

THE WORD, BAPTISM, AND THE LORD'S SUPPER-ALIKE BUT DIFFERENT

The various means of grace-the Gospel, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper- all have the same content and purpose. They are all signs and assurances of the gracious heart and attitude of God toward sinful mankind. At the same time, it is necessary to note the ways in which these means of grace differ from one another. Only Baptism is the mark and sign of the beginning of the Christian life; it is administered once and for all time to the individual, and it is never repeated. The Gospel (Word) and the Lord's Supper are the regular food for the Christian on his path through life to its end and to the coming of the new age. The Word is heard again and again, remembered repeatedly, read from time to time. So also the Lord's Supper is celebrated throughout the Christian life. But there is a decisive difference between hearing or reading the Gospel and celebrating the Lord's Supper. Hearing or reading or remembering the Word can be, and often is, an individual matter. But the Supper is never an individual matter; it is always the church of God, the disciples as a body, the body of Christ, which communes and receives this sacrament of the body and blood of the Lord.