

“Is Means Is”

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. There is a singular attack more formidable than any other that tries to remove the great and salutary comfort that our Lord Jesus intends to give you in this life dear Christian. The attack is simple and yet profound (and exceedingly evil): *the Gospel is not for you*. It is indeed a great message of salvation that all sins are forgiven, but somehow, someway – the great liar who is the devil tries to convince you – *you are not included*. How does the evil one try to raise this terrible doubt and exception in your mind?

His single best bet is to attack the *exact gift* which Jesus left for you to keep you fully confident that the Gospel is *precisely* for you: the Holy Sacrament. The body and blood of Jesus Christ – the very Gospel of the full forgiveness of sins – is for you in, with, and under the bread and the wine of the Holy Sacrament. This is why the evil one goes to great lengths to call into question what the Sacrament *is...it is the same old modus operandi of the devil that he never ceases to ask that sinful question: “Did God really say?” (Genesis 3:1)*

If the evil one can shake your confidence in what the Holy Sacrament actually is, then he will shake your entire faith since the Word of God has clearly delineated exactly what the Holy Sacrament is!

But in our sinful nature we quite simply underestimate the importance of everything I’ve said thus far. “Come on, just how important are the seemingly nuanced words in the Scriptures on the Holy Sacrament? Is this whole discussion really *that* important?! Aren’t we being somewhat knit picky? Is this just an expression of Lutherans being a little over-reactive?” To answer my self-imposed questions in the most direct way possible: “no!”

But we sinners still have our doubts don’t we? A Lutheran was expressing his concerns to a pastor of another tradition who had reached out to his family member and was in effect conducting some pretty obvious proselytizing. In the middle of the conversation about the Lord’s Supper, the other-tradition pastor threw out something that the Lutheran – who was about to suspect that perhaps he had lived a sheltered life – had never heard before. The other-tradition pastor said, “Look, let me put it to you this way,” as he reached into his back pocket to pull out his billfold and then open its contents, “do you see this picture?” The Lutheran layman was a little annoyed at how obvious the answer was: “Of course I do!” Even as he thought to

himself, “I’m not blind!” The other-tradition pastor continued his object-lesson on his version of the Lord’s Supper: “Well,” as he pointed at the picture of a young man who bore an obvious resemblance to the pastor, “this is my son.” For effect, the pastor asked the Lutheran laymen, “Did you hear what I said?” Once again, the other-tradition pastor said about the picture he was holding – which clearly represented and symbolized his son – “this is my son!”

The other tradition pastor went on to elaborate that when Jesus conducted the Last Supper and instituted the Lord’s Supper, He was clearly employing the same use of metaphorical language. “There is no question about the words that Jesus used, “this is my body,” “this is my blood,” but just as I can say,” as he pointed to the picture, “this is my son,” Jesus could treat the bread and the wine as simply and merely *representing* his body and blood.”

But the other tradition pastor wasn’t finished! He said, “But what makes our symbolic and memorial teaching *undeniable* is that how in the world could Jesus *possibly* mean that that Passover bread and wine was his body and blood, when His actual body and blood was sitting at the table with the disciples?!” “The problem that you Lutherans have,” said the zealous pastor, “is that you have permitted the tradition and institutionalism of the Church to dictate what you believe. But we must stick to the Bible and not to the traditions of men! Besides, Christianity is not about going through the motions of a religious ceremony; true Christianity is about a living faith!”

By the way, what I’ve just described to you is a so-called “argument,” which inherently commits several logical fallacies to say nothing (at this time) of the utter denial of the clear-words of Holy Scripture, but allow me to return to the story.

The object lesson devastated the Lutheran. He was shaken to his core. Had he been holding to a false teaching after all these years? Even worse, had he mistakenly placed his confidence in Jesus’ love and forgiveness through the regular and frequent reception of the Holy Sacrament? All of a sudden, he wasn’t even sure if he was saved.

Now that I hope I have your attention, let me tell you that there was a very good *reason* why Luther called reason itself, “the devil’s whore.” Luther said, “natural reason, says to these matters [of the real presence of Christ’s body in the Sacrament, etc.]. Just as though we did not know that reason is the devil’s prostitute and can do nothing but blaspheme and defile everything God speaks and does.” (Plass, *What Luther Says*, 1161)

And no, I am not now contradicting myself as I'm certainly employing reason while I preach this sermon. Luther clearly differentiated the two basic uses of reason: 1) the magisterial use when man puts reason *above* Scripture (this is what Luther referred to as "the devil's whore"); and 2) the ministerial use of reason when man led by the Holy Spirit does indeed use reason, but in such a way as not to dictate to the Word of God, but to submit itself to the dictation of God's Word upon the man.

One form of reason strives to correct and qualify God's Word, the other form of reason submits to the power of God and by the way, that is what you are doing: you do not believe correctly in what the Sacrament is on account of any religion of men, or institution of men, or tradition of men, you believe in what the Sacrament *is* for one reason and one reason *only*: *on account of what the Word of God says it is, period*. That is, you have learned the lesson that Naaman once learned:

Naaman, the great and powerful commander of the king of Syria, sought out God's prophet Elisha so that Elisha would heal Naaman of the terrible disease of leprosy. But – and you know the story – when Elisha through his servant instructed Naaman simply, *"Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored, and you shall be clean."* (2 Kings 5:10), Naaman was angry. He could not accept the simplicity of God's Word through the prophet. The Word did not impress him. He did not agree with the Word. He did not accept the Word. So in his anger he started to complain about it and reject it. But thank God that Naaman's own servants came to him and said, *"My father, it is a great word the prophet has spoken to you; will you not do it?"* (2nd Kings 5:13)

Dear Christian, it is a great word the Scriptures have spoken to you; will you not believe?! Jesus said simply and clearly: *"This is my body,"* and *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood."* (1st Corinthians 11:24-25) And, in 1st Corinthians 10:16 Paul wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit: *"The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?"*

These words were not spoken in any typical daily circumstance, but quite simply in the most serious and most sacred of contexts. Martin Chemnitz explains:

"In the first place, it is certain and cannot be denied that the words of the Supper are not to be classified in the category of points in Scripture which can either be ignored or variously explained or even incorrectly understood and still have no bearing on faith or salvation. For these are the words of the last will and testament not of a mere man but of the very Son of God. He instituted it on the night in which He was betrayed, and it concerned the most important

matter of all. He did so with most serious emotions, words, and actions. Even in glory He repeated these words to Paul, thereby showing it was His will that this be the giving of a new and special dogma that should remain in the church to the end of time."

"Therefore there is no doubt, that to these words pertain the teaching of Scripture which says: 'You shall not go aside, neither to the right nor to the left' (Deut. 5:32)... 'neither by adding or taking away' (Deut. 4:2). Likewise, John 8:31: 'If you continue in My Word, and My words continue in you, you shall be My disciples indeed' (cf. John 15:7)..."

"In the second place, when the last will and testament of a man has been executed, we are required under the law to observe the words with special care so that nothing be done which is either beside or contrary to the final will of the testator." (Chemnitz, The Lord's Supper, 26-27)

Let me put this way: when a person is about to die and they speak to you their last will and testament, there is no room for poetry, there is no place for metaphor, and there is no occasion for risking unclear meaning and intention insofar as he or she is actually describing their last will and testament. If there is *ever* a time that plain language must be treated as such, then it is in the moment just before a person is about to die. This is not the time to speak riddles; this is not the time to be confusing. Furthermore, if any person in the history of man was marked by truth, and clarity, and holy intention, then that person (as you well know) was the Lord Jesus Christ. When He said what He said, His words meant what they primarily and most naturally convey. In this case and to put it quite simply: "is means is." This *is* my body means that that Communion bread brings to your mouth the very body of Christ to assure you beyond a shadow of a doubt that all of your sins are forgiven! This *is* my blood means that that chalice which pours out the Communion wine is also pouring into your mouth the very blood of Christ that was shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins!

How can we be so sure? Let me take you back to the silly argument that can sound so impressive to haughty reason: The idea that Jesus could not have possibly meant His true and actual body and His true and actual blood, since there He was reclining at the table with the disciples in His body! Well, that proves the objection right?! Not so fast!

The parallel consideration to what the Scriptures say as to what the Sacrament *is*, is the testimony of what the Scriptures say as to who Jesus *is*. To say that Jesus could not have meant that the bread and the wine was His body and blood because there He sat in body and blood is to also say that when Jesus identified and presented Himself as a man, that He was only a man, but not *also* be God in the flesh. Do not be deceived: if anyone reduces what the Lord's Supper is, then they may as well reduce who and what Jesus Himself is (and they probably already are)!

After all -- sinful magisterial reason objects -- how can this man who walked the earth, be the creator and sustainer of the earth? Indeed, how could this man with a limited mind and knowledge who even admitted that no one knew that day or hour of the day of judgment (Matt 24:36) also know that Nathanael sat under the fig tree -- and saw him there -- even before Philip called him (John 1:48)? This man was also God; this man on earth was also always with the Father in heaven; this man who had emptied Himself was also the all-powerful incarnate God; this man who died on the cross also conquered death. This man's blood spilled on the cross was also the very blood of God (Acts 20:28)! Luther elaborated on the person of Christ, *"It is true to say about Christ the man that He created all things."* (AE 26:266) Furthermore, divinity participates in the humanity: *"The Infant lying in the lap of His mother...is the Lord of the angels."* (AE 26:265) And again, *"This man Jesus led Israel out of Egypt, struck down Pharaoh, and did all the things that belong to God."* (AE 26:265) (Alfonso O. Espinosa, "The Christology of Martin Luther in the Great Commentary on Galatians of 1531," in *Let Christ Be Christ*, ed. Daniel N. Harmelink, 65, Huntington Beach, California: Tentatio Press, 1999)

All of this is to say that while Jesus presented Himself with a human body as a true man that He also clearly presented Himself as the great "I AM" -- God Himself -- as recorded in John chapter 8. Do you see the parallel to the Supper? Christ in the body could actually give His true body just as Christ in the body could actually be true God for whom nothing is impossible; for whom nothing is too hard. Who would ever say that it is impossible for God to be in two or more places at the same time? That may be impossible for us, but why do we suppose that it would be too hard for God?

But why is any of this so important? Because to know what is actually written in the Word of God; to know what is actually taught is to have faith resting in a state of security, and by no means in a state of doubt. It is to know where to find assurance for your faith which so easily goes up and down like a roller coaster. We need to be able to know where our confidence lies. We need to know where to find our Savior in this world; in this time. We need to know that Jesus actually said what He meant and meant what He said and that "is means is!" Thank God, you know where Jesus actually comes to actual sinners with His actual body and His actual blood to actually forgive the actual sins of those who actually trust in the Words, the clear words of Jesus: "This is my body;" "This is my blood." These words which give you absolute assurance that all of your sins are forgiven and that the saving Gospel is yours!