

Incarnate Word Tract Series #17
Am I Worthy?

Misconceptions

The Holy Scriptures make it clear that Christians are to receive the Sacrament of the Altar “worthily.” However, many people have a variety of ideas as to what it means to be “worthy” to receive the Sacrament.

Some people feel that they are unworthy if they have committed a grievous sin since their last communion.

Others feel that they are unworthy if they have not gone through a long preparation for the Sacrament.

There are also those who think that they are unworthy if they don’t “feel the need” for the Sacrament.

Still others feel that they are unworthy because they don’t think that their faith is strong enough.

There are many other false reasons that Christians give themselves for believing that they are unworthy to receive the Body and Blood of Christ. This is tragic.

Scripture and the Confessions.

In order to understand correctly what true worthiness is, one must, as a Lutheran, look to the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Holy Scripture does indeed warn against receiving the Sacrament unworthily and urges Christians to examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:27, 28). In his *Large Catechism* Martin Luther quotes a very important statement as to who is worthy and who is not: “Unless a man has committed such a sin that he has forfeited the name of Christian and has to be expelled from the congregation, he should not exclude himself from the sacrament, lest he deprive himself of life” (V, 59).

Read it again and think about what it means: If you have not committed a sin for which you should be excommunicated, then you should *not* stay away from the Sacrament, lest you deprive yourself of eternal life.

In the early Church if someone did not receive the Sacrament on a given Sunday, it was taken for granted that such a person was not a Christian in good standing.

It is true that if you do not want to repent of your sins, then you should not receive the Sacrament. If you do not believe in Jesus Christ and in his bodily presence in the Sacrament, then you should not receive it. If you have no intention of using God’s help to improve your life, then you should not receive the Sacrament. But if you do repent,

believe and want to do better, then you should not stay away from the Sacrament, for you are a Christian.

. . . Who Has Faith . . .

Let us always remember what we learned in Luther's *Small Catechism*: Luther asks, "Who then receives such a Sacrament worthily?"

Answer:

"Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a fine outward training. But he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.' But he who does not believe these words, or doubts, is unworthy and unprepared; for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe."

This is what it means to be worthy to receive the Sacrament – to have *faith* in Christ's forgiveness in the Sacrament. Luther says nothing about how many or how grievous our sins have been. He says nothing about a long, somber preparation. He says nothing about "feeling the need." He says nothing about how strong or weak our faith is.

Luther says only one thing: "He is truly worthy and well prepared who has *faith* ..." This is what makes you worthy for the Sacrament, and nothing else.

If you have Christian faith, then "you should not exclude yourself from the sacrament, lest you deprive yourself of life." If you do not have faith and "have forfeited the name of Christian," then you should stay away from the Sacrament, lest you eat and drink unworthily. It is as simple as that.