**Foundations (52 of 60) The Lord's Supper - RC Sproul**

Most churches celebrate the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. But what does the Lord's Supper really mean? That's our topic today on Renewing Your Mind. Welcome to Renewing Your Mind, featuring the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul.

Most Christians are familiar with the Lord's Supper. Your church may refer to it as Communion or the Eucharist. Every denomination recognizes the Lord's Supper as an important sacrament.

But Catholics, Lutherans, Anabaptists and Reformed Christians have quite different notions about the significance and makeup of the Lord's Supper. And these differences can be divisive. Today, Dr. Sproul explains the distinguishing marks of all four perspectives.

This lesson is part of the series, Foundations, an overview of systematic theology. When we take a glimpse of the book of Acts and the life of the early Christian community, we see that it was very important in the midst of the church that the people come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And throughout church history, the central sacrament of the church has been the Lord's Supper.

And it has its roots initially in the New Testament, but even before that in the Old Testament ordinance of Passover. We know that before Jesus died, he said to his disciples that he earnestly desired to celebrate the Passover with them one more time before he would leave this world. And so he made arrangements to meet with his disciples in a borrowed place in an upward room, and there as they were celebrating the Passover, Jesus was leading his disciples through the Seder, through the Passover meal.

And as he was doing that, suddenly and perhaps abruptly, he changed the words of the liturgy, and suddenly changed the whole significance of the Old Testament Passover when he said about the bread that was being used, that that bread was his body broken for them. And then he took the wine that they used to celebrate the Passover and suddenly instituted a whole new dimension of redemptive history. Here in the upper room, the New Testament was born.

We tend to think that the New Testament begins with the spot where the writings of the New Testament begin with the announcement of the coming of John the Baptist. But actually the historical period of the New Testament does not begin until a new covenant or a new agreement has been established, and that is announced in the upper room when Jesus takes that cup and he says, this is the blood of a new covenant, blood that is poured out for the remission of your sins. And therein the sacrament of the Lord's Supper was established and inaugurated.

And it grew out, as you see, from the Passover where Jesus said, from now on, as often as you drink of this cup and eat of this bread, you're going to show forth the Lord's death until he comes. And so even as God had used the Old Testament Passover to be celebrated for the people to remember their deliverance from the angel of death, so now Christ institutes the Lord's Supper for the church to remember always the sacrifice of his death for our redemption. Now again, because the cross, because his death is so central to the Christian faith, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is also of extreme importance, and for that reason there has been endless controversy throughout church history.

As I said earlier, one of the good things about theological arguments is that it indicates that people care about truth and that people are concerned about doing what is pleasing to God. Well, how we understand the Lord's Supper has been a major point of division among Christians throughout church history. In fact, one of the great tragedies of the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation was that even though the Protestants were united on the central understanding of the gospel, of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, they couldn't come to an agreement on the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

As close in theology as Calvin and Luther were, for example, they couldn't agree on critical issues with respect to the Lord's Supper. And the central debate about the Lord's Supper has to do with the question of the mode or the manner of the presence of Christ in the sacrament. We remember when Luther and the representatives of Calvin tried to solve their problems, Luther repeatedly retreated to the words of institution when he would say in his insistence that Christ's body was physically present in the Lord's Supper, he just kept saying over and over and over again, hoc est corpus meum, hoc est corpus meum, reciting the Latin version of the words of institution where Jesus said, this is my body.

And Luther argued that Jesus would never say that the bread was His body if in fact it really wasn't His body. So that is what's produced so much of the controversy over the significance of the Lord's Supper. Incidentally, in that formula, hoc est corpus meum, when the priest in the church would go through the liturgy of the mass, and he would come to the words of institution, he would recite them in Latin, and of course he would say, hoc est corpus meum, and the people in the congregation didn't understand Latin.

And there's where you get the phrase where the people would say, oh, the priest is up there doing all his hocus pocus. That's where the old phrase hocus pocus came from, which was a play on the formula, hoc est corpus meum. All right, well, historically the major views on the nature of the Lord's Supper are those of the Roman Catholic Church, those of the Lutheran churches, those of the Anabaptists, and those of the Reformed community.

So let's take a brief overview of them. The Roman Catholic view historically is called transubstantiation, and it's a very complicated doctrine to understand. To understand what, in simple terms, what Rome is teaching here is to state it this way, that the Roman church believes that during the mass, during the prayer of consecration, a miracle takes place where the ordinary elements of bread and wine are transformed into the actual body and blood of Jesus Christ, so that what formerly was bread is now the body of Jesus.

But, of course, the immediate problem that they would have in articulating and declaring this to the people is that the people would look at that and say, wait a minute, before this miracle took place, that bread looked like bread, it tasted like bread, if I dropped it on the floor it sounds like bread, it smells like bread, and it feels like bread. And from my perspective, if it walks like a duck and it quacks like a duck, in all probability it's a duck. And now you're telling me that this stuff that looks and tastes and smells to all of my senses appears to be bread is now the body of Jesus, and what still looks like wine and tastes like wine and feels like wine and all the rest is now somebody's blood.

How can that be? Well, it was to define the miracle that this doctrine of transubstantiation was developed, and it used some ancient concepts or categories drawn from the philosophy of Aristotle, where Aristotle, in trying to define reality, said that every object is made up of its form or its matter and of its substance, which is ultimate stuff, and what was called its accidents. See if I can draw a picture of it, that a thing or an object was made up of its essence or its stuff, its substance, and what Aristotle would call its external perceivable qualities, those things that you can see and perceive about it. Now, they didn't believe in the atomic theory of matter like we do today, but you know when you go to school and you put something under a microscope, it looks a whole lot different from how it looks if you look at it with the naked eye.

I say this is this piece of chalk, but if we begin to probe inside this piece of chalk, we see these atoms whirling around and all the rest, depending on how deeply we probe into this piece of chalk. When I say this is a piece of chalk, I identify it because it's white, it's cylindrical, it has this talc-y feel to it, and I'm describing it by how it appears to my senses, but I can't penetrate into its innermost core of being. Now, what Aristotle was saying is that what it is in its innermost core is its substance.

What it is externally, on the outside, what you see are the accidents. Now, here's the formula for transubstantiation. In the miracle of the mass, the substance, the stuff, the inner core of the bread and of the wine change from bread and wine to body and blood, but the accidents remain the same.

Now, this constituted really a double miracle, because for Aristotle, every object in this world, whatever its substance was, its accidents were properly related to its substance. The reason why we can identify a duck, if it looks like a duck and if it walks like a duck and if it quacks like a duck, we know it's a duck, because only ducks walk like ducks and quack like ducks and feel like ducks, because only ducks have the accidents of ducks. So that if you have the substance of a duck, you're always going to have the accidents of a duck, and if you have the accidents of a duck, you can only have the substance of a duck giving it.

You don't plant acorns and get kangaroos from acorns. What do you get? What do you get? Acorn trees. And what do we call acorn trees? Oak trees.

There you go. Okay. That's because there's always a perfect relationship between the substance of a thing and its external qualities, its accident.

But in the mass, you have the substance of bread leaving while the accidents of bread stays. So you have the accidents of bread without its substance, and you have the substance of the body of Jesus without its accidents. You see, that's a double miracle.

All right. Now, over against this theory, Luther objected, saying it was frivolous and it involved more miracle than what was necessary, that you don't have to have all this elaborate changing of substance and accidents in order for Christ to be truly present in the Lord's Supper. And so he argued that Christ is truly present, physically present, in, with, and through or under the elements.

So in this sense, the presence of Christ is not taking the place of the presence of bread and wine, but rather it is added to the bread and wine, albeit invisibly. Now, Lutherans particularly don't like this designation, but historically theology has called the Lutheran view consubstantiation. And what does the prefix con- mean in Latin? I have some students here today from the Geneva School, a Christian classical school in Orlando, and they take Latin from very early on, and so I know they all know what the word con- means.

What does it mean? A guy that goes to prison, right? What does con- mean? What? Against. Ah, pro and con. Contra means against, that's right, but just con itself.

Let me give you a hint. If we're going to go out for lunch and have chili con carne, what are we going to have? Do you like chili? And what do you have when you have chili? What do you use to make chili? Beans with? What's carne? Carnes. Come on, guys.

Meat. So beans, chili, con, carne. What's con- mean? What? With.

All right. I can't go past this line or I go out of the camera, but give me five. All right.

So, consubstantiation means that there is with substance, that the body and blood of Jesus is present with the physical elements of bread and wine. Now, the big issue here with the Reformers was not so much about what substance and what accidents was appearing here or there, but it was a deeper issue. It was a matter of Christology.

It was a matter of how we understand the mystery of the incarnation of the divine nature of Christ and the human nature of Christ. Calvin, for example, believed that the body of Christ belongs properly to his human nature. His flesh is not a part of his divine nature.

And following the Council of Chalcedon that we looked at earlier in this course, you saw that the formula of Chalcedon said that in the mystery of the incarnation, the two natures are perfectly united, but in such a way as to be without mixture, confusion, division, or separation, each nature retaining its own attributes. And Calvin says that the power to be more than one place at the same time is a divine power, not a power of human flesh. And so he's asking this question, if the Lord's Supper is celebrated in Boston, San Francisco, London, Moscow, and Orlando all at the same time, how could the physical body and blood of Jesus be at all these different places at the same time? And Calvin would say they can't because it is not a property of the human nature of Christ to be omnipresent or to be ubiquitous, to be everywhere.

Now, for Calvin, the physical body of Jesus in its glorified state is now in heaven. He is at the right hand of God the Father. Now, the physical body of Christ is still perfectly united with the divine nature, and the divine nature can be in Boston, San Francisco, Orlando, Moscow, London, all these different places at the same time, because God has the power to be everywhere.

And so Calvin looked at it this way, that the physical body of Christ is in heaven, but the physical body of Christ is still united to the divine nature, and the divine nature can extend everywhere. And so He can be really present in Boston, San Francisco, St. Louis, and so on all at the same time. So Calvin insisted on the real presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.

That's one thing that all three of these groups have in common. The Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, and of course the Anglican Church, the Reformed Churches all agree on this much. They all believe that Christ is really, truly present in the Lord's Supper.

The debate is how He is present, whether He is present physically or spiritually. But when the Calvinists speak of spiritual presence, they don't mean just as in the minds or the memories of the people, or symbolically by the signs that are used, but they mean by His divine nature He really is there, and so that when we come together for the Lord's Supper, we come to enter into real communion with the presence of Christ. Now, quickly in the time that is left, it's important for us to understand with respect to the Lord's Supper that the time factor involved in the Supper is threefold, and the basic tenses that we have of time are the past, the present, and the future.

And the Lord's Supper relates to all three of those concerns. With respect to the past, the Lord's Supper is designed to remember something that happened in space and time centuries and centuries ago. You know, anything that Jesus taught His disciples was important, and it would be important for them to remember, but there were certain things that He said, don't you ever forget.

And when He gathered them together in the upper room and announced to them His impending death on their behalf, He said, I want you to do this, don't you ever forget this, I want you to do it in remembrance of Me. And so every single day in this world, somewhere, people are gathered remembering the Lord's death. And He said, as often as you do this, you eat and drink and do so forth the Lord's death until He come.

And He said He won't do it again until they sit down with Him in heaven. And so the Lord's Supper is also something that tells us to think to the future, where we will sit at the table of the Lord in heaven at the marriage feast of the Lamb, and enter into that great banquet and great celebration of the people of God with their King in heaven. So there's a future orientation to the Lord's Supper.

Past and future, and yet at the same time there is the present benefit of meeting the risen Christ in person at His table in every celebration that we have with Him there. So that there is a present reality, a remembrance of things past, and an anticipation of the blessed future that God has promised for His people. And these are just some of the elements involved in the significance of the Lord's Supper.

When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we look backward and forward, to the cross and to the future glory. And we celebrate the presence of the Lord here and now. This message was from the founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, Dr. R.C. Sproul.

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What happens when God's people breathe their last breath? Do we go straight to heaven or do we sleep for a while? And what about purgatory? Well, next weekend we'll hear a lesson from Dr. Sproul titled, Death and the Intermediate State. I hope you'll join us one week from now on Renewing Your Mind.