

SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR

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 the Bread, and the Eucharist.

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

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.

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

A. Christ's 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;

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;

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.

289. What are the visible elements in the Sacrament?

The visible elements are bread and wine.

Note: "The fruit of the vine" (Luke 22:18) in the Bible means wine, not grape juice.

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

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

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;

C. We need the forgiveness of our sins and the strength for a new and holy life.

Note: In the New Testament, the Sacrament was a 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"

II. 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 the 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.)
- 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 V68*).
"We are talking about the presence of the living Christ, knowing that 'death no longer has dominion over Him'"
- C. In the Sacrament Christ gives victory over sin and hell and strength for the new life in Him.
- 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.

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

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.

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)

Bible narrative: There was a blessing in touching Jesus or being touched by Him, and faith received it.

IV. 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 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 judgments on himself" (2 Cor. 11:27-29)

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 of our sins;
- B. we believe in our Savior Jesus Christ and in His words in the Sacrament;
- C. we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to change our sinful lives.

(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.

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.
- B. Those who are unforgiving, refusing to be reconciled. They show thereby that they do not really believe that God forgives them either.
- C. Those of a different confession of faith, since the Lord's Supper is a testimony of the unity of faith.
- D. Those who are unable to examine themselves, such as infants, people who have not received proper instruction, or the unconscious.

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.