

BAPTISM & THE LORD'S SUPPER ... THE LORD'S SUPPER

Perhaps the deepest and most meaningful part of any worship is the Lord's Supper. It has an intimacy which, I believe, many of God's people often wrongly take for granted, - surely it is a time when the presence of God should be felt among His people. We look back to the Israelites in the Old Testament and we can see in a very special way how He came amongst them on the Day of Atonement and in Shekinah glory appeared in the cloud (Ex. 16:10) and filled the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34,35).

The subject of the Lord's Supper is one that invokes heartfelt doctrinal differences. It is sometimes known by such titles as the Eucharist and Holy Communion. ... I don't want to spend too long discussing doctrinal differences, - but I just want to mention some of them because, on one occasion a member in a previous church very sincerely informed me that the Roman Catholic Mass was the same as our Lord's Supper.

The [*Catechism of the Catholic Church \(1994\)*](#) explains the 'Eucharist' (**eucharistia**, thankfulness); it affirms, "The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species [*i.e. the bread and the wine*] is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as 'the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend' (Thomas Aquinas). In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist 'the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, *the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained.*' (Council of Trent, 1551). 'This presence is called 'real' - by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a *substantial* presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present.' (Pope Paul VI, 1963-78 ... successor to John XXIII, and succeeded by John Paul I.)

This is known as the doctrine of 'transubstantiation'; again I quote from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, "The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of

the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation”.

The term transubstantiation was adopted into the phraseology of the church in 1215, when it was used by the Fourth Lateran Council. This doctrine was reconfirmed (1551) by the Council of Trent and carries with it terrible consequences for those who reject it, "If any one shall say that, in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, there remains the substance of bread and wine together with the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; and shall deny that wonderful and singular conversion of the whole substance of the bread into the body, and of the whole substance of the wine into the blood, the species of bread and wine alone remaining, which conversion the Catholic Church most fittingly calls Transubstantiation, let him be anathema" (Session 13, Canon 2).

The doctrine of transubstantiation, - which is foundational to Roman Catholicism, - is a blasphemy of blasphemies at the very heart of this religion because it teaches that every time the Mass is enacted Christ is crucified all over again.

Martin Luther rejected the doctrine of ‘transubstantiation’, and he replaced it with ‘*con*substantiation’. He taught there was a special and unique *physical* presence of Christ, - as well as His spiritual presence, - that accompanied the Eucharist, but that the bread and wine remained bread and wine, - they didn’t change as the doctrine of transubstantiation taught. [However, Christ’s physical presence is in Heaven!]

John Calvin considered it slightly differently. He considered it as a real means of grace, - a ‘channel’ by which Christ communicates Himself to us through His presence at the Table. Calvin believed that while Christ is bodily in Heaven, His presence is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit in a particular way at the Table.

The view that we adhere to was developed during the Reformation period by Ulrich Zwingli, the Swiss Reformer (1484-1531). He believed that Christ was present in and through the faith of the participants, but that this presence was not confined to the bread and the wine, - *they* were merely *symbolic* of His body and His blood. He did not accept a *real* presence of Christ in the Supper but, instead, interpreted the Lord’s Supper as a *symbolic* commemoration of the death of Christ.

When you explore the Protestant doctrines, - including the Thirty Nine Articles, Westminster Confession of Faith, - you will find the main understanding of the Lord's Supper shares most in common with Calvin and Zwingli. (see <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccs/hbd.htm>).

Variations occur when you delve into more local situations. For example, Plymouth Brethren would not normally admit believers to the Table who have not appropriate documentation from their local assembly. In some Strict Baptist congregations only baptised believers in membership of a fellowship are permitted to the Table.

... It is important to hold a sound Biblical view with regard to the intimacy of the Lord's Supper. We must be faithful to God's Word and be obedient to His teaching in order to enjoy His presence as we remember His death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb.

THE SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

* It *is* a solemn occasion. On one occasion I was in a meeting just outside of Jerusalem, coming from Bethlehem. At the conclusion of this meeting it was decided to celebrate the Lord's Supper. However, such was the frivolity and the lack of proper respect and solemnity I could not and did not remain in that meeting.

* The Lord's Supper remembers the greatest injustice this world has ever carried out.

* We crucified, - under the most horrible conditions, - the perfect, sinless Son of God.

* If I was to treat the Lord's Supper with frivolity, I would be no better than those who laughed at Him and mocked Him at the cross.

* When I come to the Table of the Lord I must come prepared ... for this is the most precious meeting with anyone that I can ever have.

* Because I cannot go to Him, He comes to me. He left the glories of Heaven, He set aside His crown to be laid in a cradle on His way to the cross to die for me. ... Tell me, *what is there to laugh about with that!*

* At a young age, - only in His early thirties, - He died for me. He died the cruellest death, - not only did the nails pierce His hands and His feet, but my sins pierced His heart!

* Everything I am ... everything I have ... everything I will be one day centres upon the truths we remember each time we come to the Table.

* Yes, Jesus died on the cross ... *but that is not it all!* Jesus died on the cross to take away my sin, and the sin of each of His Elect. He had an eternal purpose that we remember *solemnly* at the Lord's Supper.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

* There is no need for fanfares, priests in fancy regalia, special seats for dignitaries, - the Bible speaks out against such things, e.g. [I Cor. 11:33](#) [Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 34](#) [And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation.](#)

* When Jesus met in the Upper Room with His disciples, it was the simplest and most ordinary of settings.

* Indeed, it is not the state of the surroundings that is important, it is the state of the hearts of those gathered at the Table as they come to remember Christ and His sacrifice.

* It is not entertainment or empty religiosity. It is the meeting of sinners together with their Saviour.

* We don't need to have fancy words or meaningless gestures. Our thoughts need to be focused on our Lord.

* It is not a time for a hundred words ... when only ten would do. If someone does not know why they are partaking of the elements, ... they ought not to be partaking of them.

* The simplicity of the occasion calls upon us to look *upward*, - because the purpose of meeting at the Lord's table is so that our attention is wholly taken up with Christ.

* At the Last Supper the disciples listened to His words, - they listened to Him speak; He had their attention.

* At the Table our minds must be nowhere else, except in meditation of our great and wonderful Saviour.

* ... We look *upward*, we also look *inward*. Paul told the believers to *examine* themselves before they partake of the bread and wine ... the danger being that if they partook of the bread and wine without the appropriate preparation they could be eating and drinking damnation to their souls (I Cor. 11:28,29).

* What does *that* mean? It means that partaking of the Lord's Table is such a serious act of worship in the eyes of God that we must examine our testimony before His holy throne.

* Am I really saved and walking in fellowship with the Lord I claim to know and to serve? Am I truly born again of the Holy Spirit?

... I need to examine myself because these are eternal issues, - I daren't come to the Table if I'm not prepared.

- * Do I have unconfessed sin ... that no-one else knows about, but God knows? Am I pretending to be something I'm not? Am I as guilty as the Old Testament worshippers who brought their injured and defiled animals to the altar for sacrifice?
- * I need to look *upward*, and I need to look *inward*; I also need to look *outward*. I need to be aware of the presence of my Lord, but I also need to be aware of my fellow-believer in the Lord.
- * I can't have a poor testimony and sit at the Lord's Table if I am not right and I haven't tried to 'make it up' with my brother or sister. We are the family of God ... with responsibilities to each other ... and Paul says in Eph. 4:3 that we must make every effort **to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace**.
- * What if you *have* made every effort, but all your efforts to maintain this unity are 'thrown back in your face' and rejected? Well, there is not much you can do regarding the state of the other person's heart ... but when you come to the Table, *your* heart must be prepared.
- * The church in Corinth was ripped in pieces with factions; Euodias and Syntche in Philippi (Phil. 4:2) weren't much better!
- * Guard against coming to the Table and making it a mockery and a charade. ... Look *upwards, inwards and outwards*. Pray as the Psalmist prayed, **Ps. 26:2 Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins and my heart**. Study Paul's words again, **I Cor. 11:28 let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup**.
- * There is the **Solemnity of the Lord's Supper**, and the **Simplicity of the Lord's Supper**, there is also ...

THE SUMMONS TO THE LORD'S SUPPER

- * This is *the Lord's Table* to which every born-again child of God, - who is walking in fellowship with Him and His people, - is invited.
- * It is not for the unsaved. It is not for those loosely connected with some pseudo form of Christianity. It is for those who know and love Jesus Christ in a personal and in a life-changing way. ... It is for those who are the saved of the Lord.
- * Who invites you? It is your Saviour Who invites you.
- * How often should you come to the Table? ... How much do you love the Lord, - and want to remember in this way He has appointed, - what He has done to save your soul? Paul said should you should come 'often'.

- * You and I, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ own a right and a responsibility to come as often as we can ... [for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come \(I Cor. 11:26\)](#).
- * ... Just as each child of God ought to be baptised in the way Jesus commanded, so they should also be regular at the Lord's Supper ... to keep what He has done for us fresh in our minds.

Conclusion

- * I do not believe we can over-emphasise the importance of the Lord's Supper. It is a privilege for the people of God due to the Sovereign Grace of God.
- * And, we need to bear in mind, "Holy things," said Matthew Henry, "are to be used in a holy manner, or else they are profaned."
- * May the Lord give us a deeper understanding of this ordinance that He has blessed His people with.