

HOLY COMMUNION: ITS NATURE AND BENEFITS

(By Pastor C. Hoff)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor C. Hoff was born on 30th October, 1886, at Gomersal, South Australia. He studied at Concordia College and later Concordia Seminary, Adelaide, from 1905 to 1912. He first served the Swan Reach Parish, South Australia from 1913 to 1920. For 10 years (1920-1930) Pastor Hoff served on the mission field, at Koonibba, S.A. Later he was pastor for 24 years at Emu Downs (1930-1954). He completed his service to the Lord as an assistant migrant pastor from 1954 until his death in 1971.

In spiritual matters there is only one fountain of truth and knowledge, and that is the Word of God. We must search it if we want to know the truth. We must study it if we would have knowledge. There is no other source which can give us understanding of things concerning God and eternal life. Or should we rely on human wisdom and learning? Even the best and holiest of men are subject to error. The most far-seeing have a limited horizon and cannot penetrate into the mysteries of God. The human mind is circumscribed and cannot reach beyond mundane things.

It is true there is a natural knowledge of God. The whole creation tells us there must be a Maker, a God, a higher Being, Who governs and controls all things. But if we are to know who this God is, the Lord Himself must make this known to us. And He has done so. He has revealed Himself to us in His holy Word which He gave to His children by inspiration. This Word coming direct from the holy God is reliable and can be trusted in all its statements. It is our duty, therefore, to accept it in its entirety, even though the thoughts expressed in its sacred pages are at times beyond our understanding. There is one thing, however, which is clear to us, and that is that God loves us, wayward sinners though we be.

The truth of God's love runs like a golden thread through the pages of the Bible. By means of this Word the Lord offers us His grace; He shows us that the return to Him is made possible, because His love found a way to save us. The purpose of the Bible, therefore, is to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. For that reason we call the Word of God a Means of Grace.

By the term "Means of Grace" we mean that God uses something whereby He offers and transmits His grace to man. He employs some means by which it is made clear to us that God planned our salvation from sin, and that in Jesus Christ He has brought that plan to fruition. Through this same means, the Holy Ghost being inseparably connected with it, we are placed by faith in possession of the heavenly, eternal gifts which the Saviour procured for us. Through this means or agency God conveys or carries as in a vehicle the riches of heaven to sinful man. It is, therefore, not only the medium through which we become acquainted with God's love, but which actually makes us possessors of it, because of its inherent, effective power to change the human heart, to work repentance and faith, and also to nourish and strengthen that faith.

Sacraments

Besides, or rather, in the Word of God the Lord has given us also other Means of Grace, namely, the Sacraments, Baptism and Holy Communion. All Means of Grace have a common purpose: They offer God's grace to sinners; they have effective power to work and strengthen faith in the forgiveness of sins. The Word of God is sometimes called the audible Means of Grace, because God there operates by words, be they heard or

read. The Sacraments, however, are called the Visible Word, because the Lord employs certain outward signs through which He conveys His spiritual gifts.

In Holy Baptism it is water, and in the Communion bread and wine, connected with the Word, which are the vehicles of God's grace. Baptism is the washing of regeneration, while Holy Communion has the purpose of strengthening the faith, particularly faith in the forgiveness of sins. We who are born again are to grow in faith. For that reason we must not neglect to make frequent use of the Sacrament of the Altar.

It will be readily conceded that it is worth while periodically to review what the Bible teaches concerning the Sacrament of the Altar. Indeed, we are sure it is profitable for us all to hear once more the Scriptural teaching concerning the Lord's Supper. The subject matter for this essay is, therefore,

I. THE NATURE OF HOLY COMMUNION.

When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush, He said to him, "Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground... And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God" (Ex.3:5,6). Moses stood with awe and reverence in the presence of God. That also is the attitude we take when we approach the Lord in prayer and in hearing His Word, be it in public or private devotion. Moreover, the tabernacle, and later the temple, had not only the Holy Place, but also the Holy of Holies in which was the Mercy Seat of God. In a similar manner we could call the Holy Communion the Holy of Holies of the Christian Church, because our Lord Jesus there comes to us in a particularly intimate way. It behooves us, therefore, also to study the teaching of the Sacrament in deepest reverence.

The Sacrament of the Altar is the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself. In these words Luther sums up what the Scriptures teach concerning this Sacrament. This Sacrament is instituted by Christ Himself. The Lord celebrated the Passover with His disciples the same night in which He was betrayed. At the completion of the meal, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, brake it, and gave it to His disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My Body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of me." Then He also took the cup, gave thanks, gave it to them, saying, "Drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." With these words the Lord instituted the Sacrament which was for ever to be celebrated in His Church.

Words of Institution

We find the words of institution four times in the Bible. They are recorded by the evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and by the apostle Paul. Although recorded by four different writers it is remarkable that all four use practically identical words and expressions.

St. Matthew writes (26:26-28), "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My Body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My Blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

St. Mark writes (14:22-24), "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave it to them, and said, Take, eat, this is My Body. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, This is My Blood of the new testament, which is shed for many."

St. Luke writes (22:19,20), "And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My Body which is given for you, this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you."

St. Paul writes (1 Cor.11:23-25), "The Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, And when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is My Body, which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My Blood, this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me."

These passages tell us what Jesus did on that memorable occasion. They record the very words He used and reveal to us the meaning and the purpose of this sacred rite. The words themselves are clear and straightforward. And yet, some of the bitterest controversies have raged round them.

Controversies

There is no reason why there should be a dispute about these words, if people accepted them as they stand. We believe that when Christ, in giving the bread and the wine, says, "This is My Body...; This is My Blood," He means this and nothing else, namely, that together with the bread He gives us His true Body, and together with the wine He gives us His true Blood. We really need bring no further proof. It is rather the duty of those who do not accept the words of Christ as they stand to prove, if they can, that Jesus says one thing and means another. But since there is a difference of opinion concerning these words we shall examine all the arguments for and against the real presence of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Sacrament.

Different Teachings

There are three distinct views regarding Holy Communion, the Roman Catholic teaching of Transubstantiation; the Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence; and the Reformed teaching of a mere Representation and the consequent denial of the Real Presence. We shall first briefly set forth the doctrine of the Real Presence as taught in our Church, and later elaborate this more fully when refuting the false, unbiblical views of the Catholic and Reformed Churches.

Word of God: Source of Knowledge

In determining any Christian doctrine, we must naturally go to the Bible for information and proof. Right here let us repeat what was said in the introduction, "It is our duty to accept the Word of God in its entirety, even though the thoughts expressed in its sacred pages are at times beyond our understanding." Reason can never be a safe guide in matters of religion and faith. We cannot fathom the mind and wisdom of God. The Lord Himself says (Is.55:9), "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." We must bow before the holy God, for He is a consuming fire (Deut.4:24). Habakkuk gives an indication how we should approach the Lord and His house. He says (Hab.2:20), "The Lord is in His holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before Him." The Lord is in our midst whenever we hear His Word for our instruction. The hymn writer expresses this most beautifully:

God Himself is present,
Let us now adore Him,
And with awe appear before Him.
God is in His temple,
All within keep silence,
Prostrate lie in deepest reverence. (ALHB 5, v.1)

We repeat and emphasize the fact, that the Word of the holy, and all-wise God must be accepted without questioning. Our reason must keep silence, because in the doctrine of the Holy Communion we deal with a divine mystery.

We believe that in, with, and under the bread Christ gives us His true Body; and that in, with, and under the wine He gives us His true Blood. Our mind cannot grasp how this can be possible, but as Christians we know that with God nothing is impossible. The words, "This is My Body which is given for you," tell us that Christ gives us together with the bread that Body which suffered for us on the cross. Likewise the words, "This

cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you," make us certain that Christ gives us together with the wine that Blood which was shed for us on Calvary.

Sacramental Union

We believe that there is a sacramental union between the bread and the Body of Christ, and the wine and the Blood of Christ, so that while we receive the bread and the wine with the mouth of the Body we at the same time receive the Body and Blood of Christ with the mouth of the Body. The bread and wine in the Holy Communion we eat and drink in a natural manner, while the Body and Blood are received in a supernatural manner. Consequently, we believe that all communicants, not only those who believe, but also those who do not believe, receive the Body and Blood of Christ. The Formula of Concord expresses this in these words (Form.Conc.Epit.VII,Trig.,p.813,7), "We believe, teach, and confess that not only the true believers (in Christ) and the worthy, but also the unworthy and unbelievers, receive the true Body and Blood of Christ; however, not for life and consolation, but for judgement and condemnation, if they are not converted and do not repent, 1 Cor.11:27,29." St. Paul writes in the passage quoted, "Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord... For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body." These words clearly show that the Lord's Body and Blood are intimately connected with the bread and wine. St. Paul writes further (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?" When the apostles celebrated the Lord's Supper, they had with the bread and wine the Body and Blood of Christ. This is here clearly expressed. But we know that the apostles could not judge the hearts of the participants, to see whether they all were worthy. Yet Paul says that with the consecrated bread is the Body of Christ. All the communicants, therefore, the worthy and the unworthy, receive the same: bread and wine, and the Body and Blood of the Lord. This is the biblical, Lutheran doctrine.

Transubstantiation

Let us now see what errors are taught regarding the Sacrament. Roman Catholics teach Transubstantiation. They say that when the priest blesses or consecrates the elements the bread is changed into the Body of Christ, and the wine is changed into the Blood of Christ. All that remains of the bread and wine is "taste, smell, shape, colour" (Catholic Belief, p.70). Let us quote from their own Catechism (p.46):

Q. What is the Blessed Eucharist?

A. The Blessed Eucharist is the sacrament of the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine.

Q. What do you mean by the appearances of bread and wine?

A. By the appearances of bread and wine I mean the taste, colour, and form of bread and wine, which still remain after the substance of the bread and wine has been changed into the Body and Blood of Christ.

Q. Are both the Body and Blood of Christ under the appearance of bread and under the appearance of wine?

A. We believe that Christ, true God and true Man, is whole and entire, under the appearance of either bread or wine.

The Formula of Concord sums their teaching up in the following words (Form.Conc.VII, Trig., p.1009), "The consecrated or blessed bread and wine in the Holy Supper lose entirely their substance and essence, and are changed into the substance of the Body and Blood of Christ in such a way that only the mere form of bread and wine is left,... under which form of the bread, which nevertheless is bread no longer, but according to their

assertion has lost its natural essence, the Body of Christ is present even apart from the administration of the Holy Supper, when the bread is enclosed in the pyx or is carried about for display and adoration."

But the words of St. Paul show only too clearly that this is wrong. In writing of the Lord's Supper he says, "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?" (1 Cor.10:16). Here Paul speaks of the communion of the Body with the bread. Together with the bread is the Body of Christ. Further he writes (1 Cor.11:26,27), "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord," etc. In this passage it is distinctly stated that the communicants eat bread. Therefore we must conclude that there is no change of substance. The words of Christ also in no way indicate that a change takes place.

Withholding of the Cup

The Catholic Church withholds the cup from the people and gives them only the bread. This practice is based on the false teaching of Transubstantiation. They argue: Since the bread has been changed into the Body of Christ it is sufficient to receive the Body only, because the Body naturally contains Blood. Besides, they teach, as we have seen above, that Christ is whole and entire under the appearance of either bread or wine. Only the priest takes the cup. To refute this error, we refer to the words of institution. Our Lord gave both, bread and wine, to the disciples. In Mark 14:23 it is expressly stated, "And they all drank of it." It is vain to advance the argument that the disciples really were the first priests, and that, therefore, as priests it was right for them to take the cup. We know that the early Christian Church used both parts according to Christ's institution. The apostle Paul wrote the First Epistle to the Corinthians at least twenty-five years after the first celebration of the Lord's Supper. In that epistle he speaks in detail about the Sacrament and repeatedly refers not only to eating the bread, but also to drinking the cup. The Church of the apostles knew the Sacrament only as Jesus Christ had instituted it. It knew nothing of withholding the cup. As a matter of fact, the doctrine of Transubstantiation was declared a dogma of the Roman Church only in the year 1215 at a Lateran Council.

Reservation and Adoration

Also the idea of the reservation and the adoration of the host is foreign to the institution of Christ. By reservation is meant that portions of the host after celebration are reserved for the purpose of permitting the sick to commune in their houses. The underlying thought is that once the bread is blessed or consecrated it is and remains the Body of Christ. Since, however, there is no change of substance, but a sacramental union, it follows that the Body of Christ is present only during the celebration of the Lord's Supper. We must, therefore, also regard the elevation of the host and carrying it in processions as antichristian. So also is the teaching that Christ is offered up in a bloodless sacrifice whenever Holy Communion or Mass is celebrated. In the epistle to the Hebrews it is stated (Heb.10:14,18), "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified... Now where remission of these (sins and iniquities) is, there is no more offering for sin."

Reformed Doctrine

Perhaps the greatest danger for weak Lutherans is the Reformed view of the Lord's Supper, especially since it appeals to human reason and does not require faith to be subject to the Word of God. In treating of the errors of the Reformed Churches we shall be obliged to quote some of the texts used against the Catholic doctrine. Whereas the Catholics teach that only the Body and Blood of Christ are present after the consecration, the Reformed believe that only bread and wine are there. We, however, believe that together with the bread the true Body of Christ is given and received, and that with the wine His true Blood is given and received.

In denying the Real Presence the Reformed say that the words of Christ, "This is My Body,... This is My Blood," must not be taken in their literal, real meaning, but in a figurative sense. They say, How could Jesus give His disciples His Body with the bread while He was there present with them? How can Christ give us His Body now since He is ascended into heaven? - They are governed by their reason. But human reason

cannot be a reliable guide in matters of faith. Where is there a Bible Christian who doubts that with God nothing is impossible? He who created the world out of nothing, He who fed the multitude with five loaves and two fishes, He who raised Lazarus from the dead, yes, He who is the eternal God and yet was born of a virgin and, finally, after His death burst the bonds of the grave and of death, has He not the power to give His Body and Blood under the bread and wine? Who will deny it?

Or is there a possibility that we have read something into Christ's words of institution which is not there at all? The words of Christ read, "Take, eat; this is My Body which is given for you;... Drink ye all of it, this cup is the new testament in My Blood." These words are plain, "This is My Body,... this is My Blood." Here is no figure of speech. And yet, the Reformed teach that when Christ says, "This is My Body," He really means to say, This "represents," this "signifies," this "is a sign of" My Body. Why, then, did not Christ say so at the first Holy Supper?

Usage of Language

Is the usage of language perhaps in favour of the Reformed? It is true, there are many figures of speech in the Bible. For instance, in the parable of the Sower, Christ says, "The seed is the Word of God." To the superficial reader it may seem that if we take the words "the seed is the Word of God" in a figurative sense then we are justified in saying that the words, "This is My Body," may also be taken as a figure of speech, a picture in words. But that is wrong. The whole parable of the Sower is a picture in words. By means of this picture Christ teaches a divine truth. But there is no indication whatever that Christ used a figure of speech at the institution of the Sacrament.

To say that "is" stands for "signifies" is wrong. The Reformed certainly quoted certain words of Christ in order to substantiate this false notion. They mentioned that Christ said of Himself (John 10:9), "I am the Door," (John 15:5), "I am the Vine." But even in these passages "am" does not stand for "signify." There is certainly figurative language in these expressions. But "is" remains "is" in its simple meaning. Christ is the Door. It is true, not a door leading into a house, but the Door leading to heaven. Through Him alone, as through a door, can we enter into the presence of the heavenly Father. Likewise Jesus is the Vine. We cling to Him as the branches and draw our spiritual nourishment from Him. The figurative language is here contained in the words "Door" and "Vine." These words take on a new meaning.

Figurative language in the words of institution cannot be admitted because of the very occasion. Here is the institution of a new ordinance, an ordinance which is a bequest, a legacy, to the New Testament Church for all times. The Church was to administer this ordinance, and, therefore, the instructions concerning it had to be clear. The words of institution constitute the doctrine. Remove or change these words, and there is no doctrine left. It should not be necessary to say that every Christian doctrine must be expressly taught in the Bible. The only passages of Scripture dealing with the doctrine of the Sacrament are the four passages quoted above and the statement in 1 Cor.10. They all speak with one voice, the voice of Christ who says, "This is My Body,... this is My Blood."

John 6

The opponents of the Real Presence have gone so far as to say that, since the words of institution are under dispute, we must look elsewhere for the solution. They quote John 6 to prove their case and say, It is clearly shown that Christ is to be received spiritually, in faith. John 6:51 Jesus says, "I am the Living Bread which came down from heaven, if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever, and the Bread that I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." But first of all let us state that the Lord was not speaking of the Holy Supper in this connection. In fact, it was not instituted until some time later. Besides, the whole context proves that Jesus here speaks of receiving Him in true faith. Let us give the historical setting, Jesus had miraculously fed the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. The multitude came again to Jesus the next day. He told them that they sought Him, because they did eat of the loaves and were filled. He then proceeded to speak to them of spiritual food which He alone could supply. He stressed its importance and said (v.53), "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye

have no life in you." It is evident that the Lord does not refer to the Holy Communion, because it was not instituted at that time. If the Holy Communion were here referred to, then all those who do not partake of it, our young children included, would be lost for ever, because Jesus says, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink His Blood, ye have no life in you." Christ here rather stresses the fact that He is the Bread of life that through Him we have life eternal.

It is wrong to link John 6 with the words of institution and to say that in the Sacrament there is only a spiritual eating as stated in John 6, that our faith trusts the absent Christ and feeds on Him. But this is what the Reformed teach. And they say, How can Christ give His Body which is in heaven? But does not Scripture speak of a personal union in Christ, a union of the divine and the human nature in one person? When Jesus asked the disciples, "Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am?" Peter finally replied, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Further Paul wrote to the Colossians concerning Jesus (Col.2:9), "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Jesus, by virtue of being God and Man in one person, can assuredly give His Body and Blood in the Holy Communion. And He does! In the discourse with Nicodemus Jesus said (John 3:13), "No man hath ascended up to heaven, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

There are more texts which we could quote, but let these suffice. They all reject the idea that it is impossible for Christ to give His real Body and His real Blood under the consecrated bread and wine. We firmly believe the words of Christ, "This is My Body,... This is My Blood." We are not to ask how Jesus does it, but thankfully to accept in simple faith what He offers to us.

Importance of the Real Presence

Someone may ask, Is it really so important to believe in the Real Presence? Is it not sufficient, if we approach the Lord's Table in the faith that Christ died for us, that in the Sacrament we remember His sacrifice for our sin? No, this is not sufficient. The Sacrament of the Altar is the true Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself. That is what we as a Church confess. Here the essentials are given. But when the essentials, or some of them, are removed, there is no Sacrament. Therefore those who do not administer it according to Christ's institution, or give His words a different meaning, have not the Lord's Supper at all. When the Catholics mutilate the Sacrament, teach that the bread is changed into the Body of Christ, and withhold from the people the cup, they have not the same Sacrament which Christ instituted. They have something altogether different. Similarly, when others in effect say, Christ does not mean what He says, He cannot and does not give us His true Body and Blood, then again, they have something different, but not the Sacrament of the Lord.

Closed Communion

The facts stated above will make it clear that a Lutheran cannot partake of Holy Communion in a Church which has a false doctrine concerning this Sacrament. He would not get there what he expects, namely, the true Body and Blood of the Lord given and shed for the remission of his sins. The same words and ceremonies may be employed in those churches, but they are emptied of their contents. The kernel is removed, the empty shell remains.

Unity of Faith

There is another reason why we cannot partake of Holy Communion in another denomination. The Holy Supper is a token and testimony of the unity of faith. Churches which differ in points of doctrine can have no fellowship service without denying the truth, or at least, their confession. When we join other denominations in their religious exercises, we thereby testify that we are in harmony with them. When, however, we know that they harbour some false teaching, and yet we join them, we act dishonestly, because outwardly we make others believe that their faith is our faith, whereas in reality we hold different opinions. Above all, it is disloyal to Christ, the Lord of the Church, when, in order to please men, we show that the differences do not matter. We condone error and deny the truth. It is reprehensible in the highest degree when

we join other denominations in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, knowing that they have a false doctrine regarding it.

We practise what is known as closed Communion, that is, communicants partake of Holy Communion only in their own church. We dare not commune with other Confessions, nor dare we admit others to our Lord's Table. This was the general practice in all churches, but in our unionistic age many churches have broken down all barriers and practise open Communion.

In open Communion the instruction and injunction of the Lord given through the apostle Paul cannot be regarded. St. Paul writes (1 Cor.11:27-29, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body." No one should approach the Lord's Table unworthily. The church has a duty to see to it that only worthy communicants are admitted. While it is not always possible to exclude unworthy communicants, because, after all, we cannot judge the heart, yet it cannot be excused when such people as do not accept the words of Christ as they read are admitted. They do not discern the Lord's Body and, therefore, would eat and drink damnation to themselves. We must prevent that as far as our celebration of the Lord's Supper is concerned. Only he is truly worthy who has faith in the words of Christ. As we, therefore, do not admit others to communion, so likewise we do not commune with others.

Communing with Other Denominations

You will probably agree with this in general. But perhaps you may ask, "What is a person to do when he is far away from his own church and feels a longing for the Holy Communion and its consolation? Would it not be permissible under special circumstances to receive the Sacrament from others? Would not such a person, believing in the Real Presence, because of his own personal faith after all receive the true Body and Blood of the Lord? He hears the words there, 'This is My Body,... this is My Blood,' his faith clings to these words." To this we reply, that it is not the personal faith of the individual which makes the Supper the Lord's Supper. Those churches have not the intention at all to celebrate the Sacrament in the understanding that Christ means what He says. Their Communion does not give, and is not intended to give, the true Body and Blood of the Lord under the consecrated bread and wine. The Formula of Concord has this to say (VII.74,75. Trig., p.999), "Not the word or work of any man produces the true presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Supper, whether it be the merit or recitation of the minister, or the eating and drinking or faith of the communicants; but all this should be ascribed alone to the power of Almighty God and the Word, Institution, and ordination of our Lord Jesus Christ." When the members of a congregation come together to celebrate the Supper, they offer to the individual participant what they (the congregation) believe the Supper to be. When those who deny the real presence administer the sacred rite, they intentionally offer only bread and wine and would deny it stoutly that you can there receive the Lord's Body and Blood. Their doctrine has removed the Body and Blood of Christ. How, then, can you receive the true Sacrament there? No, under no circumstances can a Lutheran partake of Holy Communion in the Reformed Church.

However, the Lord's Supper is to us not merely a Supper of Christian fellowship, but it is a special Means of Grace through which is offered and conveyed to the believers the grace which Christ has merited. This is the main purpose of the Sacrament.

II. BENEFITS OF THE SACRAMENT.

Christ our Lord left His disciples in no doubt regarding the value and purpose of the Sacrament of the Altar. The words of institution clearly show the benefit of the Holy Supper. When Christ says, "Take, eat; this is My Body," He adds immediately, "Which is given for you." To the words, "Drink ye all of it," He adds, "This cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins." His Body and Blood are given and shed for us for the forgiveness of sins. Luther answers the question, "What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?" by saying, "That is shown us by these words, Given, and shed for you for the

remission of sins; namely, 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."

Let us understand this clearly. Christ gives the bread He had blessed to His disciples and says, "Take, eat; this is My Body, which is given for you." The Body of Christ is given into death for us, that means, Christ died for our benefit. The same truth is expressed when Christ gives the cup and tells His disciples that here is His Blood of the new testament, His Blood which is shed for us for the remission of sins. Through the death of His Body, through the shedding of His Blood, we are to receive the forgiveness of sins.

Seal of Forgiveness

This same truth, however, is made known to us also in the Gospel which has the power to create living faith in our hearts, faith in the forgiveness of sins through the merits of Christ. Why, then, should it be necessary and of such importance that we partake of Holy Communion? We receive forgiveness of sins also without it. In the first place, we reply that Christ our Lord knew what He was doing and had a definite purpose in doing it. He knows how weak we are in faith, that it is so hard for us to believe the Lord Whom we do not see. He therefore wants to strengthen that faith through the Sacrament, the visible Word, as it has been called. He gives for that purpose in the Sacrament a pledge, or as our Catechism expresses it, "To everyone who eats and drinks, Christ here (in the Sacrament) gives, as a seal of the remission of sins, that same Body and Blood wherewith He, upon a cross, earned and procured the forgiveness of sins." The Apology of the Augsburg Confession voices the same truth as follows (XXV, XII, 49, Trig., p.401), "Men are taught concerning the true use of the Sacrament that it was instituted for the purpose of being a seal and testimony of the free remission of sins, and that, accordingly, it ought to admonish alarmed consciences to be truly confident and believe that their sins are freely remitted."

It is certainly true that free and full forgiveness is offered and given through the Gospel. But on account of our weak nature God deals with us in a particular manner in the Sacrament. Someone has put it this way (Eckh. I., p.46), "The preaching (of the Word) is more general and addresses the multitude, in the Sacrament of the Altar the Lord deals direct with the individual." Herein lies a great blessing. To each communicant God speaks individually and says, "Given for you,... Shed for you." Each person is singled out and given the particular assurance that Christ died for the forgiveness of his sins. By this individual act the faith is strengthened. A Christian is at times beset with temptations and doubts. He should then seek strength in the Sacrament. The comforting words of Jesus will reassure him, especially as they are connected with the visible signs, bread and wine, under which the Lord gives him that Body which was given into death, and that Blood which was shed for the remission of sins.

New Testament in My Blood

We must refer to the words of Christ, "This cup is the new testament in My Blood." What is meant by the new testament? New testament means new covenant. It is the covenant of grace which God has made with us. That covenant is sealed with the Blood of Christ. It is valid. O what glorious truth! Whoever receives the Sacrament in faith knows that God has made a covenant with him, has promised the sinner His grace, and has attested and signed this agreement with the Blood of Christ. As surely as the Lord conveys to the sinner the covenant Blood in the cup, so surely are grace and pardon extended to him. The truth and the assurance are the same eternal truth as that of the Gospel, only applied in a most impressive and personal manner.

Holiness of Life

The faith of a Christian being strengthened through the worthy reception of the Holy Communion, it follows that there must be in consequence also an advance, a furtherance in holiness of life. Where there is faith, there is spiritual life. The very purpose of the Holy Communion presupposes this. The Christian partakes of the Holy Communion to have the forgiveness of sins assured to him. He requires this assurance of the forgiveness, because he knows that sins separate him from his God and rob him of his peace. It is therefore natural that he will strive to avoid falling into the same sins, strive to lead a holy life, so that sin may not again

separate him from his God. His gratitude to God for having purified his soul will impel him now to please the Lord with all the new strength God has given him through the Sacrament. He has come in close contact and union with his Lord through receiving the Body and Blood of Christ. Being united with Christ he will live with Him and for Him. He will follow Jesus not only in his confession of faith, but also by taking the example of the Saviour for his guide in a truly Christian life.

Through Christ all believers are members of one spiritual Body. As such they will show love and consideration to one another. But we know that also the Christians still have the old Adam who prompts them to selfishness, strife, and bitterness. These human weaknesses can be brought more under control when Christians frequently seek new strength in the Holy Communion. When they consider what great love Jesus showed to them in giving His life for them, they will see the pettiness of their behaviour and, therefore, they will be inclined more readily to forgive others and to live in love, peace, and harmony with their fellow-men. Their faith which is strengthened through the Holy Communion will help them to practise these Christian virtues.

In Remembrance

No doubt, many a Christian after partaking of the Lord's Supper resolved to be a better Christian henceforth. But before long he again became careless and his spiritual life was again of a lower standard. How can such a condition be remedied? The obvious remedy is to partake of the Holy Communion more frequently. Our spiritual life needs constant nourishment through the Word and the Sacrament. Christ wants us to come to Him often for that special grace and strength offered to us in the Sacrament. His words surely indicate that, the words: This do, as oft as ye do it, in remembrance of Me. We should receive His Body and Blood in remembrance of Him. A frequent use of the Sacrament is required.

Who would deny that we should often remember the Lord and His death for our sins? The Sacrament as a memorial of Christ's death reminds us what terrible price was required to free us from the guilt and punishment of sin. Remembering Christ's death, remembering that through His death alone we find peace with God, our love to the Saviour is increased and our hatred of sin becomes greater. The frequent attendance at the Lord's Table, the frequent remembrance of His death is for a sincere Christian a spiritual necessity. He wants to be strengthened in his faith. He desires to mend his sinful life, to strive after sanctification, and to overcome doubts and temptations. The frequent use of this wonderful Means of Grace, the Holy Communion, will supply all his spiritual needs.

Little Spiritual Life

Sometimes the complaint is made that there is little spiritual life in some Christian congregations. Perhaps the reason for this is that some members do not commune often enough. It seems that there are some who make it a rule to come to the Lord's Table but once a year. This is a sad state of affairs. It shows that there is no desire for the grace which Christ so freely offers. Under such conditions no spiritual growth can be expected. Some people maintain that statistics of attendance are a barometer giving an approximately correct reading of the spiritual condition of a community. Let us employ another picture. When a physician feels the pulse of a patient and finds that the pulse-beat is very low, he knows that there is not much life left. And when the pulse stops beating altogether, death has set in. The conclusion to be drawn from this illustration is apparent.

The fact that we know that some people neglect the blessing of Holy Communion will not in itself bring about a change. We must do something in the matter. But what? Our congregations must be instructed in the doctrine and the purpose of the Holy Communion. The love of Christ must be preached to them, so that they clearly comprehend the Lord's great consideration for the Church, that before His death He gave His followers a very special Means of Grace, that they may constantly remember His death for their sins. The individual members must be approached and asked why they neglect this blessed Sacrament. Not only the pastor has the duty to do this, but the members also. It can be very effective when the members show concern for the spiritual life of fellow-members and speak to them about attending the Holy Communion more frequently. When thus

pastor and congregation work together to the glory of God, the spiritual life of the congregation will show a quickening of the pulse-beat and much spiritual blessing will be showered upon the whole congregation.

Conclusion

We thank the Lord that He has given us the Means of Grace, His Word and the Sacraments. Let us especially remember the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ and make frequent use of it. Our faith must ever accept the words of Christ, even though human reason cannot always fathom them. Thy mysteries of God are too deep for us. But as true Bible Christians we rejoice in the mysterious, sacramental presence of the true Body and Blood of the Lord. This is our pledge and seal of God's love and forgiveness of our sins. May this essay be some little help in stimulating us to greater faith and a more frequent use of the Sacrament of the Altar, to the glory of God and to our eternal welfare!