

Appendix X — Arguments Against the Doctrine of Real Presence

The following arguments are the ones most commonly leveled against the doctrine of Real Presence.

ARGUMENT — The doctrine of Real Presence is unnecessary for the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins. God offers forgiveness through his Word.

RESPONSE — That is true. The Old Testament believers are proof that we don't "need" the Lord's Supper at all. Even the Bible limits who should partake of the Lord's Supper. However, it is not logical to assume that because God offers forgiveness one way (through the Word) that he would not/could not offer it in other ways as well (through Baptism and the Lord's Supper). In his love God desired to connect forgiveness to something we can touch in order to make the message of forgiveness even more clear and vivid. It would not be absolutely "necessary," but he chose to do it none-the-less.

ARGUMENT — Jesus was speaking figuratively when he said, "This is my body. This is my blood."

RESPONSE — Jesus makes no mention of doing so. This is a dangerous road to go down. For if we can say that Jesus was speaking figuratively at the Lord's Supper, how can we be sure he isn't speaking figuratively when he makes statements such as "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25). Good principles of Biblical interpretation say that we let the text itself tell us if it is meant to be taken figuratively. The Bible loses all sense and meaning if we abandon this principle.

ARGUMENT — Jesus indicated he was speaking figuratively when he said, "This do in remembrance of me."

RESPONSE — That statement is not an indicator of figurative speech. Reversing the words of institution demonstrates this. Imagine Jesus had said, "Take and eat, this is bread... This do in remembrance of me." Would we then assume that Jesus was distributing something other than bread? Of course not.

The statement "This do in remembrance of me" in no way hints at figurative speaking. The recollection and remembrance of Christ's redemptive work is not hindered by the doctrine of Real Presence, but only enhanced.

ARGUMENT — It is repulsive to think of eating Jesus' body and blood.

RESPONSE — This is not an argument but an emotion, and one that is born from a misunderstanding of the doctrine of Real Presence. The bread does not become a piece of Christ's flesh. Nor does the wine turn into a quart of blood like you might give at a blood bank. This error has sometimes been called "Capernaite Eating." The Bible teaches that the body and blood of Christ are truly there, but in a miraculous way — "in, with, and under" the bread and wine.

ARGUMENT — Jesus body and blood couldn't be present in the Lord's Supper. With the millions of people who have taken the Lord's supper throughout the years, Christ's body and blood would have been used up long ago.

RESPONSE — This is an attempt to rationalize a doctrine of God's Word that proclaims the miraculous. Similar to the previous argument, it approaches the Lord's Supper with a strictly physical understanding. The miracle of the Real Presence cannot be rationally comprehended any more than the Trinity, the union of Christ's human and divine natures, the six-day creation, etc. It is simply believed by faith (cf. Hebrews 11:1).

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ARGUMENT — The Lutheran teaching of the Sacraments is inconsistent. For Baptism they teach that it is open to anyone, including children. Yet for the Lord’s Supper they teach it is limited.

RESPONSE — This is not Lutheran teaching, but Biblical teaching. Christ’s command to baptize “all nations” (Matthew 28:19) is all-inclusive. Unless a different passage can be found limiting “all nations,” it would be un-Scriptural to do so. Yet in 1 Corinthians 11:27,28 we read, “Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”

It is presumptive to assume that God would apply identical principles of practice to the two different Sacraments. Scriptures show that both Baptism and the Lord’s Supper are intended for faithful use, but at different points in a person’s life.

SUMMARY

It would be unfair to say that the doctrine of Real Presence is simple. It is fair, however, to say that the doctrine of Real Presence is clear. When reading the accounts of that first celebration of the Lord’s Supper in all the synoptic Gospels, we must ask ourselves, “What does Christ clearly say?” “This is my body.” “This is my blood.” He makes no indication that he is speaking in a figurative, metaphorical sense. Not one of the Gospel writers indicate that Christ is speaking figuratively. At the time he speaks the words, he has but a few hours before he will be taken away from his disciples and crucified. It is not a time to speak in riddles.

Then there is the parallel account that Paul gives us in 1 Corinthians 11. He warns about “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.” Again, there is nothing to indicate Paul is writing figuratively.

The attacks that are leveled against the doctrine of Real Presence are extremely dangerous, not just because they destroy the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, but because they destroy the clarity of the Scriptures. If we can arbitrarily chose when Jesus and the apostles are speaking / writing figuratively, then there can be no such thing as absolute truth in the Scriptures. Their interpretation is open to subjective whim. They lose all sense. They lose all meaning. They lose all value.