the saying of the words “This is my body” or had begun earlier during the prayer. We cannot treat his words as though they were “This will be my body.” Sometimes verb tenses have special usages, as when we talk about a prophetic perfect that refers to the future or a historical present that refers to the past. But context makes it clear when we should invoke those special usages. Here at the original institution of the Supper there is no good reason to take “is” as anything other than “is,” and doing so would only raise doubts and invite bizarre interpretations.

So far I have been focusing mostly on the original Supper. What can we say about how the sacramental union is effected in our celebration of the Supper?

### **Jesus’ divine will effects the sacramental union through his Word in our celebration of his Supper**

In Luke’s account, after Jesus says, “This is my body, which is being given for you,” he proceeds to say, “Do this (τοῦτο ποιῆτε, present imperative of repeated action) in remembrance of me.” Paul has the same words in the same place. (Paul also has “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” after the actions involving the cup, where Luke omits it.)

This command (“Do this”) has decisive importance for our theology and practice. Matthew and Mark took it for granted that Christians knew that they were to repeat Jesus’ Supper. Luke and Paul make it explicit that this was Jesus’ intention. Jesus’ words “Do this” remove any doubt about the validity and efficacy of the sacrament among us when we administer it the way Jesus instituted it.

So what are we to do in the administration of the sacrament? What does “this” refer to in the command, “Do this”? A look at the preceding series of actions performed by Jesus tells us. According to Luke, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, distributed it, and identified it as his body. Those are the essential acts we are to perform in administering the first part of the sacrament. The distribution, of course, implies reception (eating), a point which is made explicit above all by Matthew, who reports Jesus’ words, “Take, eat” (and in the second part, “Drink of it, all of you”).<sup>36</sup>

We noted above that we do not have the words of Jesus’ prayer. That will not stop us from giving thanks when we administer the sacrament, but it means that we cannot count on our prayer of thanksgiving to effect the sacramental union. Since we do not have directions from Jesus as to how we should give thanks in the administration of the first part of the sacrament, the focal point in our consecration of the bread must be expressing the thought Jesus wanted us to express, above all the thought contained in the words “This is my body.” Under those circumstances, namely, in the context of a celebration of the sacrament in accordance with Christ’s institution, the sacramental union of the bread with his body is attached to the saying of Christ’s words, “This is my body” (so also with the cup and the words “This is my blood”).

How shall we account for that? Let us not suppose that Jesus created a magical formula by breaking off some of his power and putting it in a set of words that we could then wield apart from his will. If a Christian goes to the grocery store, points to a loaf of bread, and says, “This is my body” or “This is the body of Christ,” that doesn’t make it so. All that has happened is a sin against the Second Commandment. And let us not suppose that Jesus uses the divine call or a rite of ordination to put a special power into administrators of the sacrament enabling them by virtue of their office to effect the sacramental union. Neither magic words nor magicians account for the real presence, but only the powerful will of God expressed by the powerful words of Jesus Christ—words that were first heard at the original Supper but are heard again in our communion services, where they are still his words and still powerful.<sup>37</sup>

When Pastor Schmidt (a good generic name for a Lutheran pastor) administers the sacrament to his flock according to Jesus’ institution, he speaks the words “This is my body . . . This is my blood” in the person of

<sup>36</sup> Paul’s account in 1 Corinthians 11 does not mention the distribution, but he makes it very clear that he assumes eating and drinking will take place, and that in turn implies distribution.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. the paragraphs on the consecration in FC SD VII, 73-90.

Christ, that is, as Christ's mouthpiece. That is because he is following Christ's commands and saying what Christ has told him to say.<sup>38</sup> Here we can definitely apply the Lord's promise, "He who listens to you listens to me" (Lk 10:16 NIV). But what we say at Christ's command and in his person must be true. He would not require us to speak lies. He who tells us to express the thoughts "This is my body . . . This is my blood. . ." in that context is sure to act in such a way that those words of his may be uttered with complete truthfulness. That is our guarantee that we have the real presence of his body and blood also in our celebration of the sacrament.

That happens somehow *through* the words "This is my body" and "This is my blood" which we speak in Christ's person in obedience to his command. When we say them, they function as a blessing of the bread to effect the sacramental union. For what Paul says about the cup can be applied to the bread as well: "The cup of blessing *which we bless* (ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν), is it not a joint partaking of the blood of Christ?" (1 Co 10:16). We bless the elements by saying the words Jesus has given us to say over them. Nothing else shows up in Paul's teaching about the sacrament which would serve specifically to bless the elements in a way that effects the sacramental union. The Formula of Concord is talking about *that* kind of blessing when it cites Paul's words "the cup of blessing which we bless," and immediately adds, "which indeed happens in no other way than through the repetition and recitation of the words of institution" (FC SD VII, 82). But I do not claim to understand how these words of Christ, powerful at the original Supper and powerful still when spoken by us at his table in his person, effect the sacramental union. Does Christ somehow use them directly to unite his body with the bread and his blood with the wine? Or does their consecratory power operate more indirectly, in that they move Christ to unite his body and blood with the elements so that his words in the mouth of the minister may be true?<sup>39</sup> In the latter case, Christ could even effect the sacramental union just before the minister says the words. Just as God can be said to use our prayers in carrying out his will even when he answers our prayers

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<sup>38</sup> Luther writes, "But when he said, 'Do this,' by his own command and bidding he directed us to speak these words in his person and name: 'This is my body'" (*Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, p. 187).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Johann Wilhelm Baier's detailed discussion in his *Compendium theologiae positivae*, part III, chapter XI, §2: "The *principal effecting* cause of this sacrament is Christ, who instituted this sacrament and commanded us to use it repeatedly, and today brings it about that the action performed with the external elements in accordance with his command has the nature and power of the sacrament. . . . For he himself unites his body and blood with the consecrated elements in order that they may be received at the same time, and thus he strengthens and increases faith, as we shall see below. . . ." §3 "The *internal motivating* cause of the institution of this sacrament is the goodness and love of Christ toward us; the *external* motivating cause is the very merit of his suffering and death. *In particular*, with regard to the real presence of the body and blood of Christ in any administration of the Supper, Christ's *institution* itself is the principal motivating cause; the less principal motivating cause is the *consecration* of the elements performed by the minister in accordance with the institution of Christ." On the role of Christ's institution as the principal motivating cause, he adds in note d): "That act by which Christ's body and blood are made present in the holy Supper and are united with the earthly elements depends on the divine, free will of Christ. However, since Christ has decided to make his body and blood present and sacramentally united with the bread and wine in the holy Supper whenever the Supper is celebrated in conformity with his institution, and since he has openly declared this with the words 'This is my body; this is my blood,' it is sure that Christ's will is moved by the power of his institution itself to effect that very thing which the words 'This is my body; this is my blood' indicate." And to ward off magical views he says in note e): "It is to be noted that the words of consecration do not move the will of Christ by their own power, nor insofar as they are uttered by the minister, but by the power of the very institution issuing from Christ." §4. "The *ministerial* cause [of this sacrament] is the *regular minister* of the church, who consecrates the elements and distributes them to the communicants." To explain the word "consecrates" he says in note e): "That is, *by pouring out prayers* to God he first separates the external elements from ordinary use and appoints them for sacred use. (Elsewhere they call this a *blessing* or *giving of thanks*; among us it is customarily performed with the *Lord's Prayer*.) Then, by pronouncing in the person of Christ the *words of Christ* which he himself used in the original institution of the Supper, the minister brings it about that the body and blood of Christ, united with the elements of bread and wine, are distributed, eaten, and drunk at the same time [as the earthly elements]. (This is the *consecration in the strict sense of the term*.) However, the minister does not bring it about by his own physical or intrinsic power of acting, whether in a principal or an instrumental capacity; rather, he brings it about by *moving* the free will of Christ, so that Christ, using his omnipotence as the physical or materially penetrating (*realiter influentem*) effecting cause, makes his body and blood materially (*realiter*) present in the holy Supper to be truly eaten and drunk with the earthly elements. In fact, just as those words of consecration are the words of the omnipotent Son of God, so [it is true that] as soon as they are uttered, they have the divine working joined with them in order to accomplish in reality what the words themselves say." Later, however, he says that "it is not necessary to define the *moment* of time at which the body and blood of Christ begin to be sacramentally united with the bread and wine" (§8, note e).

before we utter them (“Before they call I will answer” Isa 65:24 NIV), so he can, if he chooses, work through our recitation of Jesus’ words “This is my body . . . This is my blood” even before we actually say them.

I have a decided preference for a “consecrationist” understanding of the time of the real presence. In other words, I think it likely that from the time the bread and wine are consecrated by the recitation of the words of institution, they are sacramentally united with Christ’s body and blood, on the altar and in the minister’s hand, not just in the mouth of the communicant. That seems to me to provide a simple and fully consistent way of accounting for all the relevant biblical data. But anyone who has a different way of satisfactorily accounting for all the biblical data is welcome to hold his or her view. Certainly all who take seriously Jesus’ words, “This is my body. . . This is my blood” and “Do this. . . ,” will agree that his body and blood are eaten and drunk in sacramental union with the bread and wine when we celebrate the sacrament in accordance with Christ’s institution.

### “In remembrance of me”

Jesus wants us to remember him not simply as a good man from Nazareth but as the Savior who gave his body and blood into death for us. He wants the sacrament to be an occasion for a believing remembrance of him. In short, he wants faith. But we will get a clearer picture of his intention here if we take a closer look at the phrase.

The words εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν could be translated as “for the remembering of me.” The preposition εἰς is frequently used to indicate purpose, and that fits well here; in fact, Paul’s comment in 1 Corinthians 11:26 shows that he understood it that way, as we shall see in a moment. We could paraphrase in various ways to emphasize the purpose idea: “Do this to promote the believing remembrance of me,” “Do this for the sake of faith in me,” “Do this to strengthen faith in me.” The sacrament is a means of grace well suited to do that very thing.

Note the general way the phrase is worded. It is not limited to the idea, “Take part in the Lord’s Supper so that it strengthens *your own* faith.” It is true, of course, that the individual communicant goes to the Supper for his or her own good, and the Supper wonderfully brings the body and blood of Christ to the individual’s mouth as a personal pledge of forgiveness. But it is also true that my participation in this group meal strengthens my fellow worshipers. That latter point is the very thing Paul wished to bring home to the Corinthians who were treating each other like dirt at the congregational meals during which the sacrament was celebrated. Immediately after he finishes repeating Jesus’ words of institution (1 Co 11:25), he makes a telling comment (verse 26). Note the thought connection between the verses.

(v. 25, words of Jesus) “Do this, as often as you drink it, for the remembering of me.”

(v. 26, Paul’s comment) “For (γάρ) as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.”

Paul is in effect saying, “Jesus tells us to celebrate this sacrament in order to build up faith in him. And that makes sense, for (γάρ) whenever Christians celebrate the sacrament, they preach the gospel (the death of the Lord) to each other by that very act.” Thus it was a grotesque violation of the purpose of the sacrament when the meal in which the Supper was celebrated became an occasion for letting brothers go hungry. Gospel proclamation by the communicants is inherent in the Supper, but the rich Corinthians were making a mockery of their gospel proclamation to their poor brothers since they were treating them like dirt at the same time.

But we can take the theology in Paul’s comment and find something wonderful for our use of the sacrament: *When I commune, it is for my good and the good of my brothers and sisters! I receive my Lord’s body and blood, and I proclaim the gospel of his death to my brothers and sisters, and I hear their proclamation of the gospel addressed to me!* All that is true even in a stripped-down, liturgically impoverished celebration of the sacrament, so long as the words of institution are said. They are said by the minister, but he is our mouth, and through him we proclaim the gospel content of the words of institution to one another when we participate

in the sacrament. And how much richer that proclamation is in a good Lutheran communion service, where the communion liturgy and distribution hymns give us the opportunity to proclaim the death of the Lord and its meaning with our own mouths. What is more, in such a service the sacrament takes place in a larger context of gospel preaching (the preacher is our mouth there, too), liturgy, and song.

Since Jesus instituted the sacrament to strengthen faith, let us take part eagerly in order to build up for ourselves and for each other a believing remembrance of our Savior.

### **Jesus' words regarding the cup**

Many of the issues that concern the second half of the sacrament have already been covered in one way or another. Some issues remain, but I will not address all of them. One, however, demands treatment, and that is the comparison of the strikingly different versions of Jesus' statement about the cup.

Here Matthew's text and Mark's are very similar, and Luke's is very similar to Paul's. For purposes of comparison I choose the texts of Matthew and Paul. Matthew was present at the institution of the Supper, and Paul received his understanding of it in a special revelation from Jesus. Matthew's text is fuller than Mark's, and in some respects Paul's is clearer than Luke's.

According to Matthew, Jesus "took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it them, saying, 'Drink from it, all [of you]. *For this is my blood of the covenant, which is being poured out for many for forgiveness of sins*'" (text of the last sentence: τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πόλλων ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτῶν).

The antecedent of "this" is "cup," but of course the focus is on the contents of the cup. Here again Jesus' words allow us to speak of a sacramental union. There still was wine in the cup, and the wine was so obvious that there was no reason to mention it in this verse. What was not obvious was the blood united with the wine, so Jesus draws attention to that special gift and its importance.

He calls it "my blood of the covenant," and that phrase rings a bell. At the ratification of the old covenant at Sinai, young bulls were sacrificed. Half their blood was thrown against the altar, which represented God, and half of it was thrown onto the people themselves—real blood coming into bodily contact with the people. Moses said, "This is *the blood of the covenant* that the LORD has made with you . . ." (Ex 24:8). Now at the Supper Jesus says, "This is my *blood of the covenant*." The old covenant didn't need to be ratified with blood again; clearly Jesus is talking about a different covenant, the new covenant of forgiveness (Jer 31:31, 34). Like the old covenant, it is ratified or sealed with blood that is offered to God and conveyed bodily to the people. But in this covenant, the blood is better than animal blood. It is the blood of the Son of God, truly efficacious for the forgiveness of sins. It is offered to God on the altar of the cross and conveyed bodily to the people in the sacrament. Jesus referred to both actions in his sacramental words. He spoke of his blood as blood "being poured out for many (i.e., all mankind) for the forgiveness of sins" because his bloody death on the cross had already been set in motion and was only hours away. He told all his communicants to drink it so that his blood might be conveyed to their bodies in a special way and become a special assurance that they are beneficiaries of the new covenant of forgiveness. Thus his lifeblood becomes our life.

Paul and Luke refer to many of the same thoughts. What is surprising is the way they are put together. According to Paul, Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in (by virtue of) my blood" (τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι).

To say that the cup (i.e., the liquid in the cup) is a covenant (an arrangement made by God for human beings to live as his people) may seem odd. How can a liquid be a relationship between God and man? But the sentence is of the same kind as Jesus' words "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:25). That is a compressed way of saying that Jesus is the cause of the resurrection, or the means by which the resurrection to eternal life takes place. Just so, "This cup is the new covenant" is a compressed way of saying "This cup is a cause (instrumental cause) of the new covenant; it is a means by which we take part in the new covenant, a

means by which it is ratified and sealed for us.” My expanded version is in some ways more logical, fuller, and clearer, but Paul’s compressed expression has the advantage of being brief, striking, and memorable.<sup>40</sup>

The other point needed to track Paul’s wording is that “in my blood” (equivalent to “by virtue of” or “because of” or “through my blood”) is not an adjectival phrase describing the new covenant but an adverbial phrase explaining how “this cup is the new covenant.”<sup>41</sup> It may help us get the feel of the adverbial function of the phrase if we reposition it in the sentence: “By virtue of my blood, this cup is the new covenant.” And the blood has to be in the cup if that adverbial phrase is going to work as an explanation.

Put it all together and we can convey Paul’s thought in this expanded paraphrase: “The drink in this cup is a means of sealing the new covenant of forgiveness, by virtue of my blood which is there.”

If someone is troubled by the huge differences in wording, we can offer possible ways of accounting for the divergence.<sup>42</sup> But the main thing is to see that despite the differing grammatical connections, Matthew and Paul are saying essentially the same thing. Matthew highlights the substance of the invisible gift by saying, “This is my blood,” and implies the benefit of receiving it. (Since it is Jesus’ covenant-blood poured out for many for forgiveness of sins, the implication is that by drinking the blood we get the benefits of that covenant.) Paul highlights the benefit by saying, “This cup is the new covenant,” and implies that Jesus’ blood is what is in the cup so as to provide that benefit. Different emphases, different grammar, same doctrine.

### What about *reliquiae*?

What if the communicants do not eat and drink all the consecrated bread and wine? What should be done with the *reliquiae*, the consecrated elements remaining when all the communicants have communed?

Lutherans agree that the sacramental union is not permanent and that the consecrated elements are not to be put to some other use in the expectation that Christ’s body and blood will still be united with the bread and wine outside the framework of the uninterrupted sacramental actions commanded by Christ. We will not reserve a consecrated host in a box on the altar or carry it in procession as a focal point for adoration, and we will not keep one at home as a charm. These convictions are summed up in a rule derived from the words of institution and often called the *Nihil*-rule from its first word in Latin: “Nothing has the nature of a sacrament outside the use instituted by Christ” or “outside the divinely instituted action” (FC SD VII, 85). The Formula of Concord immediately adds that here “use” and the equivalent term “action” do not refer primarily to faith or the oral reception of the elements but to the whole sacramental action consisting of consecration, distribution, and reception.

<sup>40</sup> We have here another instance of *metonymy of effect for cause/means* (cf. note 5). Instead of spelling out the idea “means” or “cause” explicitly as the predicate nominative, the author substitutes the word for the effect (“new covenant”) brought about or mediated by the cause. The old Lutherans were generally reluctant to admit figurative usages in the words of institution, particularly when the alleged figure was “empty” (as when “body” is taken to mean “sign of the [absent] body”). But some of them admitted the metonymy in τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν and drew a distinction: One should not admit figurative expressions in a sentence in which subject and predicate identified the *substance* of the sacrament (bread and body, cup and blood), but a figurative use could be admitted in a sentence in which the sacramental *fruit* or *benefit* is predicated of the sacramental substance (“This cup is the *new covenant*”). Cf. the extended discussion in Friedrich Balduin, *Commentarius in omnes epistolas beati apostoli Pauli* (Frankfurt, 1654), question IX on 1Corinthians 11:17-34, pp. 457f.

<sup>41</sup> Taking the phrase adjectivally does not produce false doctrine—the new covenant of forgiveness does in fact exist by virtue of Christ’s blood shed on the cross—but it does miss Paul’s point here. Neither grammar nor word order point to an adjectival use of the phrase. We also do not need an adjectival phrase to tell us which “new covenant” Jesus is talking about, because there is only one new covenant, the one prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and familiar as such to Jesus’ disciples. But we do need an explanation of how “this cup is the new covenant” to make the sentence fully intelligible, and we get one if we take the phrase “by virtue of my blood” adverbially, as Paul intended.

<sup>42</sup> Three come to mind: 1) Perhaps Jesus used various ways of speaking about the cup in the upper room. 2) Perhaps he spoke about the cup one way in the upper room and a different way later on when he gave Paul a special revelation about the sacrament. 3) Perhaps he used only one Aramaic expression when he spoke of the cup in the upper room and when he revealed the institution to Paul; Matthew and Paul use different ways of translating it into Greek, one of them more literal, the other quite free. Common to all these explanations is the Holy Spirit’s inspiration, guaranteeing the reliability of the Greek texts as indications of what Jesus meant. In any case it is not surprising that Luke, the friend and admirer of Paul, would echo Paul’s text in his Gospel.

The rest of the question concerning *reliquiae* is not a matter of dogma but of sound pastoral practice. Pastors will not want to deal with consecrated elements in a way that encourages irreverence toward the sacrament, false doctrine, or improper questions.

Some Lutherans have urged that all the consecrated elements are to be consumed within the celebration at which they were consecrated. Then there are no *reliquiae* to deal with or wonder about. But I do not see how this practice can be demanded as a dogmatic necessity.

It is true that Christ consecrated bread and wine at the original Supper for no other purpose than to give his disciples thereby his body and blood and all the attached benefits. But I don't see that his purpose proves convincingly that all the consecrated elements had to be eaten and drunk at that table. The canonical accounts say nothing about consuming all fragments and draining the cup. The feeding of the five thousand is an instructive parallel with regard to Jesus' purpose. Jesus mentions no other purpose for multiplying the loaves and fish than to feed the people who had gathered that day, and yet there were leftovers in abundance. He could have provided only what was needed, but he provided more. Those leftovers were gathered and saved at Jesus' direction so that nothing would be wasted. The *reliquiae* at the Supper can also be saved, most fittingly for future use in the sacrament, at which they will be the body and blood of Christ by virtue of a new consecration.

Some try to provide an exegetical basis for insisting that all consecrated elements should be consumed within the same celebration. They point to the word "for" (γάρ) in "Drink from it, all of you, *for* this is my blood of the covenant" (Mt 26:28). We are to drink it *because* it is Christ's blood. They mean that Jesus' words "Drink. . . for this is my blood of the covenant" apply also to unconsumed wine at the end of the celebration, when each communicant has already received a share (and the same alleged rationale would then apply to the bread). But that is not the proper way to understand the logic of Christ's words. He doesn't mean, "Drink because the nature of this liquid demands drinking, and so whatever is in the cup must be drunk"; he means, "Drink because my blood is here and I want you to receive it by mouth." That is confirmed by the parts of the text that indicate quantity. Jesus doesn't say, "Drain the cup entirely" or "Drink all of it"; he says, "Drink *from* it," which amounts to "Drink *some* of what is in the cup." If you drink some of it, you receive Christ's blood, and that is what Christ intends here. You don't get a larger, more powerful share of Christ's blood by drinking more of the wine. It is enough to drink some.<sup>43</sup> Christ's actual quantitative concern, so to speak, is of a different kind. He doesn't say that all the cup is to be drunk but that all his communicants are to drink. "Drink from it, all of you" (πάντες). We should not read into the text something Jesus has not said or implied.

### Fellowship at the Lord's Supper

There is not enough time to discuss the whole issue of fellowship in this essay. But often, it seems, a pastor's attempt to explain the practice of closed communion<sup>44</sup> directly from the Lord's Supper texts in the Bible bogs down into something like this: "People who don't believe in the real presence do not discern the Lord's body. They would receive the Supper to their judgment, and we in love want to spare them that." – "But Pastor, what about my relatives who do believe in the real presence? Why can't they commune with us?" Perhaps Paul's comments on the Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 can help us.<sup>45</sup>

We noted earlier that Paul explained "in remembrance of me" by pointing out that whenever Christians commune they proclaim the death of the Lord (1 Co 11:26). Paul does not mean that in a minimalistic way, as

<sup>43</sup> The same applies to the consecrated bread. If you eat some of it, you get the whole body of Christ. Jesus said, "This is my body," not "This is a part of my body" or "some of my flesh." You don't get more of his body by eating more of the bread.

<sup>44</sup> Some dislike the term "closed communion" ("Too negative!"). But "close communion" is no improvement. Either it is an old-fashioned variant spelling for "closed communion," or it is a dogmatically fuzzy term (how close is close enough?) lacking clear biblical or ecclesiastical roots. If we need a new term, would it help to say we practice *confessional communion*?

<sup>45</sup> Paul's comments on the Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 also have an essential role in the whole discussion of fellowship. The matter is discussed at length in Werner Elert's *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, trans. N. E. Nagel (St. Louis: Concordia Publ. House, 1966).

though communicants by their participation proclaimed no more than “The Lord died, the Lord died.” In the same epistle Paul used a comparable expression, “Christ . . . crucified,” to refer to the whole message he preached and taught during the eighteen months when he founded the church in Corinth: “For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified” (1 Co 2:2 NIV). Both phrases, “the death of the Lord” and “Christ crucified,” sum up the plan of salvation culminating in the death and resurrection of Christ and what it all means. As Luther says, “the whole gospel and the article of the Creed, ‘I believe in one holy Christian church . . . the forgiveness of sins,’ are embodied in this sacrament and offered to us through the Word.”<sup>46</sup> At the Supper we proclaim the heart of the gospel explicitly through the words of institution *and the rest of it implicitly*.

Who, then, has the right to muddy that proclamation with an alien message? Why should we allow that to happen by welcoming communicants who by their church membership continue to uphold a compromised confession of the gospel? The Supper was not given to reduce the gospel to a minimum but to summarize and clothe in sacramental form the gospel in its fullness.

A traditional church building has altar, pulpit, and pews in one worship space. That nicely pictures the way the Supper, the sermon, and the people’s confession all belong together as one harmonious witness to the gospel. It is not for us to tear them apart.

Recall again the abuses of the Supper in the Corinthian church. It would be bad under any circumstance to refuse to share food with a hungry Christian brother, but it was especially grievous at the Supper. To cause a brother the physical pain of hunger and attack his dignity at the very time when you are engaged in proclaiming the saving death of the Lord to him is outrageous. But is it any better to cause spiritual harm and attack the gospel we live by? If a sectarian Christian comes to our communion table without renouncing his false confession, he will be continuing his assault upon our confession at the very time he is supposed to be proclaiming to us the death of the Lord for our salvation. It is bad enough that he maintains a false confession against us under any circumstances, but it is especially grievous if he does so at our celebration of the Supper. Why should we permit such a thing? Let him lay down his weapons first and come in peace.

We are glad that there are many millions of believers outside the WELS, and we yearn for the day when all ills will be healed and we can sit down together at the marriage Supper of the Lamb. But where there are still assaults on the gospel, the Supper is no place to ignore them. The integrity of the gospel is at stake.

### **The purpose of the Supper**

Though we have discussed the purpose of the Supper to some extent, let’s finish by bringing the main points together.

Jesus instituted the Supper in order to give us his body and blood and through them the forgiveness of sins for the strengthening of our faith. And “where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation” (SC VI, 6). The Supper’s primary character is that it is a means of grace.

The blessings just mentioned are treasures we possess by faith even before we receive the Supper. By faith in the gospel we possess forgiveness, life, and salvation, and are united with our Savior in his entirety, God and man, soul, body, blood. But Jesus wanted us to receive these gifts also in this special way. He created a sacrament that is to be received by me individually (thus assuring me personally), bodily (thus reminding me that he saves the whole me, soul and body), and repeatedly (thus providing for sacramental reassurance and growth all my life).

How it all happens is a sublime mystery, but we can see the point of much of it. It is mysterious that he gives us his body and his blood separately and that he does so in a unique and unfathomable union with bread and wine, but we see that the gifts are well chosen.

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<sup>46</sup> LC V, 32, cited from the Kolb-Wengert edition of *The Book of Concord*, p. 470.

Both his body and his blood were given into death for us. And yet they are full of life. Christ gave his disciples his living body and living blood that were soon to die. The risen Christ now gives us his living body and living blood that once were given into death for us and now can die no more (Ap X, 4).

The gift of his body has its special purposes. We eat his body with faith in his promises and are united with him thereby; we are his body (1 Co 10:17). The individual assurance I receive at this group meal does not leave me an isolated Christian but reincorporates me as a member of Christ's body, the community of salvation. And being bodily united with Christ, I can apply Ephesians 5:29-30 and see the certainty of Christ's love for me: "After all, no man ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church – for we are members of his body."

The gift of his blood is fitting because of the special connection between forgiveness and blood (Heb 9:22), the blood of Christ prefigured by the blood of thousands of animal sacrifices. We are also reminded of another Old Testament saying that finds its highest application in Christ and helps us understand his gift: "the life of every creature is its blood" (Lev 17:14 NIV).

In summary, this means of grace provides us with gifts and promises assuring us that we are forgiven by God, that we are Christ's dearly loved members, bodily united with him and through him with one another, and that we have his life at work in us. Thus faith is strengthened, and fruits of faith flourish.

On a secondary level, it is an occasion for giving thanks to God. There is in the Supper a "sacrifice of praise" (Ap XXIV, 74). But that does not entitle anyone to turn the Supper into the sacrifice of the Mass, a representation of the body and blood of Christ to God to atone for sin. Christ does in fact make his body and blood present in the Supper, but he does so to give them to us, not to God. He offered them to God on the cross, but he gives them to us in the Supper. His work of atonement was finished on the cross. It cannot be repeated or extended in time, and there is no need for any such action, for his completed sacrifice on the cross is the all-sufficient and unique atonement for sin (Ap XXIV, 22).

The giving of thanks ties in with the great, overarching theme of the glory of God (1 Co 10:31), but that does not elevate thanksgiving to the primary purpose of the Supper. After all, God's glory is revealed much better in his perfect gifts and saving acts than in our feeble response of praise.

The words of institution show clearly that the Supper is primarily a sacrament (God's gracious gift to us) and only secondarily a sacrifice of praise (our response). Thanksgiving is mentioned briefly in the form of a participle (εὐχαριστήσας) so that attention can be focused on the gifts, which are described at length: "This is my body . . . This is my blood . . ." Thus terms like "the (Lord's) Supper" and "(Holy) Communion" and "the sacrament" are more fitting than "the Eucharist" or "the sacrifice" as standard ways of referring to it.

Another secondary purpose of the Supper is that it serves as a mark of the church (AC VII) and a mark of our profession of faith. By participating, we proclaim the gospel and our faith in it to glorify God and to help others. It is wonderful that we can serve God and each other by taking part, but let's always remember that the Supper is first and foremost a gift to us rather than something done by us. As our Augsburg Confession says so well (XIII, Latin text), "Concerning the use of the sacraments [our churches] teach that the sacraments were instituted not only to be marks of profession among men, but more importantly to be signs and testimonies of God's will toward us, intended to stir up and strengthen faith in those who use them."