

**WE HAVE A COMMON MEANS:
The Gospel in Word And Sacraments**

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- I. The Means of Grace: Holy Word and Blessed Sacraments
 - A. The Means of Grace Flow from the Cross of Christ

1. On that first Good Friday when the Roman soldiers came to break the legs of those crucified to hasten their death, they found that Jesus was already dead. Therefore they did not break His bones. "But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out" (John 19:34). This statement indicates that Jesus truly died a natural human death, but the fathers found far more significance in this statement. They understood this passage in the light of the words of Zechariah, the Prophet, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a first born" (12:10). "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness" (13:1). The God-man Jesus Christ, the Almighty Himself, was pierced on the cross for our salvation. The blood and water from his wounded side has provided that wonderful cleansing fountain for sin and uncleanness of which Zechariah speaks. It can wash away each stain and mark, each spot and wrinkle. His holy, precious blood is the source of redemption for the whole world (1 John 1:7; 2:2).
2. That fountain of salvation, opened just moments after His death where full redemption was accomplished, continues to flow for us today in the water of Baptism, the blood of the Lord's Supper, and in His Word which is spirit and life. Here the Lord comes to us with all His blessings as St. John indicates, "This is He who came by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6). The means of grace indeed flow from the cross of Christ and make present for us all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice. (WA Tr IV: 519-520, #4799.1-2; G. Stoeckhardt, *The Three Letters of John*, pp. 116-118; J. Ylvisaker, *The Gospels*, pp. 753-754; C. Zorn, *Brosamlein*, pp. 169-170)

B. There Is No Promise of the Spirit's Activity apart from the Means of Grace

3. The Scripture nowhere promises the Spirit and His gifts outside of the means of grace. In fact, our Confessions quote Luther as saying, "We should and must constantly maintain that God will not deal with us except through His external Word and Sacraments. Whatever is attributed to the Spirit apart from such Word and Sacraments is of the devil" (SA III VIII 9, p. 313). It is impossible to receive any saving knowledge apart from the means of grace. Whenever man looks to other revelations, error and heresy begin.
4. The Spirit has chosen to use means to convey to us all the treasure of salvation. The Scriptures declare that faith comes from hearing the Word (Romans 10:17), that Baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21), that whenever you forgive sins they are forgiven and whenever you do not forgive sins, they are not forgiven (John 20:23), and that the Lord's Supper gives the forgiveness of sins (Matthew 26:28). The scriptural and confessional doctrine of the means of grace is defined in this way by Dr. Pieper:

He (God) ordained the means by which He gives men the infallible assurance of His gracious will toward them; in other words, He both confers on men the remission of sins merited by Christ and works faith in the proffered remission or, where faith already exists, strengthens it. The Church has appropriately called these divine ordinances the means of grace (F. Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 103).

This doctrine is a wonderful comfort for the believer. We do not have to spend our whole life searching for God's grace and forgiveness. He freely offers and gives it to us in His objective means of grace. There is nothing we must do or accomplish to receive His grace. Not only does He give us His forgiveness in the means of grace, but through them He also works and strengthens the faith which receives that forgiveness, life, and salvation. This comforting doctrine, which emphasizes that our salvation does not depend on our own effort, indeed upholds the central article of the faith, justification by faith alone.

II. Our Common Means: The Word Which Is Spirit and Life

A. The Word of God Is Inspired, Infallible, and Inerrant

5. The proclaimed and written Word is the primary means of grace, the chief thing in both the Sacraments. This Word of God, which is the Holy Scripture, is absolutely clear and true. God the Holy Spirit breathed into the minds of the holy writers the very thoughts they should express and the very words they were to write. Therefore we know that the Bible is infallible and errorless in every detail. This doctrine, which we call “verbal inspiration,” is definitely the teaching of the Scripture. St. Paul says, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Likewise St. Peter writes, “Prophecy never came by the will of man, but the holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:21; see also John 10:35; John 17:17; 1 Corinthians 2:13; 2 Peter 3:15-17). The *Formula* speaks of the Old and New Testaments “as the pure and clear fountain of Israel, which is the only true norm according to which all teachers and teaching are to be judged and evaluated” (FC SD *Rule and Norm* 3, pp. 503-504).

B. The Word of God Is the Power of God unto Salvation

6. The battle for the Bible has been fought in our circles and throughout the church. In many places it is still being fought. Fine statements concerning verbal inspiration have been formulated. This is a wonderful blessing for which we should thank God. But at the same time we must always emphasize why the battle for the Bible was fought. The Scripture is not just an errorless record of past history. It is not merely an exact account which makes computer age technology look poor by comparison. Rather, it is the power of God unto salvation (Roman 1:16). The Word of God is like a fire and like a hammer that shatters the rock (Jeremiah 23:29) and is living, active, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12).

7. The Word is creative and life-giving. Jesus says, “The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life (John 6:63). That Word can turn a heart dead in trespasses and sins to a living faith in the Savior. This is the teaching of the entire Scripture. Already in the Old Testament the power of the Word is confirmed when God speaks through Isaiah, “For as the rains come down and the snow from heaven, and do not return there, but water the earth, and make it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My Word be that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please and it shall prosper in the thing for which I send it” (Isaiah 55:10-11). The Word will accomplish what God pleases, namely, that faith is worked through hearing that Word (Romans 10:17) or, as St. Peter puts it, that we are born again through the incorruptible seed of God’s Word (1 Peter 1:23; see also 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; 2 Thessalonians 2:14). There is no question that this is the doctrine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Before Emperor Charles V the fathers confessed at Augsburg:

In order that we may obtain this faith, the ministry of teaching the Gospel and administering the sacraments was instituted. For through the Word and the sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given, and the Holy Spirit produces faith, where and when it please God, in those who hear the Gospel (AC V, p. 31).

8. This life-giving Word, which creates faith in us, also strengthens faith and preserves us in that faith. Through the Word, the Holy Spirit is given in all His fullness with all His many gifts. Here the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are offered and bestowed. The Word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). It gives direction for our life and therefore “is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). The Word’s the nourishment and strengthening which our faith and new spiritual life need on our earthly journey (1 Peter 2:2; Acts 20:28-30). Just as our body needs food to grow, so our spiritual life needs the Word to remain strong and healthy. The Scripture is the feast to which Isaiah invites, “Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price . . . let your soul delight itself in abundance” (Isaiah 55:1,2). In the midst of all adversity and affliction God’s Word gives peace, comfort, and joy to the heart (Psalm 19:8,9; Jeremiah 15:16; John 16:33). In every

need and conflict of life we will flee to that life-giving Word, for through it the Holy Spirit creates faith, strengthens faith, and preserves it unto our end.

C. The Central Message of the Word Is the Cross of Christ

9. When we speak of the Word being the power of God unto salvation and giving forgiveness of sins and life, we are specifically speaking of the Gospel in contradistinction to the Law. The Law is never life-giving. The Law can only kill. This proper distinction between Law and Gospel is one of the fundamental teachings of the Scriptures and of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Law is the holy, eternal, unchanging will of God. The Law commands what people are to do and not to do, and always insists on total obedience. While the Law serves as a curb in this sinful world, and also as a guide in that it shows believers how to live as children of God, its primary purpose is to make us conscious of sin and our lost condition by nature (Romans 3:20). The Gospel, on the other hand, makes no demands but freely grants and offers. It gives the gracious forgiveness of Christ and eternal salvation. Showing God's undeserved love to sinners and to the unworthy for Christ's sake alone, the Gospel shines to illuminate human hearts and to make them alive. The Law and the Gospel are very different and distinct. "The Law says 'do this,' and it is never done. Grace says 'believe in this,' and everything is already done" (LW 31:41).
10. The message of the Gospel is God revealed in the cross. In the Law, God hides Himself behind the fire, smoke, thunder and lightning of Mt. Sinai, so that sinful man does not dare to approach. But in the Gospel God has revealed His grace and mercy to the fallen creation in the person of Jesus Christ. God clothed Himself in flesh that man might know His love. God hid Himself in the suffering and death of the cross so that we might know Him. In the Heidelberg Disputation Luther insists, "He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. . . . God can be found only in suffering and the cross" (LW 31:53). This is the theology of the cross which is the heart and core of the Scripture, as St. Paul writes, "For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Corinthians 2:2). The cross which signifies the suffering of Christ, as His redemptive act, is an event which appears to be a tragedy, but which is in fact the grandest event God ever performed. The theology of the cross recognizes God precisely where He has hidden Himself, in His suffering and in all which the theology of glory considers to be weakness and foolishness. This is the paradox of the cross.
11. Jesus became poor and lowly to raise us to His divine glory, to eternal life in heaven. He lived a perfect and harmonious life with God and man which the Father accepted as the perfect life of all people. Then He allowed Himself to be nailed to a Roman cross and to be swallowed up in death so that He might give Himself as the one sufficient redemptive sacrifice for all sin. What appeared to be His end, His defeat, was really His ultimate victory. In His death the Victim becomes the Victor Divine, the Conqueror of the Universe, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, for He broke forth from the grave triumphant, having vanquished His foes, freeing us from the power of sin, death, and the devil. His glorious resurrection is the pronouncement of absolution for the whole world. In Him all are forgiven.
12. It is through the word of the cross that God comes to us and unites us with Christ's death and resurrection. As Law, the cross shows the full extent of God's wrath because of sin and destroys every form of self-righteousness. As Gospel, the cross shows fully the extent of God's love. It gives forgiveness, righteousness, and salvation which were guaranteed to us by the resurrection. Thus the cross in the light of Easter becomes God's means for making us alive, for bringing us to faith. As Jesus suffered death to give us life, so sinful man must hear the killing word of the Law so that his heart is prepared for the life-giving word that in Jesus' death and resurrection there is forgiveness for all, a gift of God's grace. He dies to sin and arises to the new life of faith.

III. Our Common Means: The Blessed Sacraments

A. The Sacraments Are the Visible Word

13. The Gospel always remains the supreme means of grace. This truth Luther emphasizes when he writes, "The Word, I say, and only the Word, is the vehicle of God's grace" (LW

27:249). It is the Word of God which gives power to a sacrament and makes it a sacrament as he especially says concerning the Lord's Supper, "It is the Word, I maintain, which distinguishes it from mere bread and wine and constitutes it a sacrament" (LC V 10, p. 448). The Sacraments are a means of grace because of the Word and promises of God connected to them. The Sacraments can be considered the sacramental Word or the visible Word, as does the Apology:

As the Word enters through the ears to strike the heart, so the rite (sacrament) itself enters through the eyes to move the heart. The Word and the rite have the same effect, as Augustine said so well when he called the sacrament "the visible Word," for the rite is received by the eye and is a sort of picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore both have the same effect (Ap XIII 5, p. 212).

B. The Definition of a Sacrament

14. The Scripture does not use the word "sacrament," nor does it give a definition of a sacrament. Yet our Lutheran fathers saw that the rites bestowing God's grace had certain common elements. This is the source of our Lutheran definition of a sacrament. "By a sacrament we mean a sacred act instituted by God Himself, [LC Preface 20, p. 364; LC IV 1, p. 436] which consists of certain visible means connected with His Word [LC IV 18, p.438; LW 36:124], through which He offers, gives, and seals to us the forgiveness of sins which Christ has earned for us" [LW 36:124; Ap XIII 3 4, p. 211] (ELS Catechism p. 196). Based on this definition the Lutheran Church confesses two Sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper.
15. The Sacraments belong in the sphere of the Gospel. They are gracious acts through which God provides what He has promised in His Word. The Sacraments give us the same treasure of salvation as is given through the Word. One who is burdened and terrified by his sin cannot but thank God that He has not only provided one but many means through which we receive the forgiveness of sins (SA III, IV, p. 310).

IV. Our Common Means: The Water of Baptism

A. The Command and Institution of Baptism

16. Baptism is that glorious creative act of the entire Trinity in which we were born again, being united with Christ's death and resurrection, and thus were incorporated into the body of Christ, the church, receiving all the blessings of salvation. This Sacrament the Risen Lord instituted shortly before His Ascension. He commanded the disciples, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:19,20). Likewise He said in the Gospel of Mark, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). The divine institution of Baptism is also evident from apostolic practice. The apostles administered Baptism already at the first Pentecost. In his Pentecost sermon St. Peter urged, "Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).
17. According to the institution of Baptism, we are to make disciples by means of baptizing and by means of teaching. Baptism is then a means through which disciples are made. An individual is to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. To be baptized in the name of the Trinity means to be connected to the Trinity, to be united with the Trinity in such a way that the individual becomes God's possession and is dedicated to His service. In this institution the Lord commands His church to baptize all nations. This shows that Baptism is meant for all people—no age group excluded. Finally the baptismal command concludes, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age," reminding us that the Lord will be with us in Baptism not only in His omnipresence, as He is

in all things, but in such a way that we are saved according to the Father's mercy, united with Christ and His death and resurrection, and born again by the Spirit (MWS 113).

18. The essential parts of Baptism are the water and the Word (Ephesians 5:25,26). The water used in Baptism is ordinary water like that which one would drink or in which one could bathe. We do not have to obtain the water from a special place like the Jordan. Nor is the amount or manner of applying water expressed in Scripture. Some today believe that the word "baptize" denotes only "immersing." However, in Mark 7:4 the Greek verb baptizein is used to speak of "the washing of cups, pitchers, copper vessels, and couches" showing that this verb simply means "to wash." When we wash pitchers, vessels, and couches, we do not ordinarily totally immerse them. Thus we may apply the water in Baptism in any manner. This water in itself does not make Baptism. Luther says in the Small Catechism: "Baptism is not just water, but it is water used according to God's command and connected with His Word." The Word that is to be connected with the water and which makes it a powerful means of grace is found in the baptismal institution: "Go therefore . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." The baptismal formula used is: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

B. The Blessings of Holy Baptism

1. Baptism as Full Forgiveness

19. Baptism is not a mere rite which we must perform because of God's command, nor is it merely an action by which we symbolically show what happened to us when we came to faith, as the Reformed teach. Rather, Baptism is a divine work apart from all human action. Here God offers and gives full forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16). St. Peter says that Baptism saves us (1 Peter 3:21). This does not mean that there is another way to be saved besides trusting in Jesus' forgiveness won on the cross. Rather, Baptism unites us with Christ's cross. Baptism is a means through which the treasure of salvation is brought to us. On the cross Jesus won forgiveness for all people. Yet that forgiveness will do us no good unless it is brought to us who are living in the twentieth century. This is the purpose of Baptism. Baptism works like a pipeline bringing forgiveness of sin from its source, the cross, to each of us personally at the baptismal font.
20. Luther at times pictures the baptismal font as a fountain filled with the Messiah's blood. "This is not a common bath of water . . . but it is a Baptism of blood or a blood bath (Blutbad) which Christ alone, the Son of God Himself, prepared through His own death" (St. L. XII, 538; see also LW 51:324-326). Because Baptism offers and gives the forgiveness won on the cross through Christ's blood, Luther sees Baptism as a bath in the rose-colored blood flowing from the dear Savior's veins. It can indeed wash away each stain and mark, each spot and wrinkle. Though our sins are as scarlet, they are as white as snow, though they are red like crimson, they are as wool, for here we have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, having received His full forgiveness at the font. This beautiful comforting picture language Luther uses in his great baptismal hymn:

The eye of sense alone is dim
And nothing sees but water;
Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him
The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
It sees the cleansing fountain, red
With the dear blood of Jesus,
Which from the sins, inherited
From fallen Adam, frees us
And from our own misdoings.

(ELS Hymnal Supplement, Hymn 111)

21. Because Baptism effects the forgiveness of sin, it delivers from death and the devil and gives eternal salvation. Death no longer has any power over us for it has lost its sting (1

Corinthians 15:55). It is no longer the terrible end of everything, but it has become a restful sleep and the gateway to eternal joy in the mansions of the Father (John 11:25-26; 14:1-6). As certainly as Baptism brings us into communion with Christ's redemptive death, giving us forgiveness, so certainly it unites us with His resurrection, giving life and salvation (Romans 6:3-11). Concerning Baptism's power to conquer death and give eternal life Luther concludes in the Large Catechism:

Suppose there were a physician who had such skill that people would not die, or even though they died would afterward live forever. Just think how the world would snow and rain money upon him! Because of the pressing crowd of rich men no one else could get near him. Now, here in Baptism there is brought free to every man's door just such a priceless medicine which swallows up death and saves the lives of all men (LC IV 43, p. 442).

22. Baptism delivers us from the devil. On account of our sins Satan has power over us. We are by nature his slaves doing his every bidding. But when our sins were forgiven in baptism, we were freed from his domination. To emphasize this liberation certain of the old Lutheran agendas included an exorcism in the baptismal liturgy: "I adjure you, you unclean spirit, by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit that you go out of and depart from this servant of Jesus Christ. Amen" (Kirchen-Agende, p. 4; see also LW 53:96).
23. The ultimate purpose of Baptism is eternal salvation. Baptism indeed saves us (1 Peter 3:21)! In Baptism we were marked with the holy cross and sealed as the Lord's. We became the children of God, heirs of heaven. Our Baptism shows that the Father is always extending His loving arms to us that we may repent and return to Him. The confession, "I am baptized," assures us that the Lord is with us all the way in this life, never leaving nor forsaking us, and that at last He will carry us home to the heavenly fatherland above.

2. Baptism as the New Birth

24. The baptismal font is full of Christ's forgiveness and salvation. It is a wonderful treasure in every way. This treasure is received and made our own by faith (Ephesians 2:8,9). Yet this faith is impossible for humanity by itself for "no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:3). Faith is worked alone through the means of grace.
25. This Baptism which requires faith also creates such faith. Baptism is regenerative. St. Paul writes, "God saved us through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). Baptism is here called a washing that regenerates and renews because it creates faith, making us spiritually alive and thus saves us. Likewise St. Paul shows that in Baptism we are risen with Christ through faith (Colossians 2:12). St. John declares that we are born again by the water and the Word which is Baptism (John 3:5). To be born again means to come to faith in Jesus and His forgiveness for salvation. Therefore Baptism works faith.
26. Since Baptism brings to us all the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice and creates the faith to receive these benefits, it should not be withheld from our children. They are included in the "all nations" of the baptismal institution (Matthew 28:19). They are born dead in trespasses and sins as all humanity (Ephesians 2:1), and Baptism is the only means whereby infants, who too must be born again, can ordinarily be regenerated and brought to faith (John 3:5; Titus 3:5). In the Scriptures Baptism is compared with circumcision (Colossians 2:13). As little children were circumcised in the Old Testament, so they should now be baptized. Also the assumption that little children should not be baptized because they can not believe must be rejected, for the Scriptures clearly speak of little ones who believe in Christ and who are part of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 18:6; Mark 9:42; Mark 10:13; Luke 18:15). When an individual has already been brought to faith through the Word, then Baptism strengthens and seals that faith. An unbelieving child is usually brought to faith through Baptism and an unbelieving adult through the Word, but in both cases it is the same almighty miracle, for both by nature are dead in sin and can not come to faith by themselves.

3. Baptism as Dying and Rising in Christ

27. The most comprehensive statement concerning Baptism in the New Testament is found in Romans 6. Here St. Paul shows that in Baptism we were united with Christ and His cross. Our old sinful flesh was nailed to the cross, and we died to sin. We were buried with Christ in the tomb. Because we have participated in the death of Christ through Baptism, we were freed from sin and delivered from death and the devil (Romans 6:7). All our sins were washed into the depths of the sea through Jesus' blood. As Jesus arose triumphant that first Easter morning, so we arose to new life in Baptism by the power of Christ's resurrection (Romans 6:5; Colossians 2:12; 1 Peter 3:21). Faith in Christ's cross was created in our hearts, we received new resurrection life in Him, and we were incorporated into His body, the church (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Therefore our Baptism gives us all of the blessings of Christ's death and resurrection and the absolute certainty of salvation.
28. Baptism is not merely a one time occurrence in the past without any real meaning for the here and now. No, it has value each and every day of our life. Each day we need to die and rise again in Baptism. Through Christ's resurrection, Baptism is the power source of our new life, our resurrection life right now, so that we can daily crucify the flesh and arise to new life; that is, we can daily put off the old man and put on the new man. Each day in true repentance we will throw our sins of pride, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, and greed back into the baptismal font and drown them. Then through the word of absolution given us in Baptism, our new resurrection life will come forth strengthened to live a more God-pleasing life. This is the daily use of Baptism to which Luther refers in his Small Catechism under the "Meaning of Baptism."

C. Holy Absolution Is the Continuum of Holy Baptism

29. Because of our definition of a sacrament Lutherans do not usually speak of Holy Absolution as a sacrament. Yet as a continuum of Holy Baptism, we hold it in high regard. "You see that Baptism, both by its power and by its signification, comprehends also the third Sacrament, formerly called Penance, which is really nothing else than Baptism" (LC IV 74, p. 445). Absolution continues the dying and rising with Christ in Baptism. In confession we drown our sins in the baptismal font and in absolution we receive Jesus' forgiveness flowing to us in the baptismal water.
30. Absolution is the administration of the Keys, the dispensing of the Gospel of forgiveness, be that to many or to the individual. Christ said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:18). Again He said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23). This is the wonderful comforting word, "Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you" (Matthew 9:2). Some may ask, "How can a man forgive sins; isn't that a prerogative of God alone?" On the cross Christ won full and complete forgiveness for all people (1 John 2:2). It was done once and for all. But He did not distribute or give that forgiveness on the cross. He distributes it through Holy Baptism, through the Lord's Supper, and through the word of absolution spoken by men in Christ's stead (LW 40:213,214). He commanded men to speak His forgiveness in His place (John 20:23; Luke 10:16). Therefore when in the Divine Liturgy we hear the pastor say, "I forgive you all your sin in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," we should be absolutely confident of forgiveness, since it is as certain as if Christ spoke the words Himself. Our Confessions teach, "Our people are taught to esteem absolution highly because it is the voice of God and is pronounced by God's command" (AC XXV, pp. 61-62).

V. Our Common Means: The Body and Blood of the Supper

A. The Command and Institution of the Sacrament

31. The institution of the Lord's Supper is recorded in Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:15-20, and in 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. The historical setting of the Supper was the

Passover, the most solemn meal for God's Old Testament people. In the meal where Old Testament believers ate the flesh of the Passover lamb, which was to picture for them the true Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, Jesus the very Lamb of God gave New Testament believers not only a picture of His flesh and blood with bread and wine, but He gave them His true body and blood wherein He bestowed upon them all the blessings of the cross.

32. As the Passover meal was underway, Jesus took some of the unleavened bread, broke it for distribution, and gave thanks or blessed it. Exactly what that blessing entailed we are not told, but it must have been quite different from the usual Passover benediction because concerning the blessed bread that He was offering His disciples and inviting them to receive the Lord said, "Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me." These are the words of blessing Christ gave to the church so that in our Lord's Supper celebration the Word may be joined to the elements effecting the presence, as St. Augustine says, "If the Word be joined to the element, it becomes a Sacrament" (*Accedat verbum ad elementum, et fit sacramentum*). Notice what Jesus said concerning that which He was offering His disciples: "This is My Body." Jesus did not say, "This is a picture of My body," nor did He say, "This only represents My body." Rather, He said, "This is My Body." This is the confession of the Lutheran fathers: "It is taught among us that the true body and blood of Christ are really present in the Supper of our Lord under the form of bread and wine and are there distributed and received. The contrary doctrine is therefore rejected" (*AC X*, p. 34).
33. The Words of Institution continue: "In the same way also He took the cup after supper." Jesus took the third cup of the Passover, which was a cup of wine, for only wine was used in the Passover. He blessed it even as He had blessed the bread and gave it to them saying, "This is the new testament in My blood." St. Matthew explains further, "which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins." The words of explanation concerning this cup which is His true blood allude to the ratification of the first covenant in Exodus 24. Real blood ratified the old covenant and the people were given that real blood in testimony of the fact that they received the blessing of the sacrifice. Likewise real blood ratified the new covenant, and God's people are still given that real blood of the true Lamb of God so that they are certain that the benefits of Christ's redemptive sacrifice apply to them (*LS 100-102*). The Words of Institution summarize the blessings of this Sacrament with the phrase "for the forgiveness of sins," which shows that all the treasure house of salvation is offered in this Supper, as Luther says in the Small Catechism, "For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."
34. Jesus concluded His Institution with the command, "Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." A similar command had already been given concerning His body. These words explain that this institution was not meant as only a one time occurrence in the past. It is to be repeated until Christ comes again in glory (1 Corinthians 11:26). Each time Christians celebrate this Supper they bring Christ's great sacrifice into remembrance and receive the treasure of that sacrifice: the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.
35. When Christ said, "Do this in remembrance of Me," He commanded us to continue this institution. What is necessary for a valid Lord's Supper? Jesus said, "Do this," do what I have done. One is to take bread and wine, bless them with Christ's almighty word of consecration, "This is My body, This is My blood," which effect the presence, and distribute His true body and blood so that they may be eaten and drunk (*LW 37, 187*).
36. Another portion of Scripture which is important in the study of the Lord's Supper is 1 Corinthians 10:16,17: "Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a participation in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for all partake of the one bread." St. Paul did not say that the cup and bread are only visual aids to help us understand Christ's redemptive work. No, he said that the cup and the bread are a participation in, a real partaking of Christ's body and blood.

37. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 the imperative “Do this” of the Words of Institution is particularly illuminated. Here “the cup of blessing which we bless” is explained. Notice that it is a cup which the church is to bless. Then the “Do this” is not only a command to distribute and receive but also to bless. One can distribute and receive forever, but without God’s commanded blessing it is only bread and wine. It is God’s blessing which causes Jesus’ body and blood to be present. On the other hand, one can say God’s blessing forever but if there is no distribution and reception there is no Sacrament, for Christ’s full institution has not been carried out.
38. Since the Lord has commanded that the bread and wine be blessed in order to have a valid Sacrament, what is the blessing that the Lord desired His church to use? In close proximity to this Scripture, where St. Paul particularly asserts that Christ’s followers bless the elements, he also gives the church a Word of the Lord in liturgical form concerning the Lord’s Supper, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed, etc.” (1 Corinthians 11:23). These words, which Christ gave to St. Paul, He wanted delivered to the church for the celebration of the Supper.
39. In summary, how do we know that we have the true Supper today? What causes Christ’s body and blood to be present in the Sacrament or what effects the presence? It is not any power or work of man but alone the Word and institution of Christ, as is the case in Holy Baptism. It is that all-powerful Word which God spoke at the creation and it was done. St. Paul says that by blessing with those words commanded in Christ’s institution we have “a participation in the blood of Christ” and “a participation in the body of Christ” (1 Corinthians 10:16). Then it is the Words of Institution by virtue of Christ’s original command which effect the presence of Christ’s body and blood in the Supper. This is the teaching of our Lutheran Confessions: “For wherever we observe His institution and speak His words over the bread and cup and distribute the blessed bread and cup, Christ Himself is still active through the spoken words by virtue of the first institution, which He wanted to be repeated” (FC SD VII, 75, p. 583). It is alone the almighty Word of Christ which causes His presence and not our action or doing. At the same time the entire sacramental action (consecration, distribution, reception) must be carried out or there is no Sacrament, that is, no real presence, for nothing has the character of a sacrament outside its intended use. The whole sacramental action must be kept as a unit (FC SD VII, 85-87, pp. 584-585).

B. The Proper Preparation for the Sacrament

40. In order to obtain the benefits of the Holy Supper we need to be well prepared to receive it worthily, for St. Paul says, “He who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Corinthians 11:29). This, however, is not a worthiness brought about by the Law, but by the Gospel, and it does not consist of a perfect life and entire purity of the soul. Rather, to be worthy and well prepared means that we have a sincere sorrow over our sins, that we confess them, striving to do better, and earnestly long for forgiveness of sins.
41. At the same time this worthiness includes a confident faith in Jesus the Savior who paid for the sins of the whole world on the cross with His body and blood and who gives us that very body and blood in the Supper for the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. With these questions Christians should examine themselves before coming to the Lord’s Supper:
- a. Am I truly sorry for all my sins in thought, word, and deed?
 - b. Do I believe that Jesus my Savior paid for all these sins on the cross?
 - c. Do I believe that Jesus gives me in the Supper His body and blood for the forgiveness of my sins, life, and salvation?
 - d. Do I sincerely desire with the aid of the Holy Spirit henceforth to amend my sinful life?

C. The Blessings of the Sacrament

1. The Supper Gives the Forgiveness of Sins

42. Luther aptly summarized the blessings of the Supper in the Small Catechism: "The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking 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." Forgiveness of sins is the chief blessing of the Sacrament, as the Words of Institution declare, and from it flow all the other blessings of the Supper.
43. The Holy Sacrament is a real impartation of the remission of sins obtained for all people on the cross. In our weaknesses and failures we can often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha kneeling before the cross embracing His dying body and drinking from His five bloody wounds. It is Jesus' body hung on the cross and His shed blood which have paid for the sins of the world. As a kidnapped child is bought back by its parents with money, so Jesus bought us back not with gold or silver but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death. His body and blood are the ransom for sin. In the Supper we receive the very thing which paid for sins, the very thing which freed us from hell's destruction. Then no matter how great and terrible our sins may be, no matter how heavily they burden our conscience, receiving this Sacrament we need never wonder whether our sins are forgiven, for within us we have the very ransom money which paid for our sins, namely, His true body and blood (C. F. W. Walther, *Brosamen*, pp. 108-117).

2. The Supper Gives Life

44. The Holy Supper confers life. This is not temporal life which we received through natural birth, but it is that new spiritual life which has been regenerated in us through the new birth in Holy Baptism. Since this life is still weak and imperfect, and constant growth is necessary, the Lord Jesus has instituted this Sacrament as a true spiritual nourishment. Luther says concerning this:

Therefore, it is appropriately called the food of the soul since it nourishes and strengthens the new man. While it is true that through Baptism we are first born anew, our human flesh and blood have not lost their old skin. There are so many hindrances and temptations of the devil and the world that we often grow weary and faint, at times even stumble. The Lord's Supper is given as a daily food and sustenance so that our faith may refresh and strengthen itself and not weaken in the struggle but grow continually stronger. For the new life should be one that continually develops and progresses. Meanwhile it must suffer much opposition. . . . For such time, when our heart feels too sorely pressed, this comfort of the Lord's Supper is given to bring us new strength and refreshment (LC V, 23-26, p. 449).

45. Our Confessions quote the Early Church fathers as saying, "Christ's flesh is truly a life-giving food and His blood truly a quickening beverage" (FC SD VIII, 76, p. 606). The body and blood of our Lord in the Supper are life-giving. They are never unfruitful, impotent, or useless. Here we receive the body and blood of the living God into this body made of dust. What can be more powerful? What can be more beneficial? This is the greatest treasure in the life of a Christian. It is the greatest benefit for body and soul. "This life-giving bread and cup of blessing, hallowed by the solemn benediction, benefits the life of the total man, being at the same time a medicine and an offering, to heal our infirmities and to purge our iniquities" (Ex. 2,491).
46. As the Christian travels in this life, he faces problems and troubles all the way. There are often financial difficulties in our home, bitterness in our family, conflicts with our friends, sickness, and even the death of those most near and dear. For this reason the German Lutheran fathers often speak of this life as the Jammertal, the "vale of tears." Yet in every difficulty and problem of life the Lord Jesus says, "Come to My Table, all you that labor and are heavy laden, I will give you rest." Through the Sacrament of His body and blood He

gives us the strength to face all the problems and troubles of life and to do all things through Him. Come to this refreshing repast (LC V 66-70, p. 454). Here He give us His quickening flesh and blood which strengthens us to live a holier life and empowers us to walk in His loving footsteps (LS 191). Here is the nourishment, the heavenly manna, we need all the way through the journey of this life. This is the case in every physical need and sickness and especially at the hour of death. For there is no better help than that of the Divine Physician, who gives His life-giving flesh and blood as the soothing medicine which aids and quickens us in soul and body.

47. There are many today who are seeking a closer walk with Jesus, a closer relationship with the Savior. There are times in every Christian's life when he feels very distant from the Divine Redeemer. At such times the Christian is not to attend some wild, emotional revival to have an experience of Christ. He is not to try to wrestle with the Lord in prayer until he feels His presence. Rather, he is to go where the Lord has promised to be found, in the Word and Sacraments. In the Supper there is an intimate union with Christ, for here He comes into the believer with His body and blood and remains with him.
48. This incorporation into Christ which the Lord's Supper grants constitutes at the same time a true communion among all members of His body. One cannot be united with Christ without also at the same time existing in communion with all the other members of this body. As He comes into us with His flesh and blood, uniting us with Himself, so He comes into all the other communicants drawing us together as His church. St. Paul says, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). As many kernels of wheat are ground together to form a loaf of bread and as many grapes are crushed to form one cup of wine, so in the Supper we become His one body, the church, by partaking of His one body in the Sacrament. This is a wonderful fellowship where we will bear one another's burdens by showing love and compassion to each brother and sister in need. Because this Sacrament draws us into one body, we are to receive the Sacrament only with those who are one with us in Christ, those who teach His word in its truth and purity. Otherwise, we are really lying. We are declaring we are one when we are not one.

3. The Supper Gives Eternal Salvation

49. The Holy Supper confers salvation. Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also eternal salvation. In the Supper the believer receives the very ransom money that paid for his sins and freed him from destruction. This is what has thrown open the doors of heaven and broken every barrier down. As we receive His body and blood in the Supper, we know that heaven is ours. "Thus the Sacrament is for us a ford, a bridge, a door, a ship, and a stretcher, by which and in which we pass from this world into eternal life" (LW 35, 66).
50. As Christ walked among men, people were healed and raised from the dead by His very touch. His flesh and blood are life-giving. Then as we receive His body and blood into this dying body, we are assured that, even though it returns to the dust from which it was formed, on the last day it will break forth from the grave glorified like Christ's glorified body, and so we will ever be with the Lord. Because of this, the Early Church fathers have often spoken of the Supper as the viaticum, "the medicine of immortality," which is a food preparing us for eternal life. Luther clearly points to the Sacrament as a pledge and seal of the resurrection and eternal life:

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 (LW 37: 134; see also 37:100, 132; Ex 2, 233,234).

This is the medicine of immortality, an antidote that we may not die, but live forever in Him.

51. St. Paul says, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). Not only does the Supper point us back to the sacrifice of the cross, but it at the same time points forward to the final consummation of our redemption on the last day. Each time we celebrate the Sacrament, we do it eagerly awaiting the second coming as the whole Ancient Church cried, Maranatha, "Lord, come quickly." The Father then gives us His Son under the form of bread and wine as a foretaste of the great wedding feast of the Lamb which will be ours at His second coming. In the Supper we for a moment step out of our mundane workaday existence where we carry one after another to the grave, and we have a foretaste of heaven, where the Lamb once slain Himself descends and angels prostrate fall. Here is heaven on earth as the fathers prayed, "Your Supper be my heaven on earth, till I enter heaven." Then as we eat at His Table here, we have the certainty that we will be at His Table there where we will eat of the heavenly manna and drink of the river of His pleasure forevermore .

Soli Deo Gloria

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Abbreviations

Lutheran Confessions (all quotes are from the Tappert Translation unless otherwise indicated):

AC - Augsburg Confession
Ap - Apology of the Augsburg Confession
FC - Formula of Concord
LC - Large Catechism
SA - Smalcald Articles
SD - Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord

Luther's Works:

LW - American Edition
St. L.- St. Louis Edition
WA - Weimar Edition

Writings of Chemnitz:

LS - The Lord's Supper
MWS - Ministry, Word, and Sacraments
TNC - Two Natures in Christ