

The Body and Blood of Jesus Christ

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Since the beginning of Christianity, there has been some debate concerning the nature of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The point of debate concerns whether one takes a literal or metaphorical view of certain New Testament references, paramount among them those which come from the mouth of Jesus Himself. Please prayerfully consider the following, examining the Scriptures for yourself.

There is general agreement that the body of Christ being broken speaks of the sacrificial physical death of the Incarnate Christ, and that the shed blood of Christ was necessary for the redemption of sinners (Acts 2:23; Matthew 20:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19). But is there more than this? The Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions say that there is. They believe, in varying degrees (the Catholics more so), that the literal body and blood (the physical presence) of Jesus Christ is found in the communion elements as they are presented in the ordinance given by the Lord—"do this in remembrance of Me" (Luke 22:19). Theologically, these positions are known as Trans-substantiation and Con-substantiation.

The Reformed (Protestant) view rejects these positions as being absurd, finding the basis for this conclusion in the Bible, and in basic Bible Hermeneutics (principles of understanding). We understand the Scriptures literally unless there is good reason not to do so. And in the case of references to eating of the body and drinking of the blood of our Lord, there are lots of reasons to understand such references metaphorically and not literally. In other places, Jesus calls Herod a fox (Luke 13:31-32) and calls Himself a vine (John 15:5). There are many other such examples of metaphoric language in the Bible. If we were to literally cut off our hands and feet every time we sin, we would all be blind quadriplegics (Matthew 18:8-9). More to our thesis, prior to the institution of the Lord's Table, in John 6:48-59, Jesus commands His disciples to eat His flesh and drink His blood. The Jews were offended at this language, because in its literal sense, it represented a direct opposition to the teaching of Leviticus 7:22-27. However, Jesus never did speak against the Law of Moses; in fact, He came to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17-19). Was Jesus teaching cannibalism? God forbid! He was speaking of a spiritual feeding upon God through receiving Himself by belief in faith, and true discipleship to follow.

Let us look at the nature of the body and blood of Christ in the communion ordinance as we find it in Matthew. “And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:26-29). Again, Jesus was still alive. To say that His body and blood were in many places then is a denial of the Incarnation. He is clearly speaking metaphorically. In fact, in this very passage, Jesus identifies the drink as “fruit of the vine” and not His blood, showing that symbolism was clearly in view. In eating of the bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine, the partakers were enjoying, and still enjoy, familial fellowship with Jesus Christ, the Savior and the Son of God. So what is the Lord’s Supper? It is a divinely given New Covenant Ordinance to be celebrated often in the company of two or more (or many more) believers in which some special measure of Christ’s presence in the midst brings us spiritual blessings such as fellowship, peace, and spiritual cleansing. At the appointed time, we remember Jesus Christ’s past once for all sacrifice for our sins, present work and fellowship, and future promises and eternal hope. In support of the prior statements, please read Acts 2:42, 20:7, 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, Matthew 18:10, Luke 22:17-20, and Hebrews 10:12-14.