

## DID GOD REALLY SAY, “THIS IS MY BODY & BLOOD?”

We will answer this question using God’s Word, and we will explore the meaning of this phrase using the words of today’s second lesson. From 1 Corinthians 10, we listen again to verse 16:

*<sup>16</sup> Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?  
And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Did God really say, “This is my body. This is my blood”? The simple answer is of course, YES.

If you were listening just a few minutes ago as today’s Gospel lesson from Matthew 26 was read, you heard Jesus quoted as saying, “Take and eat; **this is my body**” and “Drink from it, all of you. **This is my blood of the covenant . . .**” (Matthew 26:26-28 NIV).

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter of Mark’s gospel Jesus is again quoted as saying, “Take it; **this is my body**” and, “**This is my blood of the covenant . . .**” (Mark 14:22-24 NIV).

In the gospel of Luke we read that Jesus said, “**This is my body given for you . . .**” and “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood . . .**” (Luke 22:19-20 NIV).

Finally, the Apostle Paul passes on to us what Jesus had taught him personally, that on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread and said, “**This is my body . . .**” and then he took the cup of wine and said, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood . . .**” (1 Corinthians 11:24-25 NIV).

Did God really say, “This is my body. This is my blood”? Yes, without a doubt, it is recorded in four different locations, four different books of the New Testament. Now that fact is important in and of itself. If the divinely inspired writers of the Bible were led by the Holy Spirit to record this statement “*This is my body. This is my blood*” four times in the pages of scripture, don’t you think maybe this phrase is important? Don’t you think this is maybe something on which God wants us to be very clear? If you believe the Bible then you know not only did Jesus say these words, but these words are very important. The question then becomes “What does Jesus mean when he says, “This is my body. This is my blood”?

The meaning of this phrase is made clear in today’s text. Let’s first look at the context in which these words were written, a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Corinth in Greece. Paul had founded this congregation earlier in his ministry and, over the years, had worked with the Corinthians face-to-face and by letter to teach and admonish and instruct them. In this part of his letter Paul addressed the Corinthians’ practice of participating in the rites and feasts of idol worship.

Now how could this happen? How could Christians start worshiping idols? Well, back in those days, pagan worship often involved the celebration of a meal. Maybe a Corinthian Christian family, exercising its “Christian liberty,” accepted the invitation of a pagan neighbor and joined them for a “special occasion,” perhaps a wedding, at the idol temple. Noticing that the food served in connection with the

ceremony was really good, and plentiful, and free, and noticing that many of their business associates and neighborhood acquaintances were also in attendance, the Christian family may have found it easier and easier to return with some regularity to share the food and the fellowship even if they had to sit through some weird pagan ceremony. It may have reached the point that several Christian families were regularly attending the pagan rites so the Apostle Paul had to say:

*<sup>14</sup> Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. <sup>15</sup> I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say.*

His argument will be that a Christian who takes part in the rites and feasts of idol worship is really associating himself with Satan's kingdom. That follower of Christ then becomes a partner with devils. What's remarkable is that Paul uses the widely known truths, the crystal clear doctrine of the Lord's Supper to warn the Corinthians against involvement with idol worship. He draws a parallel between the two:

*<sup>16</sup> Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*

Paul is using, as an example in his argument, the **first** of the three "unities" that exist in the Lord's Supper, i.e., the unity that exists between the wine of Communion and the blood of Christ and the unity that exists between the bread of Communion and the body of Christ. The wine in the cup is a "participation" in the blood of Christ. The bread that we break is a "participation" in the body of Christ. When the King James authors translated this passage, they used the English word "communion" for the Greek word *koinonia* to express the unity between the elements bread & wine and the body & blood of Christ. The wine in the cup, is it not the "communion" of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not the "communion" of the body of Christ. (That's why, among Protestant denominations, the sacrament bears the name "Holy Communion.")

So when you eat the bread of the Lord's Supper you also receive Christ's body, and when you drink the wine of the Lord's Supper you also receive Christ's blood. As you eat and drink the earthly elements, you also eat and drink the sacramental elements. There is a "participation" between the two, a "communion," a unity. This is what Christ means when he takes bread and says, "This is my body" and takes wine and says, "This is my blood."

When you participate in the Lord's Supper you enter into a most intimate fellowship with Christ himself. This is the **second** unity of communion, the unity between Christ and the believer. As you, individually, partake of the bread and wine you are receiving into yourself the very body and blood of Christ that was shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins.

Furthermore, in the Lord's Supper, you are brought into the most intimate fellowship with those who commune with you.

*<sup>17</sup> Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*

There is one loaf, one collection of bread on the Lord's Table. There is one cup, one collection of wine on the Lord's Table. All who partake of that bread and wine are united with each other because we all share that common meal. That sharing makes us one spiritual body. This is the **third** unity of

communion, the unity among participants. To receive the Lord's Supper with a congregation is a declaration of unity, a public profession of oneness, with that congregation.

Paul uses the "unities" of Holy Communion, which were widely known truths, universally taught in the early Christian church, to warn the Corinthians against involvement with idol worship. Just as there is a participation in the body and blood of Christ when we celebrate Holy Communion, so also there is a fellowship with the idols when their worshipers eat the sacrifices brought to the altars of the idols.

<sup>18</sup> *Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar?*

Eating and drinking in worship at the altar unites us with Christ, and we share in the blessings we receive, especially the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God, just as the people of Israel did in the Old Testament. In the same way, pagans are united with their gods through their worship, but those worshipers can look for no blessings from their gods.

Next Paul makes it clear. Idols do not really exist. The gods that idols represent are only creatures of man's imagination. But the devils who planted idolatry in man's mind are real. They are behind idolatry and promote it. These are the beings that idol worshipers actually fellowship with in idol worship.

<sup>19</sup> *Do I mean then that a sacrifice offered to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything?* <sup>20</sup> *No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

For the Christians in Corinth, participating in idol sacrifices and idol worship should be unthinkable.

<sup>21</sup> *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons.*

If the Christians in Corinth thought they could participate in both Christian and pagan rites, Paul had a solemn warning for them:

<sup>22</sup> *Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

The Lord our God is jealous, he is possessive, of his honor and glory. He does not want the praise and honor and glory due to him given to someone or something else. When he tells believers to avoid false worship, "You shall have no other gods," he means it. He is serious.

Our Lord is also serious about the celebration of that sacred meal which he has given to us for our spiritual benefit. In the very next chapter of this same letter, the Apostle Paul admonished the Corinthians for the disorderly way in which they were administering the Lord's Supper. He repeated the words that Jesus himself had told him were said at the institution of the sacrament: "This is my body. This is my blood." Then the Apostle warns against receiving the sacrament in an unworthy manner.

<sup>27</sup> *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.* 1 Corinthians 11:27 (NIV).

It is clear from this that the bread and wine are still present in the consecrated supper. ". . . whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup . . ." The bread and wine do not cease to exist as some would teach. Nor are they magically "changed into" Christ's body & blood by the clergy, and thereby cease to be bread &

wine. Christ's body and blood are really present in the Sacrament, not because of anything we say, not because of anything we do. His body and blood are present through the words he spoke 2,000 years ago, "This is my body. This is my blood."

So when you come to the Lord's Supper you receive the earthly elements bread and wine. But remember the first unity of communion. There is a communion, a unity, a participation, of the bread and Christ's body and the wine and Christ's blood. So when you receive the bread and wine you also receive the body and blood of Christ. That's why a person who receives the sacrament "in an unworthy manner" is guilty of sinning not against the bread & wine but against the body & blood. How could you be guilty of sinning against the body & blood of Christ if it weren't there?

<sup>28</sup> *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.* 1 Cor. 11:28.

The bread and wine remain in existence.

<sup>29</sup> *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.* 1 Corinthians 11:29 (NIV).

But with the bread and wine a participant receives the body and blood of the Lord. We call this the "Real Presence" of Christ in Holy Communion. Anyone who receives the Lord's Supper and doesn't recognize that the body and blood of Christ are present eats and drinks judgment on himself. This is one of the reasons why we practice Member Communion. We receive at the Lord's Table those that we know have been instructed to understand that the Lord's body and blood are present in and with the bread and wine. We don't want someone to receive the Lord's Supper to his or her detriment.

Within Christianity, there are those who teach that the body and blood of Christ are not present in the Sacrament. They say that the clear and simple statements "This is my body. This is my blood." are not to be understood as they are written. They teach that, in each of the four recorded instances in which these statements occur, Jesus didn't mean to say, "This is my body." He really meant to say, "This *represents* my body." But the word "is" generally means "is" wherever it is used. The times that Jesus spoke in parables or used figurative language he would explain to his disciples, in depth, what he meant. Each time the words of institution are recorded in the Bible, Jesus adds no commentary or explanation. The words are to be understood simply as they are spoken. **'Is' means 'is'.**

But the body of Christ, they argue, ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. Since a body can't be in two places at the same time, and since Jesus' body is in heaven, his body can't be in the bread of communion. The bread merely 'represents' Christ's body and the wine merely 'represents' Christ's blood. We know from Scripture that, after the resurrection, Jesus' glorified body was not bound by the laws of nature. He would appear in rooms where the doors were locked and the windows shuttered. As with the Emmaus disciples the resurrected Christ could also disappear from a room with no trace. His body is not bound by the laws of nature today. His body and blood CAN be present in the Lord's Supper.

As the author of the hymn we just sang said so poetically: "*Yet, Savior, you are not confined to any habitation, But you are present everywhere . . .*" The ascended Lord is present and rules over all things in heaven and on earth as True God and True Man. In fact, he has promised that whenever we gather for worship, he is here. He said he will never leave us and that he will be with us to end of time.

So, did God really say, “This is my body and blood”? Yes. What did Jesus mean? He meant that in the Sacrament you receive His body with the bread and you receive his blood with the wine. And so we come to the third question. Why. Why did Jesus institute a sacrament in which we receive his body and blood?

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Dr. Luther explained, “Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”

In this sacred meal, our Lord comes to you individually and he gives you the very body which hung on the cross of Calvary. He gives you the very blood that poured from his wounds. He gives you, tangibly, the very things he used to pay for your sins and to win your forgiveness. You can taste and see them. And he promises, as you taste and see his body and blood with the bread and wine, you personally receive the assurance of sins forgiven and the strengthening of your faith in him.

The Lord’s Supper is the message of God’s love for you in Christ, proclaimed openly to the world, as in John 3:16, but sealed personally to you by his presence in the bread and the wine. That’s why he says to you so clearly, “This is my body. This is my blood.” Amen.