

## **WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH XXIX: 5-7**

*(Reading: 1 Corinthians 10:1-22)*

### **How The Lord's Supper Is His Supper**

If what we have confessed in the Articles 5 till 7 of this 29<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Westminster Confession sounds like something you've heard before, it's because it is! The compilers of this creed of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century were drawing together some strands which had appeared before but now again come into play in a more specific way.

That's why what Article 5 brings up is what Chapter 27 had raised in its second Article. There, in speaking of the sacraments in general, we confessed, "There is, in every sacrament, a spiritual relation, or sacramental union between the sign and the thing signified: whence it comes to pass, that the names and effects of the one are attributed to the other."

The tie in with Article 5 is that it's the spiritual work of the Holy Spirit represented in the outward action. So the bread and wine symbolise the inner reality - they are not that reality itself. This is exactly what we have seen with the bread and the wine not becoming the actual body and blood of Christ.

#### **Don't Let The Name Throw You**

In effect, what Article 5 is saying is DON'T LET THE NAME THROW YOU! Don't become focused on Jesus describing the bread and wine as his body and blood. While they are the words He used of this sacrament in such scriptures as Matthew 28, the verses 26 till 28, it was a meaning such as in John 10 verse 9 when He says, "I am the gate."

I mean, the Lord's not actually a gate. If that were so we would expect that He would have wooden planks and a hinge and all the rest of it. In the same way, if it were the Lord's physical body and blood then why doesn't it actually become that? DON'T LET THE NAME THROW YOU!

Instead, let the name remain a name, because while a name pictures something - it is not that thing.

Therefore Jesus means that the elements of bread and wine represent His body and blood given for our salvation. As bread and wine nourish physically so Christ's death for us nourishes spiritually.

This was shown in a story concerning Ebenezer Erskine. Rev. Erskine was a leading figure in a reforming movement amongst Presbyterian churches in Scotland during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. On one occasion a lady was present at the observance of the Lord's Supper in her church, when Erskine was leading the service. She was very impressed by his preaching and quite moved by the sacrament. So she asked about him and where he was from.

The next Sunday she went to Erskine's own church to hear him. But she felt none of those strong impressions she had had the Sunday before. Wondering about this, she called on Erskine. She asked him what could possibly explain the difference in her feelings. He answered her, "Madam, the reason is this - last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus Christ. But today you have come to hear Ebenezer Erskine."

She got the message mixed up with the messenger. Just the same way we have to be careful not to get the Lord's Supper mixed up so that the outside seems to be the inside. As Article 5 ends in describing the elements, "they still remain truly and only bread and wine, as they were before."

This is what the Lord Jesus shows in Matthew 26 verse 29 and 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11 verses 27 and 28. For after having distributed and participated in the elements He still calls them bread and wine.

#### **Don't Let Others Distract You**

But then the Confession of Faith goes further in Article 6. It moves on to bring out how serious the error is that takes Jesus' words literally here. In the words of a second aspect this afternoon, DON'T LET OTHERS DISTRACT YOU.

The Confession takes this error so seriously it calls it a heresy, for when it says that Roman Catholic doctrine “hath been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions, yea, of gross idolatries” it’s speaking about something which is a false teaching altogether.

This is what the apostle John strongly warned against at the end of his first letter. In chapter 5 verse 21, he writes, “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.” Now, where you find that warning in John’s letter it seems right out of place with what has just gone on before it. But having just pointed unequivocally to Jesus Christ, the one who is the true God and eternal life, the apostle states that the last thing Christians should be doing is being distracted away from Him. It actually couldn’t be a more telling way to end his letter. They would be in doubt what it was about!

An incident from the year 1805 illustrates this. It was the time when the installation of the new knights of the garter was approaching. And while his Majesty, George III, was talking with some people of high rank about this, a distinguished nobleman said to the king, ‘Sir, are not the new knights to be installed, obliged to take the sacrament before the ceremony?’”

His Majesty’s face suddenly changed. With a stern look, he replied, “No; that religious ceremony is not to be mixed up with our profane ceremonies. Even at the time of my coronation, I was very unwilling to take the sacrament; but when they told me it was indispensable and I must take it, before I approached the communion table, I took off the trinket from my head. The sacrament, my Lord, is not to be profaned by our Gothic institutions.”

However, this is exactly what the church had come to at the time of the Reformation. It had come to the stage where the sign and the thing signified had become the same thing. That is not only completely unscriptural, it’s also beyond reason. It doesn’t make sense - in fact, it’s non-sense! And not only doesn’t it make sense it goes right against common sense. That’s why it is not just an error - it’s heretical!

I mean, why would you want to sacrifice Christ all over again? For that’s what Rome does with saying the bread and the wine are truly Christ’s body and blood offered again on the altar. No wonder that wafers replaced bread and the cup held back from the people. They couldn’t risk any crumbs falling or drops being spilt!

Such teaching could only lead to many superstitions and the most blatant idolatry. A situation that remains until today. Because you will get those amongst us who say we should look for the good in the Roman Catholic Church. You might even read reports about how ‘conservative’ the present pope is. Anyway, they say, shouldn’t we keep talking to them because that might be the way the Lord brings His “grace” to them? Well, it certainly seems that many Protestant leaders have made that trip to Rome. They met Pope John Paul II. And they couldn’t help but go away impressed. Now they’re saying that about the Pope Benedict XVI.

It shows how far many of us have gone from the gospel, because this is not as if a few members in our congregation have become slightly confused. This is where the leaders of a denomination have openly and consistently gone against God’s Word.

How can a Reformed Professor pray that this new Pope will be lead “into a deeper and fuller understanding of Scripture” when he’s got it all wrong in the first place? “Can a blind lead a blind man?” to use Jesus’ words in Luke 6 verse 39. “Won’t they both fall into a pit?”

And that’s what Article 6 says. It accurately tells of how the church fell into idolatry before the reformation and of how it’s happening amongst the churches of the reformation today.

I mean, how many of those visiting with the Pope actually raise these fundamental heresies with him? You certainly don’t need to visit him to convey that to him anyway! You don’t need to be overawed by all those earthly treasures in Rome to state the truth.

What you do need to do, though, is what Article 7 goes on to elucidate. Because having dealt negatively with where the church has gone wrong in this - where it’s become man-centred - we always have to return to being Christ-centred. When we look to Him we are being “Worthy receivers”. In the words of the third aspect, **DO SEE CHRIST SPIRITUALLY IN YOU!**

## **Do See Christ Spiritually In You**

Dear friend, this comes down to what really matters - what's on your heart. This is what Paul speaks of in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 11 verse 28 when he writes about properly examining ourselves before we eat the bread and drink the cup. Because it has to come out of where you are in the Lord.

So Scripture confirms what our senses have already told us. For there's no way Christ is physically present in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. He's there only spiritually. But that spiritual presence - the personal and immediate presence of God the Holy Spirit - means that true believers do receive and feed upon Christ and have union and communion with Him, not only as to His divine nature but also as to his human nature. What comes out of this in Article 7 is that two errors are addressed. And we need to say they are errors and not heresies because they don't teach that the bread and wine are turned into Christ's actual body and blood.

The first of these errors is the Lutheran teaching of 'consubstantiation'. This teaches that the physical or material substance of Christ's flesh and blood is literally present "in, with and under" the bread and wine. The Lutherans compare this with the example of a sponge. To the substance of the sponge is added the substance of water. You still see just a sponge. But the substance of the water is all through it. However, as G. I. Williamson notes, "such a view virtually destroys the human nature of Christ. How can Christ have a true human nature which is literally capable of being at any number of places at the same time?"

Now, Lutherans say that his human nature is 'ubiquitous'. This means that Christ can be present everywhere in human nature. But then it's not human, is it? When Jesus said in John 16 verse 7 that it was for our good that He was going away and that the Spirit would then come to us, it's clear Christ is physically absent from the earth.

So the Lutheran view is an error. But it also shows us that we should not be surprised Lutheran ministers today are joining the Roman Catholic priesthood.

The second of these errors isn't actually stated as such in Article 7. It's the view that swings right over to the other extreme from Rome's view, because it's the error of 'memorialism'. This is the belief that there is nothing either physically or spiritually to be gained from the sacrament. It was a view Zwingli initially took and it has been held by many Anabaptists since then. You'll find it largely in Arminian churches - like Churches of Christ, General Baptist, and Pentecostal churches. There they usually have their communion every week. But it's very quickly flicked through; no preparation for it; no warning given with it; and no guarding of it. The Lord's Supper is just something you do - like a birthday!

So the Reformed view is quite distinctive. To say that there is a real spiritual feeding and drinking which comes as we physically eat and drink is a narrowly-held view but definitely the scriptural view. This is what is meant by the apostle Paul when he writes in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10 verse 16, "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?"

It is also what has been graciously confirmed by the Lord many times throughout church history. One Joseph Williams of Kidderminster, in his diary dated August 26, 1744, tells of such an occasion. He wrote, "The whole administration of the Lord's Supper to-day, was through adorable grace, a sweet opportunity, a most wonderful gospel feast. How did my heart burn within me! How tenderly did it throb! What streams of tears, even tears of joy, joy unspeakable and full of glory, flowed from my gushing eyes, while the minister was in his introductory discourse! 'As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show forth the Lord's death till He come.'

"With what humble boldness did I appeal to the omniscient God, to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that each of the Divine Persons knew the sincerity and integrity of my heart, midst all the imperfections and frailties with which I am encompassed! With what holy freedom of and confidence could

I desire of God to search and try me, my own heart not condemning me! How did my heart glow with thankfulness and admiration, at the amazing condescension and love of God in Christ Jesus, to a creature so mean, so vile, and sinful! Had the tide of sacred joy swelled a few degrees higher, I could hardly have restrained myself from crying out in the congregation, 'O He is come! He is come!'"

This is one man's descriptive experience. But doesn't it connect with us all? Being a worthy receiver means being spiritually blessed. And that cannot leave us untouched!