

Bread and Wine

extract from Proposition XIII § v

§ v. . . . *Objection:* If it is said that Jesus Christ calls the bread his body, and the wine his blood, and therefore he seems to have indicated* a special understanding about his disciples partaking of his flesh and blood:

Answer: I answer that his calling the bread his body and the wine his blood implies no such thing. I do not deny that in all things he did and in the use of all natural things, Jesus Christ took the opportunity to raise the minds of his disciples and hearers to spiritual things. For example, when the woman of Samaria was drawing water, he took the opportunity to tell her of the Living Water, and that “whoever drinks it shall never thirst,”¹ which is essentially what is said about his blood. Yet it does not logically follow that that well or its water had any necessary relation to the living water, or the living water to that well, etc. In the same way when the Jews were following him hoping for bread, Christ takes the opportunity to tell them of the spiritual bread and flesh of his body, which was more necessary for them to feed upon.² It cannot be logically deduced that their following him hoping for bread had any necessary relation to that. And also Christ takes the opportunity from the bread and wine which was there in front of them when he was at supper with his disciples, to tell them that just as the bread which he broke for them and the wine which he blessed and gave to them helped to preserve and nourish their bodies, so also he was going to give his body and shed his blood for the salvation of their souls. Therefore the very purpose of this ceremony is to be a memorial of his death for those who do it.

¹ John 4:14

² John 6.

But if it is said that the apostle (1 Corinthians 10:16) calls the bread which he broke “the communion of the body of Christ,” and calls the cup, “the communion of his blood”:

I accept that most willingly, but I deny that this should be interpreted as the outward bread, and that interpretation cannot be proved. The contrary is obvious from the context, for in this chapter the apostle doesn’t speak one word about that ceremony. In the beginning of the chapter he reminds us of how the Jews in the old times were made partakers of the spiritual food and water, which was Christ, and how some of them fell from that good condition through disobedience and idolatry. By the example of those Jews whom God destroyed long ago, he exhorts the Corinthians to avoid those evils, reminding them that they are likewise partakers of the body and blood of Christ, and they would rob themselves of that communion if they did evil, because “they could not drink of the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils, or partake of the Lord’s table and the table of devils” (verse 21). This shows that here the apostle doesn’t mean the use of the outward bread and wine, because those that drink the cup of devils, and eat from the table of devils, indeed the very wickedest people, may still partake of the outward bread and wine. The apostle calls the bread one (verse 17) and he says, “Though we are many, we are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread.” If the bread is one, it cannot be the outward bread, or the inward bread would be excluded; but no one can deny that it is the partaking of the inward bread, and not the outward, that makes the saints truly “one body” and “one bread.” . . .

Objection: The thing they most emphasize in this matter, and are always making a great noise about, is from 1 Corinthians 11, where the apostle is specifically talking about this subject. From some words in this chapter they have the greatest appearance of truth for their assertion, for example verse 27, where he calls the cup the “cup of the Lord” and says that “they who eat it and drink it unworthily,

are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,” and (verse 29) “eat and drink their own damnation.” They argue* that this has a direct or necessary relation to the body, flesh, and blood of Christ.

Answer: At first glance this may ensnare the unwary reader, but if it is carefully considered it does not by any means prove the matter which is under dispute. I will speak later about the Corinthians’ practice of this ceremony, why they did it, and why that doesn’t oblige Christians to do the same nowadays. At this time it is enough to say that they practiced this ceremony. Secondly, that in practicing it they committed and were guilty of various abuses. Thirdly, that in this chapter the apostle is giving them directions for how they could do it properly, and showing them its right and proper practice and purpose.

These things being established, we must note that the very clear and particular use of the ceremony, according to the apostle, is “to show forth the Lord’s death,”³ etc. But to show forth the Lord’s death and to partake of the flesh and blood of Christ are different things. He does not say that as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you partake of the body and blood of Christ; but rather he says “you show forth the Lord’s death.” So I acknowledge that this ceremony, for those who practice it, has a direct relation to the outward body and death of Christ upon the cross, and is a memorial of it. But it does not follow logically that it has any inward or immediate relation to believers partaking of the spiritual body and blood of Christ, or to that spiritual supper spoken of in Revelation 3:20.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XIII § v (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 386-389 and Roberti Barclaii,

³ 1 Corinthians 11:26

Teologiae verè Christianae apologia, facsimile (Amsterdam:
Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 297-298.