

REFORMATION 500 WEEK 29: HEIDELBERG CATECHISM QA'S 78-79

Question 78: DO, THEN, THE BREAD AND THE WINE BECOME THE REAL BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST? **No, but as the water in Baptism is not changed into the blood of Christ, nor becomes the washing away of sins itself, being only the divine token [symbol] and assurance thereof, so also in the Lord's Supper the sacred bread does not become the body of Christ itself, though agreeably to the nature and usage of sacraments it is called the body of Christ.**

Both Roman Catholics and Lutherans argue that Christ's words, "This *is* My body," and "This *is* My blood," are to be understood *literally*, meaning that Christ's *physical* body and blood are present *in* the communion bread and wine. The Roman Catholic view is that when the priest utters the words, "This is My body," the substance of the bread miraculously changes into the real flesh and blood of Christ; all that remains of the bread and wine is its form, appearance, weight, smell, and taste. This view is called *transubstantiation*, which means *change of substance*. Only the bread (not the wine) is given to the people, because flesh has blood in it; and therefore, the people get "the blood" when they eat "the flesh." The Lutherans do not believe the bread or wine changes; but that Christ's glorified body in heaven is now (like His divine nature) everywhere present and therefore is present *with* the bread and wine. This is called *consubstantiation*, which means "*with* the substance."

The truth is, the Catholics and Lutherans are not *literal enough*. Jesus did not say, "This *changed into* My body" or "This *contains* My body." The verb "is" in the Bible never means "changed into" or "contains." But it does mean *represents* or *symbolizes*. For example, "The field *is* the world" (Matt. 13:38). Jesus said, "I *am* the bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:41). Did Jesus mean He *changed into* or was *inside* a loaf of bread? The answer is obvious. He *represented* bread – heavenly bread in fact – the true manna from heaven! Remember the rock that was struck in the wilderness, and out came water for the people to drink? "That Rock *was* Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). Did the rock *change into* or *contain* Christ? Again, the answer is obvious. That Rock *symbolized* Christ – who was struck for our sins, to give us living water (John 4:13-14; 7:37-38). If I showed you a photograph of my mother and said, "This *is* my mother," you would not think I was holding a piece of my mother's flesh. Likewise, Jesus was not holding a piece of His own flesh, or a cup of His own blood. The disciples, who often misunderstood Jesus, did not need to ask Him what He meant, because it was obvious. The bread *represents* His body. The wine *represents* His blood "shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt. 26:28).

"Christ's physical body in heaven is one; it is not shredded into millions of pieces and scattered over the Communion tables of all churches in all ages!" (Jones, *Study Helps*, 180). Christ's glorified human body is *visible* in heaven at the right hand of God. It is not *invisible* in the bread and wine. According to the creed of Chalcedon (AD 451), the historic position of the Christian Church is that Christ's divine and human natures are so joined together that there is **no change** of the one into the other. But if Christ's human nature *became* everywhere present then that would be a change!

Another problem with the Catholic and Lutheran position is inconsistency. They insist that "to *drink* Christ's blood" must be interpreted *literally*; and therefore, they think the communion wine changes into or contains the blood of Christ. But

they do not argue that 'to be *washed* by the blood of Christ' (1 John 1:7) must be interpreted literally, so that the baptism water changes into or contains the blood of Christ. Rather, they admit, 'to be *washed* by Christ's blood' is figurative language, meaning, 'to be *forgiven* by Christ's blood.' They are willing to interpret the *washing* of the blood figuratively; why not the *drinking* of the blood? For "to be washed with the blood of Christ, and to drink His blood is the same thing" (Ursinus, 396).

Let us look at the last phrase of Question 78: "in the Lord's Supper the sacred bread does not become the body of Christ itself, though agreeably to the nature and usage of sacraments it is called the body of Christ." This is simply a repeat of what was said in connection with baptism, that sometimes a symbol (like baptism) is called by the name of what it symbolizes (i.e. the *washing* away of sins). Circumcision, which was the sign of the covenant between God and Abraham, is called the covenant itself ("the covenant of circumcision," Acts 7:8), even though it is only a *symbol* of the covenant. The rock in the wilderness is called *Christ* ("that Rock *was* Christ"), even though it was only a *symbol* of Christ. So, we should have no problem with calling the bread His body, and the cup His blood, even though they are only *symbols* of His body and blood.

Question 79: WHY THEN DOES CHRIST CALL THE BREAD HIS BODY, AND THE CUP HIS BLOOD, OR THE NEW TESTAMENT IN HIS BLOOD; AND THE APOSTLE PAUL, THE COMMUNION OF THE BODY AND THE BLOOD OF CHRIST? **Christ speaks thus with great cause, namely, not only to teach us thereby, that like as the bread and wine sustain this temporal life, so also His crucified body and shed blood are the true meat and drink of our souls unto life eternal; but much more, by this visible sign and pledge to assure us that we are as really partakers of His true body and blood by the working of the Holy Spirit, as we receive by the mouth of the body these holy tokens [symbols] in remembrance of Him; and that all His sufferings and obedience are as certainly our own, as if we ourselves had suffered and done all in our own person.**

Why are sacramental symbols called by the name of what they symbolize? *This highlights the close connection between the symbol and what it symbolizes.* The **physical** nourishment we receive from bread and wine (Psalm 104:15; Gen. 14:18) **resembles** the **spiritual** nourishment we receive every day as a result of believing in ("eating") Christ's crucified body and shed blood. Remember that eternal life is a life of union and communion (fellowship) with the risen and glorified Christ (through the Word and prayer) in the bond of the Holy Spirit so that we are spiritually sanctified and transformed more and more into His image. Christ calls the bread His crucified body and the wine His shed-blood because He wants to *symbolically assure* us believers that just as certainly as our mouth tastes the bread and wine (symbols of His sacrifice), we can be just as certain that our soul tastes (possesses) all the benefits of His sacrifice. He *gives us* symbols of His suffering and death to assure us that His suffering and death is *imputed to us* as if we ourselves had suffered and died. Christ wants us to *taste* with our mouth **how near** He is to us and **how dear** we are to Him. He told His disciples, "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you" (Luke 22:15). His desire to have communion with His people has not changed (Heb. 13:8)!

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