

The Sacrament of the Altar (Part I)

What is the Sacrament of the Altar? It 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.

Where is this written? The holy Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul, write thus: Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread: and when He had given thanks, He 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."

After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Take, 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."

Luther's few words here are loaded with significance, teaching the doctrine of the Supper and where that doctrine is to be found with absolute certainty. In this world, these are fighting words!

1. Protestants (except for Lutherans) generally say that the Lord's Supper *represents* or *remembers* Christ's body and blood. But what do we, on the basis of His words, say it *is*?
2. Roman Catholics say the bread and wine *become* body and blood and are no more bread and wine. Protestants (except for Lutherans) say that Jesus is "with us" but only "in spirit" where we eat His Supper. Where, on the basis of His words do we say He is, and in His very body and blood?
3. Skeptics and critics say the church came up with the Lord's Supper as a symbol of a long-gone Jesus, a gathering that expresses the unity of spirit of believers. Who do we say instituted it?
4. Roman Catholics say that the Supper is given us for a priest to sacrifice it to God to obtain more forgiveness for sins. For what purpose do we say our Lord gives it, again, on the basis of his own words?

From Luther's *Large Catechism* (V: Sacrament of the Altar)

⁹ And as we have said of Baptism that it is not simple water, so here also we say the Sacrament is bread and wine, but not mere bread and wine, such as are ordinarily served at the table, but bread and wine comprehended in, and connected with, the Word of God...

¹¹ Now, it is not the word or ordinance of a prince or emperor, but of the sublime Majesty, at whose feet all creatures should fall, and affirm it is as He says, and accept it with all reverence, fear, and humility.

¹² 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 the body and blood of Christ? etc., I know that all spirits and scholars together are not as wise as is the Divine Majesty in His little finger.

¹³ Now here stands the Word of Christ: "Take, eat; this is My body; Drink ye all of it; this is the new testament in My blood," etc. Here we abide, and would like to see those who will constitute themselves His masters, and make it different from what He has spoken.