

Communion

Lesson 4

I. Introduction

- a. In our lesson last week we established that the four NT passages which deal specifically with the Blessing or giving thanks offered by our Lord as He distributed the elements of bread and wine do not support the notion of **consecration**.
- b. However, the controversy within the church regarding the Lord's Supper **does not** end with the question of consecration.
- c. Another aspect of the controversy which we need to understand revolves around the question: what did Jesus mean when he spoke the words "This **IS** my body?"
- d. The way one understands the meaning of this simple sentence will dictate the understanding that one has of the entire **ordinance** of the Lord's Supper.
- e. If we are to understand this solemn transaction we must weigh **every** word, as there is none without its appropriate and deeply emphatic meaning.
- f. This week we will continue looking at the **words** of Jesus as he distributed the unleavened bread to those present. Matt 26:26 *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. KJV*

II. This IS my Body

- a. First, we should observe that Christ had **nothing** in His hands, as he spoke these words, but part of that unleavened bread which he and his disciples had been eating at supper.
- b. Therefore, it is rational to conclude that the bread which he held and was now breaking, **represented** his body, which, in the course of a few hours, was to be crucified for them.
- c. Granted, being God, Jesus could have miraculously changed the unleavened bread into his physical body as he held it in his hands, just as he had changed plain water into **wine** at the marriage feast. *John 2:6-11 And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him. KJV*
- d. Many, through the centuries, have been tempted to read into the words of Jesus, a miraculous event in which he transformed the bread and wine into his literal body and blood. This is called **transubstantiation**.
- e. However, such an understanding appears to run counter to the 40 recorded miracles performed by Christ during his earthly ministry which were accomplished for specific **purposes**:
 1. They prove beyond doubt that He had supreme command over **Nature**.
 2. They prove that He was "Lord of life and death, and of **all things** pertaining to youth, strength, health, age, weakness and sickness.
 3. They are direct evidence of the cardinal truth of our faith, that our Lord possessed powers which belong to **God** Himself.
 4. He did not merely work wonders in order that men might believe His assertions about Himself, but His wonderful works, His powers-virtues-were direct evidence of their **truth**.
 5. He proved that He was a **Savior** by doing the works of a Savior, by healing men and women from their diseases of both body and soul.
- f. In other words, the 40 miracles of Jesus were purposeful and consistent with his character. And while they may have awed his eyewitnesses, each one made **rational** sense given the context of its occurrence.
- g. In examining the words of Jesus as he broke the bread, common sense and reason, unclouded by any doctrinal **predisposition**, do not permit any other meaning than the plain, ordinary, meaning one would attribute upon hearing them.
- h. So what did Jesus mean when he said this **is** my body?

III. Representation or Real?

- a. Jesus commonly used descriptive language with which he **compared** one thing with another in an unusual and striking manner that captured the attention of his hearers but which sometimes confused them.
 1. He used **similes**, a direct comparison using the words *like* or *as*:
Matt 13:31 The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, KJV **Matt 13:33** The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, KJV
Matt 13:47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, KJV
Matt 13:40 As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. KJV

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2. He also used **metaphors**, an implied comparison that does not use the words *as* and *like*:
 - John 6:35** I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. KJV
 - John 6:51** I am the living bread which came down from heaven: KJV
 - John 8:12** I am the light of the world: KJV
 - John 10:7** I am the door of the sheep. KJV
- b. The first rule of Bible interpretation is that Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture. Apart from the words of Jesus, the Bible often uses one object to **represent** or signify another:
 - Mark 14:14** Where eating the Passover lamb represented God's passing over the children of Israel.
 - Gen 41:26-27**. Where the seven kine ARE (i.e. represent) seven years.
 - Deut. 16:3** This IS (represents) the affliction which our fathers endured in the land of Egypt.
 - Dan 7:24**. The ten horns ARE (i.e. signify) ten kings.
 - 1 Cor 10:4** They drank of the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock WAS (represented) Christ.
 - Rev 1:20** The seven stars ARE (represent) the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks ARE (represent) the seven churches.
- c. The examples of this kind of descriptive word usage are too **numerous** for us to cover in detail, but from the sampling provided we can easily understand how extensively this device was employed by the writers of the Bible.
- d. **Tertulian** seems to have had a correct notion of those words of our Lord as witnessed by the following quote: 'Having taken the bread, and distributed that body to his disciples, he made it a figure of his body by saying, This is my body,
- e. From this we can learn that the obvious truth is, there is scarcely a more **common** form of speech in any language than, This is, to mean, this object or person REPRESENTS or SIGNIFIES something else.

IV. Conclusion

- a. In our lesson last week we made the case for understanding that when Christ is described as blessing or giving thanks, the most natural understanding of the passage is that he was offering a **prayer** of gratitude for God's provision.
- b. We also saw that Jesus used the unleavened loaf of bread to represent to his disciples that, just as bread is a life sustaining substance, in like manner and yet in a **spiritual** sense, it is through his body broken for us that we receive eternal life.
- c. From our lesson today, we can conclude that the words of Jesus in instituting the Lord's Supper memorial, in **no way** suggest even the slightest notion that he performed some miraculous transformation of the bread which he held.
- d. The misguided understanding of our Lord's words and the events of the Last Supper provide an example of how the enemy of our souls works to deceive, divide, and ultimately to **destroy** the Church of Jesus Christ.
- e. Fortunately, for us, we have full assurance that in spite of the **appearance** of failure, division and destruction, ultimately, Christ will triumph in the building and sustaining of his Church. *Matt 16:18 I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. KJV*

V. Application

- a. If we are not literally eating the real body of Jesus as we participate in communion, then, as a believer, in what ways are you figuratively or spiritually eating of his body?