

The Sacrament of the Altar (Part III)

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words which stand here, namely: "Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins." Which words are, beside the bodily eating and drinking, as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins.

1. To what two things does Luther attribute the power of the Sacrament of the Altar to forgive sins and give life and salvation?
2. Does the Real Presence of our Lord's body and blood, then, depend in any way on our faith or preparation? (See St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 11:23–29)
3. Luther also mentions faith and preparation (as does St. Paul, above). If Christ's body and blood are present whether or not we believe, why then do we extol faith and prepare and examine potential communicants? What constitutes a right preparation to receive the Supper, even for us who have been already "examined and absolved"?

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

³³⁻³⁴ Now we must also see who is the person that receives this power and benefit. That is answered briefly, as we said above of Baptism and often elsewhere: Whoever believes it has what the words declare and bring. For they are not spoken or proclaimed to stone and wood, but to those who hear them, to whom He says: Take and eat, etc.

And because He offers and promises forgiveness of sin, it cannot be received otherwise than by faith. This faith He Himself demands in the Word when He says: Given and shed for you. As if He said: For this reason I give it, and bid you eat and drink, that you may claim it as yours and enjoy it.

³⁵ Whoever now accepts these words, and believes that what they declare is true, has it. But whoever does not believe it has nothing, as he allows it to be offered to him in vain, and refuses to enjoy such a saving good. The treasure, indeed, is opened and placed at every one's door, yea, upon his table, but it is necessary that you also claim it, and confidently view it as the words suggest to you.

³⁶ This, now, is the entire Christian preparation for receiving this Sacrament worthily. For since this treasure is entirely presented in the words, it cannot be apprehended and appropriated in any other way than with the heart. For such a gift and eternal treasure cannot be seized with the fist.

³⁷ Fasting and prayer, etc., may indeed be an external preparation and discipline for children, that the body may keep and bear itself modestly and reverently towards the body and blood of Christ; yet what is given in and with it the body cannot seize and appropriate. But this is done by the faith of the heart, which discerns this treasure and desires it.

³⁸ This may suffice for what is necessary as a general instruction respecting this Sacrament; for what is further to be said of it belongs to another time.