

An Explanation of The Small Catechism

The Sacrament of the Altar

1. The Nature of the Sacrament of the Altar

What is the Sacrament of the Altar?

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink.

Where is this written?

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night when He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said: "Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me."

In the same way also He took the cup after supper, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you; this cup is the new testament, in My blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

285. What are some other names for the Sacrament of the Altar?

This sacrament is also called the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, Holy Communion, the Breaking of Bread, and the Eucharist.

924 **1 Cor. 11:20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.

925 **1 Cor. 10:21** You cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

926 **1 Cor. 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (NKJV).

927 **Acts 2:42** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

928 **Matt. 26:26** Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is My body."

Note: Eucharist comes from the Greek word for "giving thanks."

286. Who instituted the Sacrament of the Altar?

Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, instituted this sacrament.

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929 **1 Cor. 11:23-24** I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night He was betrayed, took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

287. What does Christ give us in this sacrament?

In this sacrament Christ gives us His own true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

930 **Matt. 26:26, 28** "This is My body.... This is My blood."

288. How does the Bible make it clear that these words of Christ are not picture language?

Christ's words in the Sacrament must be taken at face value especially because

A. these words are the words of a testament, and even an ordinary person's last will and testament may not be changed once that person has died;

931 **1 Cor. 11:25** "This cup is the new covenant [testament] in My blood."

932 **Gal. 3:15** Though it is only a man's covenant [will], yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it (NKJV).

Note: Compare also Heb. 9:15-22.

B. God's Word clearly teaches that in the Sacrament the bread and wine are a communion or participation in the body and blood of Christ;

933 **1 Cor. 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (NKJV).

C. God's Word clearly teaches that those who misuse the Sacrament sin not against bread and wine but against Christ's body and blood.

934 **1 Cor. 11:27, 29** Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

289. What are the visible elements in the Sacrament?

The visible elements are bread and wine.

935 **Matt. 26:26-27** Jesus took bread.... Then He took the cup.

Note: "The fruit of the vine" (Luke 22:18) in the Bible means wine, not grape juice. See also 1 Cor. 11:21.

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290. Do Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament replace the bread and wine, so that the bread and wine are no longer there?

No, bread and wine remain in the Sacrament.

936 **1 Cor. 11:26** Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

291. How then are the bread and wine in the Sacrament the body and blood of Christ?

The bread and wine in the Sacrament are Christ's body and blood by sacramental union. By the power of His word, Christ gives His body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated (blessed) bread and wine.

937 **1 Cor. 10:16** The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (NKJV).

292. Do all communicants receive the body and blood in the Sacrament, whether or not they believe?

Yes, because the Sacrament depends on Christ's word, not on our faith.

938 **1 Cor. 11:27** Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

Note: All communicants should receive both parts of the Sacrament, since Christ said, "Take and eat; this is my body.... Drink from it, all of you" (Matt. 26:26-27).

293. Are the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament sacrificed again to God for the sins of the living and the dead?

No, the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament are the one perfect sacrifice offered to God once and for all on the cross and are now distributed to us in the Sacrament together with all the blessings and benefits which this sacrifice has won for us.

939 **1 Cor. 5:7** Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

940 **Heb. 10:14** By one sacrifice He has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

941 **Heb. 10:18** Where these [sins] have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin.

Note: We speak of the "Sacrament of the Altar" because an altar is a place of sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed His body and blood on the cross for the sins of the world once and for all. In the Sacrament of the Altar, He distributes this same body and blood until the end of time.

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294. What does Christ command when He says, "This do in remembrance of Me"?

Christ commands in these words that His Sacrament be celebrated in the church till the end of time as a living proclamation and distribution of His saving death and all its blessings.

942 **1 Cor. 11:26** Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

295. Why are we to receive the Sacrament often?

We are to receive the Sacrament often because

- A. Christ commands, or urgently invites, us, saying, "This do in remembrance of Me";
- B. His words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins" promise and offer us great blessings; 943 Matt. 11:28 Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will Live you rest
- C. we need the forgiveness of our sins and the strength for a new and holy life.

944 **John 15:5** I am the vine; you are the branches If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.

Note: In the New Testament, the Sacrament wa regular and major feature of congregational worship, not an occasional extra (Acts 2:42; 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20, 33). In Reformation times our churches celebrated the Sacrament "every Sunday and on other festivals" (Apology XXIV 1).

2. The Benefit of the Sacrament of the Altar

What is the benefit of this eating and drinking? These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins," show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

296. What is the benefit offered in this sacrament?

- A. The chief blessing of the Sacrament is the forgiveness of sins which Christ's body and blood have won for us on the cross. (The Lord's Supper is a means of grace.)

945 **Matt. 26:28** This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

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946 **1 Peter 1:18-19** You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

947 **Col. 1:22** He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in His sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

948 **1 John 1:7** The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin.

B. Together with forgiveness, God gives all other blessings as well, that is, "life and salvation."

"We must never regard the sacrament as a harmful thing from which we should flee, but as a pure, wholesome, soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in both soul and body. For where the soul is healed, the body has benefited also" (Large Catechism V 68).

"We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that 'death no longer has dominion over Him' [Rom. 6:9] (Apology X 4).

949 **Rom. 6:8-9** If we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with Him. For we know that since Christ raised from the dead, He cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over Him.

950 **Rom. 8:31-32** If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all-how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things?

C. In the Sacrament Christ gives victory over sin and hell and strength for the new life in Him.

951 **Rom. 8:10** If Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.

952 **1 Peter 2:24** He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by His wounds you have been healed.

D. As Christians partake of this sacrament together, they make a solemn public confession of Christ and of unity in the truth of His Gospel.

953 **1 Cor. 10:17** Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

954 **1 Cor. 11:26** Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Note: See also Heb. 12:22-24.

3. The Power of the Sacrament of the Altar

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things?

Certainly not just eating and drinking do these things, but the words written here: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." These words, along with the

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bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: "forgiveness of sins."

297. How can forgiveness, life, and salvation be obtained through bodily eating and drinking?

Not simply the eating and drinking, but the words of Christ together with His body and blood under the bread and wine are the way through which these blessings are given.

"We do not claim this of bread and wine-since in itself bread is bread-but of that bread and wine which are Christ's body and blood and with which the words are coupled. These and no other, we say, are the treasure through which forgiveness is obtained" (Large Catechism V 28).

Christ's words of promise have put these gifts into the Sacrament, and the believer receives them there through faith.

298. Does everyone who eats and drinks the Sacrament also receive forgiveness, life, and salvation?

Forgiveness, life, and salvation are truly offered to all who eat the Lord's body and blood in the Sacrament, but only through faith can we receive the blessings offered there.

955 **Luke 1:45** Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished.

956 **Luke 11:27-28** "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Note: To "keep" or "obey" God's Word of promise is to believe or trust it. "For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith'" (Rom. 1:17).

957 **1 Cor. 10:3-5** They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert.

Bible narrative: There was a blessing in touching Jesus or being touched by Him, and faith received it (Matt. 9:20-22, 27-29).

4. How to Receive This Sacrament Worthily

Who receives this sacrament worthily?

Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts

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them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.

299. Why is it important to receive the Sacrament worthily?

It is very important because St. Paul clearly teaches: "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before He eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

300. Is it necessary to fast before receiving the Sacrament?

Fasting can be good training for the will, but God does not command particular times, places, and forms for this.

958 **1 Tim. 4:8** Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things.

Note: See also 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

301. When do we receive the Sacrament worthily?

We receive it worthily when we have faith in Christ and His words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

302. When is a person unworthy and unprepared?

A person is unworthy and unprepared when he or she does not believe or doubts Christ's words, since the words "for you" require all hearts to believe.

303. How are we to examine ourselves before receiving the Sacrament?

We are to examine ourselves to see whether

A. we are sorry for our sins;

959 **Ps. 38:18** I confess my iniquity; I am troubled by my sin.

960 **2 Cor. 7:10-11** Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you.

B. we believe in our Savior Jesus Christ and in His words in the Sacrament;

961 **Luke 22:19-20** This is My body given for you . . . This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.

962 **2 Cor. 13:5** Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves.

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C. we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to change our sinful lives.

963 **Eph. 4:22-24** Put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and ... put on the new man which was created according to God, in righteousness and true holiness (NKJV).

As a preparation for the Sacrament, use "Christian Questions with Their Answers."

304. May those who are weak in faith come to the Lord's Table?

Yes, for Christ instituted the Sacrament for the very purpose of strengthening and increasing our faith.

964 **Mark 9:24** 1 do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.

965 **John 6:37** Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away.

305. Who must not be given the Sacrament?

The Sacrament must not be given to the following:

A. Those who are openly ungodly and unrepentant, including those who take part in non-Christian religious worship.

966 **1 Cor. 5:11, 13** You must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. . . . " Expel the wicked man from among you."

967 **1 Cor. 10:20-21** The sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.

B. Those who are unforgiving, refusing to be reconciled. They show thereby that they do not really believe that God forgives them either.

968 **Matt. 6:15** If you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Bible narrative: The unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35).

C. Those of a different confession of faith, since the Lord's Supper is a testimony of the unity of faith.

969 **Acts 2:42** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

970 **1 Cor. 10:17** Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

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971 **1 Cor. 11:26** Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

972 **Rom. 16:17** Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them.

D. Those who are unable to examine themselves, such as infants, people who have not received proper instruction, or the unconscious.

973 **1 Cor. 11:28** A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

Note: Pastors as stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Cor. 4:1) have the greatest responsibility as to who should be admitted to the Sacrament. Some of the responsibility also rests with the congregation and the communicant.

306. What is confirmation?

Confirmation is a public rite of the church preceded by a period of instruction designed to help baptized Christians identify with the life and mission of the Christian community.

Note: Prior to admission to the Lord's Supper, it is necessary to be instructed in the Christian faith (1 Cor. 11:28). The rite of confirmation provides an opportunity for the individual Christian, relying on God's promise given in Holy Baptism, to make a personal public confession of the faith and a lifelong pledge of fidelity to Christ.

974 **Matt. 10:32-33** Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I will disown him before My Father in heaven.

975 **Rev. 2:10** Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

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