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## **GIVING OUT THE GIFTS:**

# Christ's Gifts in His Supper

### 2017–18 LCMS Circuit Bible Studies

Studies in pastoral theology using C.F.W. Walther, *American-Lutheran Pastoral Theology* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017).

## **PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE**

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References in Walther: Articles 15, 17–18 (pp. 171–183, 199–232)  
[Walther's Titles: *The Lord's Supper*]

## INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON

In this study, we will look at three articles that explain the theological and practical reasoning for the announcement, administration and admittance to the Lord's Supper. A dominant theme in these articles is the necessity and care with which the pastor examines those who desire to commune. Pastors are entrusted as "stewards of the mysteries

of God" (1 Cor. 4:1) and take up this task of the administration of Christ's gifts with a keen eye and ear toward the care of souls. As Walther, Luther, Gerhard, Chrysostom, Chemnitz and others emphasize time and again, Christ's gifts in His Supper are meant to be delivered with pastoral integrity in great confidence for the benefit of the faithful.

## ARTICLE 15: ANNOUNCEMENT FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER (PP. 171–183)

*"Because a preacher should be not only a teacher but also a shepherd, bishop, and watchman; ... he therefore has the holy obligation to require that those who wish to receive the Holy Supper announce personally beforehand and to use [the announcement] faithfully and wisely for an examination."*

—Walther

1. The parsonage I now live in was designed with a private foyer and office right off the main entrance. I was told that it was designed this way so that members could come on Saturday to the parsonage and announce for Holy Communion. Many older churches and parsonages have similar places that made accommodations for private announcement for the Lord's Supper. What factors have contributed to us moving away from this form of announcement for the Lord's Supper?
2. **Comment 1:** Chrysostom's epigram preceding this essay is laudable. Never was he one to mince words or to speak in vagaries. His preaching was straightforward and plainly from Scripture. In a pluralistic society with the influence of many differing spiritualities, he held high the benefits of the Supper as well as its potential spiritual harm. What might Chrysostom say to the preacher who uses the "Holy Supper as bait" (172)?
3. In this essay from *Der Lutheraner*, Walther states, "For it is certainly true: there is hardly anything in all of pastoral care that causes more trouble for a faithful minister of the Church than wanting to deal conscientiously with admission to the Holy Supper" (172). How does a pastor deal conscientiously with this matter, and what are the factors leading him to be less than conscientious?
4. Is a preacher doing the right thing in this if he would rather endure everything — in fact, even give up his ministry — than admit someone to the Holy Supper without examination (172)?
5. The divine Word is preached not only to keep the soul in the faith but also to bring about repentance of sin. The Holy Supper keeps, preserves and nurtures the Christian faith. When is the Supper received to the detriment of the one who receives? Does the worthy or unworthy reception of the participant have an effect upon the one administering the Sacrament?
6. What does Walther assert that examination should consist of for the one announcing for the Supper?
7. The faculty of theology at Wittenberg wrote that there are three main reasons to retain the institution of announcement (179). What is the aim of their rationale?
8. **Comment 2:** It would be hard to argue that Walther would agree with a member doing self-examination from a five-point communion statement in a bulletin and that such self-examination would be sufficient for admittance to the Supper. If the member won't come to the pastor for examination, it must not irritate the pastor to go and visit them personally (180). What are

some things the pastor should *not* do when visiting with a member who is announcing for communion?

9. **Comment 4:** Congregation members will sin against one another, and disputes will arise. What can be learned from how the faculty of theology at Wittenberg dealt with the case described (181–182)?

## ARTICLE 17: ADMINISTRATION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (PP. 199–221)

*“Valid administration of the Holy Supper consists of the blessing (consecration), distribution, and reception of bread and wine.”* —Walther

1. **Comment 2:** Stewards are under authority and are granted authority to act in certain times and places. For instance, a steward on an airplane has great authority to ensure that the occupants are kept safe and, in an emergency, ushered to safety. However, their authority to act decisively in an emergency situation is not their usual work. Usually they instruct, speak to and serve with much grace the needs and concerns of the travelers on the plane. The steward on the plane cannot devise his own protocol for conduct and service, but must follow proper procedure. So it is with the “stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Cor. 4:1). The pastor acts with authority under the authority of Christ by the Word of Christ. As a steward, he is not free to do and act as he wishes, but must serve and keep safe that which has been entrusted to him. Whose responsibility is it to deal with the steward who deals carelessly with the mysteries of God?
2. Article VII of the Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord states, “And just as the declaration [Gen.1:28] ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth,’ was spoken only once but is ever efficacious in nature, so that it is fruitful and multiplies, so also this declaration (‘This is My body,’ etc.) was spoken once, but even to this day and to His return is efficacious and works, that in the Supper of the Church His true Body and Blood are present” (202). At what point might a pastor make the Lord’s Supper impotent by his careless or deliberate actions?
3. **Comment 4:** At the heart of this comment is not, “Who can administer the Holy Supper?” but rather, “When does man erode the *certainty* of the Holy Supper?” This debate arises out of the doctrine of the call and the priesthood of all believers for the sake of good order and the assurance of grace given. In what emergency situation might a layman administer the Holy Supper? What legitimate spiritual reason might one have for declaring an “emergency” administration of the Holy Supper? Where do vicars fit into this discussion? How quickly the exception in the case of an emergency can become the rule through the means of man in pursuit of his own devices!
4. **Comment 5:** Article VIII of the Augsburg Confession confirms the validity of the Holy Supper even when the one administering it is heterodox. However, when both false teachers and their congregations by their public confession give the Words of Institution a different meaning, they nullify the essence of the Supper and distribute only bread and wine (212). Again, the issue at hand is the certainty with which Christ’s gifts are given. Which has greater importance: the orthodoxy of the celebrant or the confession of the congregation?
5. **Comment 7:** One can see why our Lutheran forefathers went to jail and emigrated to America for freedom of religion. The Prussian Union and its imposed regulations made uncertain that which our Lord most certainly gave — His Holy Supper for the forgiveness of sins. If it is unacceptable to qualify the distribution formula by saying, “*Christ says*, ‘This is my body...’” why is it acceptable to say, “This is the *true* body...” (214–215)?
6. **Comments 8, 9 and 12:** These are the common-sense comments. The advice on what to do if a “possibly venomous” spider were to drop down into the chalice is priceless (216). Likewise, the common-sense approach to make use of the Holy Supper is also priceless as exemplified in footnote 34 (217).
7. **Comment 11:** It is hard to read this comment without the distortion of feminism in our minds. Think theologically: Why would the eighth article in the Saxon General Articles prescribe “that first the men and bachelors are to line up in an orderly fashion for Communion, and then the virgins, but after them the women” (218)?
8. **Comment 13:** In regard to those who attend the Divine Service but do not commune, Deyling writes, “Those who do not receive the Sacrament with their mouths should still take it by faith, spiritually partake of the body and blood of Christ, praise God with hymns, and

not leave the church until the worship service has ended and the Thanksgiving, where the blessing of the people is done” (220). Some churches have a mass exodus before and after the service of the Sacrament. How can a pastor winsomely admonish people to stay and receive these spiritual blessings?

9. **Comment 14:** What to do with the leftovers? Sacred things should be cared for in a sacred manner. There is a range of honorable care for the consecrated elements

that remain so long as care is taken to keep separate that which is holy from the common. Great care is to be taken so as not to give the appearance of evil or cause offense. Which is easier: to fall toward the Roman Catholic understanding and treat the consecrated elements as the Sacrament even apart from their actual use, or to fall toward the casual Protestant side and treat the consecrated wine and bread crumbs as common leftovers in a kitchen?

## ARTICLE 18:

### WHO SHOULD BE ADMITTED TO THE LORD’S SUPPER (PP. 222–232)

*As far as communicants are concerned, only those should be admitted to the Holy Supper:*

1. *Who are already baptized;*
2. *Are able to examine themselves;*
3. *Cannot be proven to be non-Christians or heterodox believers, who would therefore be taking the Sacrament unworthily; and, finally, of whom*
4. *There is no reason to believe that they need to reconcile with someone or to provide restitution beforehand.*

Open communion practices within many Protestant denominations and, most contentiously, within Lutheran denominations cause much unnecessary strife. The Holy Supper is not necessary for salvation, but it does impart many salutary gifts to the one who receives it worthily. Whenever it is withheld, it is always to be done from the position of love. To receive it worthily is to receive it for the great benefit of the forgiveness of sins, strengthening of faith and the strengthening of the common confession expressed at that altar and pulpit. To receive it unworthily is to ingest toxic medication upon the soul. The latter is to be avoided at all costs.

1. **Comment 2:** This comment discusses communing those who may or may not be able to examine themselves and discern the body and blood of the Lord. Included here are the sleeping, unconscious, those in the throes of death, the insane, deaf-mute, young children, memory patients and the like. What and where is the line when a person cannot rightly examine or discern the body and blood of our Lord and therefore should not commune?
2. **Comment 3:** I have heard that the “Judas excuse” has been argued for open communion. The rationale is that Jesus communed Judas, and he obviously wasn’t

a true believer, so what right does a local pastor then have to refuse the Holy Supper to a person who believes something a little differently? However, they are missing the fact of the outward confession that Judas made before his betrayal and the public confession of faith made by a person who believes Scripture differently, as attested by their differing church membership. What did Jesus do to warn Judas of the danger of his plans, and how is a pastor to warn those he suspects may take the Holy Supper to their harm?

3. **Comment 4:** Differences matter, and agreeing to disagree just doesn’t cut it. The postmodern maxim that truth is relative to the individual is rubbish. What does Mling write concerning the offense of erroneous doctrine and practice (225–226)?
4. **Comment 5:** Reconciliation is necessary for reception of the Holy Supper. What happens when a pastor, over time, continually admits souls who have not reconciled or have no desire to reconcile with their brother? What about those who have divorced?
5. **Comment 8:** Luther states, “Let him distribute the Sacrament both to *himself* and to the people while the *Agnus Dei* is sung” (*Werke* 10:2760) (230). But the later Lutheran theologians, like Gerhard, are far from declaring that self-communion by the preacher to be the normal manner of distribution. What was Gerhard’s rationale for preferring another pastor to commune the pastor and permitting self-communion only out of dire necessity? How did it become wide practice for an elder to commune the pastor before the whole congregation? What would Walther say of our communion practices today? Would he commune with the LCMS in 2018? Why or why not?