The Nature of the Sacrament of the Altar

Wednesday, February 28 at 11 AM & 7 PM

Third Wednesday of Lent – 2018

During Lent: Wednesday Services at 11 & 7; Meals at 12 & 6

Introduction: Dear friends in Christ: We all fall into sin, *so we are so blessed to have God's forgiveness in Christ!* Since, *at times*, we FEEL like we are NOT forgiven, *God wants to make us SURE through the Lord's Supper* – so that is our focus over the next four Wednesdays. We will answer these four major questions: (1) What is it? (2) What is its benefit? (3) What is its power? (4) Who receives it worthily?

Today, going to page 322, of Luther's Small Catechism, we focus on The **Nature** of the Sacrament of the Altar!

The Central Thought

"Just before He died, Jesus gave Christians a holy meal to eat and drink—His "true body and blood . . . in and under the bread and wine" (LC V 8).

Today's section includes 14 questions: **348-361**.

A Closer Reading of the Small Catechism

348. **Who instituted the Sacrament of the Altar?** Jesus; He did so during the Passover meal in the upper room, prior to being betrayed, arrested, and crucified.

349. **What does Christ give us in this Sacrament?** "…His own true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins."

As recorded in Matthew 26, Jesus said, "…this is My body… this is My blood… for the forgiveness of sins."

350. **Why do we take the words "This is My body" and "This is My blood" at face value?** For these reasons:

   a. Jesus is the Son of God, *through whom the Father created all things*.

   b. Jesus, *at a most serious time*, spoke those words as His last will and testament.

   c. Jesus' words recall God's covenant with Israel, *which was sealed with the blood of a sacrifice*.

   d. God's Word teaches a *definite and true connection* between bread-body, wine-blood. "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor. 10:16 NIV).

   e. "God's Word clearly teaches that those who misuse the Sacrament sin… against the body and blood of Christ." God's Word says, "Whoever… eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27 ESV).

351. **What are the earthly elements Jesus uses in this Sacrament?** Unleavened bread – *since they were eating the Passover meal*, and wine – *since it was springtime and all juice had fermented into wine*.

352. **How then are bread and wine in the Sacrament the body and blood of Christ?** That is a bad question; *bread and wine are NOT the body and blood of Christ*; instead, by "the power of Christ's almighty Word" an actual union is established between bread-body and

wine-blood. We call that a *sacramental union*, which could also be called a *mysterious union*, since the Greek word, μυστήριον – *meaning mystery* – is also the root of our English word, sacrament.

353. **Do all communicants receive the body and blood in the Sacrament, whether or not they believe?** Yes; it is the **Word of Christ** that makes His body and blood present – **not faith**, *so all receive the body and blood whether they believe or not*.

354. **What does Christ command when He says, "This do in remembrance of Me"?** He "commands… that this Sacrament be administered in His Church until the Last Day." By doing so, we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Connections and Applications

355. **Why is this Sacrament called the Sacrament of the Altar?** "…because an altar is a place of sacrifice" and – *according to God's plan* – Jesus allowed Himself to be sacrificed to take away the sin of the world! Our altar and altar Crucifix are visual reminders of Jesus' sacrifice; the altar also functions as a table from which we receive.

356. **Why are Jesus' words always spoken over the bread and the wine by the pastor?** It is by the **power of Jesus** – *not of the pastor* – that His very body and blood are sacramentally united with the bread and wine.

357. **Are communicants to receive both the body and the blood of Christ in the Sacrament?** Yes; Jesus said, "Take, eat; this is My body…. Drink of it, all of you."

358. **How often are we to receive the Sacrament?** We might ask, "How often do we sin?" Since we *sin often*,

Christ invites us to *receive often* for forgiveness and assurance! These are additional reasons:

   a. In the Early Church "the Sacrament was a regular and major feature of congregational worship, not an occasional extra."

   b. "...in Reformation times *[500 years ago]* our church celebrated the Sacrament 'every Lord's Day and on the other festivals'" (Ap XXIV 1).

359. **Do the bread and wine merely symbolize the body and blood of Christ?** No. "Jesus' own words clearly identify the bread as His body and the wine as His blood" (The four locations of the words of institution: Mt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:23-25).

360. **Do Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament replace the bread and wine, so that the bread and wine only appear to be there?** No. A sacramental union is formed between body and bread, wine and blood (1Co 10:16). The Roman Catholic Church *wrongly* teaches that the bread and wine BECOME the body and blood; many other church bodies *wrongly* teach that the bread and wine only represent Jesus' body and blood.

361. **Are the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament sacrificed again to God for the sins of the living and the dead?** No; Jesus' sacrifice was sufficient and finished once for all. God's Word says that "...Christ... died for sins once for all, *the* just for *the* unjust, in order that He might bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18 NAS).

Conclusion: Let us pray: "Lord Jesus Christ..." (Luther's Small Catechism Explanation, 330).

CONNECT WITH US ➔ Website: www.BethlehemLutheranChurchParma.com
Podcast: Benefit from the Bible | Facebook: Bethlehem Lutheran Church Parma
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 7500 State Road, Parma, Ohio 44134, 440-845-2230
Page **4** of **4**