

Luther and the Lord's Supper

- I. The overall significance of the Lord's Supper
- A. "...preaching ought to be nothing but an explanation of the words of Christ, when He instituted the mass and said, 'This is my body, this is my blood,' etc. What is the whole gospel but an explanation of this testament? Christ has gathered up the whole gospel in a short summary with the words of this testament or sacrament" (*Treatise on the New Testament*, 1520).
- B. "Everything depends on these words. Every Christian should and must know them and hold them fast. He must never let anyone take them away from him by any other kind of teaching, even though it were an angel from heaven. They are words of life and salvation, so that whoever believes in them has all his sins forgiven through faith; he is a child of life and has overcome death and hell. Language cannot express how great and mighty these words are, for **they are the sum and substance of the whole gospel**" (*Adoration of the Sacrament*, 1523).
- II. Luther's "First Front" was against whom?

The three "captivities" of the Sacrament:

- A. Withholding the cup from the laity – mandated at the Council of Constance in 1415: "Certain people, in some parts of the world, have rashly dared to assert that the Christian people ought to receive the holy sacrament of the Eucharist under the species of both bread and wine. They communicate the laity everywhere not only under the species of bread but also under that of wine ... although this sacrament was received by the faithful under both species in the early Church, nevertheless later it was received under both species only by those confecting it, and by the laity only under the species of bread. Therefore, since this custom was introduced for good reasons by the Church and holy Fathers and has been observed for a very long time, it should be held as a law that nobody may repudiate or alter at will without the Church's permission. To say that the observance of this custom or law is sacrilegious or illicit must be regarded as erroneous. Those who stubbornly assert the opposite of the aforesaid are to be confined as heretics."

Luther: "the tyranny of Rome has wrested" the "completeness" of the sacrament "from us" (*Babylonian Captivity*, 1520).

"We do not hold that only one kind of the Sacrament is to be given...giving the one kind only is not the entire ordinance and institution commanded by Christ. We especially condemn and in God's name curse those who not only refuse to give both kinds but also quite tyrannically prohibit, condemn, and blaspheme giving both kinds as heresy. In doing so, they exalt themselves against and above Christ, our Lord and God" (SA III, 6).

B. Transubstantiation

1. "For what is asserted without the Scriptures or proven revelation may be held as an opinion, but need not be believed. But this opinion of Thomas [Aquinas] hangs so completely in the air without support of Scripture or reason..."
2. Let us not dabble too much in philosophy....Does it not seem as though [Christ] desired to keep us in a simple faith, sufficient for us to believe that His blood was in the cup? For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will

take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to His words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is in the body of Christ. My warrant for this is the words which say: 'He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat, this (that is, this bread, which He had taken and broken) is My body."' And Paul says: 'The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?' ...What does it matter if philosophy cannot fathom this? The Holy Spirit is greater than Aristotle."

3. ...it is truly said: 'This bread is my body; this wine is my blood,' and vice versa. Thus I will understand it for the time being to the honor of the holy words of God, to which I will allow no violence to be done by petty human arguments, nor will I allow them to be twisted into meanings which are foreign to them."

C. The Sacrifice of the Mass – "by far the most wicked of all."

"It is the common belief that the mass is a sacrifice, which is offered to God....Over against all these things, firmly entrenched as they are, we must resolutely set the words and example of Christ. For unless we firmly hold that the mass is the promise or testament of Christ, as the words clearly say, we shall lose the whole gospel and all its comfort. Let us permit nothing to prevail against these words...for they contain nothing about a work or a sacrifice."

Is this still taught by Rome today? Why does it matter?

III. Luther's "Second Front," which began in the mid 1520s, was against whom?

What was Luther's basis for dealing with these opponents?

A. Christ's institution determines what the Sacrament is.

1. "The chief point is God's Word and ordinance or command. For the Sacrament has not been invented nor introduced by any man. Without anyone's counsel and deliberation it has been instituted by Christ."
2. "Just as we have said that Baptism is not simple water, so here we also say that though the Sacrament is bread and wine, it is not mere bread and wine...But this is bread and wine included in, and connected with, God's Word. It is the Word, I say, that makes and sets this Sacrament apart. So it is not mere bread and wine, but is, and is called, Christ's body and blood."
3. "Now, it is not the word or ordinance of a prince or emperor. But it is the Word of the grand Majesty, at whose feet all creatures should fall and affirm it is as He says, and accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility."

Who, then, is the true one at work in the Sacrament?

The comfort which this basis of assurance gives:

"With this Word you can strengthen your conscience and say, 'If a hundred thousand devils, together with all fanatics, should rush forward, crying, "How can bread and wine be Christ's body and blood?" and such, I know that all spirits and scholars together are not as wise as is the Divine Majesty in His little finger.' Now here stands Christ's Word, 'Take, eat; this is My body....Drink of it, all of you; this is My blood of the new testament,' and so on. Here we stop to watch those who will call themselves His masters and make the matter different from what He has spoken. It is true,

indeed, that if you take away the Word or regard the Sacrament without the words, you have nothing but mere bread and wine. But if the words remain with them, as they shall and must, then, by virtue of the words, it is truly Christ's body and blood. What Christ's lips say and speak, so it is. He can never lie or deceive."

What did Luther introduce to the liturgy that was totally new? Why?

B. Parting of ways at Marburg (1529). Why was this such an issue for Luther?

IV. The Benefits of the Sacrament

- A. Forgiveness of sins: "This is the most necessary part, so that we may know what we should seek and gain there. This is plain and clear from the words just mentioned, 'This is My body and blood, given and shed *for you* for the forgiveness of sins.' Briefly, that is like saying, 'For this reason we go to the Sacrament: there we receive such a treasure by and in which we gain forgiveness of sins.' 'Why so?' 'Because the words stand here and give us this. Therefore, Christ asks me to eat and drink, so that this treasure may be my own and may benefit me as a sure pledge and token. In fact, it is the very same treasure that is appointed for me against my sins, death, and every disaster.'"
- B. Consolation and strength in the battle against Satan: "Therefore, the Sacrament is given as a daily pasture and sustenance, that faith may refresh and strengthen itself so that it will not fall back in such a battle, but become ever stronger and stronger....But...the devil is such a furious enemy. When he sees that we oppose him and attack the old man, and that he cannot topple us by force, he prowls and moves about on all sides. He tries every trick and does not stop until he finally wears us out, so that we either renounce our faith or throw up our hands and put up our feet, becoming indifferent or impatient. Now to this purpose the comfort of the Sacrament is given when the heart feels that the burden is becoming too heavy, so that it may gain here new power and refreshment."
- C. The whole Gospel, all that Christ has done for us: "Although the work is done and the forgiveness of sins is secured by the cross, it cannot come to us in any other way than through the Word. How would we know about it otherwise, that such a thing was accomplished or was to be given to us, unless it were presented by preaching or the oral Word? How do they know about it? Or how can they receive and make the forgiveness their own, unless they lay hold of and believe the Scriptures and the Gospel? But now the entire Gospel and the article of the Creed—I believe in...the holy Christian Church...the forgiveness of sins, and so on—are embodied by the Word in this Sacrament and presented to us."
- D. This even includes bodily benefit and the promise of the resurrection: "We must never think of the Sacrament as something harmful from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy that grants salvation and comfort. It will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved."

From *These Words of Christ* (1527): "Similarly, the mouth, the throat, the body, which eats Christ's body, will also have its benefit in that it will live forever and arise on the Last Day to eternal salvation. This is the secret power and benefit which flows from the body of Christ in the Supper into our body, for it must be useful, and cannot be present in vain. Therefore it must bestow life and salvation upon our bodies, as is its nature."

V. Luther's strong advocacy of frequency of communion.

- A. “daily administered and distributed among Christians”
 - B. “So those who want to be Christians may prepare to receive this praiseworthy Sacrament often.”
 - C. “since [Christ] speaks the words ‘As often as you drink it,’ it is still implied that we should do it often. This is added because He wants to have the Sacrament free. He does not limit it to special times, like the Jewish Passover, which they were obliged to eat only once a year.”
 - D. “If you could see how many knives, darts, and arrows are every moment aimed at you, you would be glad to come to the Sacrament as often as possible.”
- VI. Worthiness – recall Luther’s terror of God as a young man, and as a new priest at Mass.
- A. What does Luther say is the basis for true worthiness in the *Small Catechism*?
 - B. Admission to the Sacrament grounded in the Word
 1. “it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know what they seek or why they come.”
 2. “Whoever believes the words has what they declare and bring...But it is necessary that you also claim [the treasure] and confidently view it as the words tell you.”
 3. “To be sure, it is true that those who despise the Sacrament and live in an unchristian way receive it to their hurt and damnation (1 Corinthians 11:29-30). Nothing shall be good or wholesome for them. It is just like a sick person who on a whim eats and drinks what is forbidden to him by the doctor. But those who are mindful of their weakness desire to be rid of it and long for help. They should regard the Sacrament just like a precious antidote against the poison that they have in them. Here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin. It contains and brings with it God’s grace and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.”

“Here He offers to us the entire treasure that He has brought for us from heaven.”