

Notes for “Lords Supper” Sermon (Rough Draft- I didn’t take time to polish it this week)

1 Corinthians 11:17-18 *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part.*

Have you ever been a part of a church meeting that just wasn’t good? Maybe it was uncomfortable, stressful, divisive, or long. Maybe it was one of those meetings that Paul would describe as being “not for better but for worse”.

I want to describe to you a church business meeting that sounds so miserable, you are going to think I am making it up or overexaggerating. I am not. I really happened. In a really church. It makes a 3 hours meeting with a little bit of conflict sound pretty easy. This meeting was long and divisive. It was called in response to some impassioned criticism of the church. Those who were raising the issues were spreading their messages about why the church was in error. They insisted that it needed reformation. It got so messy that the church was declaring many of these critics to be heretics. To make is all more difficult, they were attempting to vote on documents with specific wording to define their beliefs. This is hard to do with a large group of opinionated people. They argued over prices, using precis theological phrases in Latin. This was not a fun church gathering. The things that happened at this church meeting were so notable that someone wrote a book about it.ⁱ The book has 4 volumes. It’s 2500 pages long. The couldn’t finish in one session. This church meeting was broken into 24 different sessions that lasted for 18 years. I’m not going to complain about the meetings I have to be a part of.

The meeting I am describing is the Council of Trent, the 19th Ecumenical Council of the Roman Catholic Church held from 1545 to 1563. It was the Roman Catholic response to the Protestant Reformation. I haven’t told you the worst part yet. The worst part was not what they put into it (18 years, 24 session, conflict). The worst part was what they got out of it. Their clarifications of doctrine solidified a distorted teaching of the gospel. One of the clarifications that came out of the Council of Trent is the following disturbing canon: “If anyone says that the sacraments of the new law do not confer grace *ex opera operato*, but that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let them be condemned.”ⁱⁱ

We will get to that Latin phrase in a bit. First, there are some major questions. 18 years and you come up with that? Shouldn’t that last word be “saved” not “condemned”? How did we get from the words of Paul, “for by grace you have been saved, through faith, not by works so that no one can boast.” To the words of church that condemn you if you believe that “faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace”? How did we from being saved by believing in Jesus to being condemned by not agreeing with the church? How do we get from, “do this in remembrance of me” to the teaching that grace is conferred by the act of the sacraments being performed? How did we get from the Lord’s Supper to the Council of Trent? How did we get from 1 Corinthians 11 to Canon #8?

In this message I will attempt to tell that story in an effort to better understand the doctrine of the Lords Supper.

Fundamental Belief #16: The Lords Supper

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the emblems of the body and blood of Jesus as an expression of faith in Him, our Lord and Saviour. In this experience of communion Christ is present to meet and strengthen His people. As we partake, we joyfully proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. Preparation for the Supper includes self-examination, repentance, and confession. The Master ordained the service of foot-washing to signify renewed cleansing, to express a willingness to serve one another in Christlike humility, and to unite our hearts in love. The communion service is open to all believing Christians. (Matt. 26:17-30; John 6:48-63; 13:1-17; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17; 11:23-30; Rev. 3:20.)

The text says, "there are divisions" (v.18). The history of the Lord's Supper has been marked with division. These divisions are what lead to the point of writing Canon #8. Let's begin with some points general agreement.

In Millard Erickson's overview of the Lord's Supper he outlines 6 points of agreement concerning the Lord's Supper.ⁱⁱⁱ

1. "Established by Christ"- Verse 23 "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you..."
2. "The Necessity of Repetitions"- Verse 26 "as often as you eat it"... "until he comes". He hasn't come yet. Some do it every time they gather for worship. It has not been prescribed how often but the expectation is given that it will be a repeated occurrence.
3. "A Form of Proclamation"- Verse 26. The Lord's Supper is a physical proclamation that Jesus died to save sinners.
4. "A Spiritual Benefit to the Partaker"- Vere 17. God designed the Lord's Supper to be for the better not worse. We have different views on what exactly the benefit is, but we all find value in the practice.
5. "Restriction to Followers of Christ"- Some churches practice a closed communion for only members, others are open to all believers. Some have a specific age requirement for participants. However you do it, it is to be taken seriously by believers. The restriction to believers is right in the text. These are the alarming word in verse 27-31. It is a spiritual reality to take seriously. Take Jesus seriously. The reverence has been directed toward the bread and juice when it should be directed toward Jesus.
6. "The Horizontal Dimension"- Paul argues for the unifying work of the Lords Supper in 1 Cor 10:15-17. It's sad that the Lord's Supper is intended to serve in a unifying role and has so often been a point of division. It is God's desire that his people are one as the Father and Son are one (John 17). In verses 20-22 it is clear that the Lord's Supper is not about satisfying physical hunger. The Lord's Supper is opposed to division in that it places us all on the same level before Christ, in need of his grace.

Erickson also outlines 4 major points of disagreement.

1. Presence of Christ
2. Efficacy of the Rite
3. Proper Administrator
4. Appropriate Recipients
5. Elements used

So how did we get to the Council of Trent? Here is a brief history from 1 Corinthians 11 to Canon #8.

We will track two of these, the real presence and the efficacy of the rite, from 1 Corinthians 11 to the Council of Trent.

Efficacy of the Lords Supper

The New Testament attached a much spiritual significance to the Lord's Supper. The early church carried forward that significance with an emphasis that began to blur the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Ignatius, the 1st century Patriarch of Antioch, called it the Lord's Supper the "medicine of immortality".^{iv} He taught that "communion is necessary for the Christian life, and only heretics withdraw from it."^v So, I'll be taking note of which of you skip the next communion Sabbath! The action of the Lord's Supper has always been seen as important in the church, at times, too important.

The Donatists Controversy of the late fourth and early fifth centuries further blurred the significance of the Lord's Supper.^{vi} The church had to figure out how to deal with the priests who compromised their faith during Roman persecution. They questioned, does the Lord's Supper still have power if the one performing it is not righteous? Two theories emerged. The Donatists believed that the priests had to be perfect for the sacraments to have effect. The following Latin terms were not used at that time but later became ways of classifying these different views.

1. Ex opera operantis (literally "through the work of the one who works")- Some refused to accept the ministry of the fallen priests because they believed that the efficacy of the sacrament depended on the purity of the one administering it. Church leaders should live pure lives. But if your salvation depends on my perfection, we're all in trouble.
2. Ex opera operato (literally "through the work that is worked")- Others accepted the priest regardless of their morality because they believed that the efficacy of the sacrament depended on the action of the sacrament and not on the one performing it. You might recognize the words "ex opera operato" from Canon #8.

Both were a distortion of the gospel taking the attention off of the power of Christ. The alternative to the Donatists position should have been Jesus. Instead, they landed in another

distortion of the gospel. The Donatist view placed the power in the person and the alternative placed the power in the act. We are supposed to do the Lord's Supper in remembrance of who?

The Real Presence

The presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper had a history of controversy as well. The idea of Christ being truly present in the emblems of the Lord's Supper was debated centuries before the Protestant Reformation. Consider the following quotes.

John of Damascus, in an important 8th century document^{vii}, explained, "And not you ask how the bread becomes the body of Christ, and the water becomes the blood of Christ. I shall tell you. The Holy Spirit comes upon them and achieves things which surpass every word and thought".

Paschasius Radbertus, a ninth century monk^{viii} wrote, "It is clearly about the flesh and blood that Christ declared: "Truly, truly I say to you, unless you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you will not have eternal life withing you" (John 6:53). There he is certainly speaking about nothing other than the true flesh and true blood."

Radbertus' friend in the same monastery described the differing views of the real presences and wrote^{ix} "There is no small difference between the two". He added "they are indeed divided by schism". In the 9th century this though was already dividing the church. He concluded that "they are the body and blood of Christ in a figurative sense" asking "How then can they be called the body and blood of Christ when no change can be seen to have taken place?" He appealed to readers to taste is and smell is and look at it to see that nothing has changed, except on a spiritual level.

In the year 1070 Lanfranc of Bec wrote^x "while the bits of flesh are really eaten and his blood really drunk. He himself nevertheless continues in this totality as when all will be restored. If you ask me how this is possible, I can only reply briefly as follows: it is a mystery of faith, To believe it can be healthy: to investigate it cannot be of any use."

In 1265 Thomas Aquinas argued presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper was rightly called "transubstantiation" in his notable work Summa Theologiae.^{xi} "It has been held that the substance of bread and wine remain in this sacrament after consecration.... This position is therefore to be avoided as heretical. Therefore it remains that the body of Christ can only come to be in the sacrament by means of the conversion of the substance of bread into his body; and that which is converted into anything does not remain after the conversion".

The Catholic Church build a robust sacramental system. The sacraments are believed to be means of grace. The 7 sacraments are listed below. Each of them are considered efficacious in the work of salvation.

1. Baptism (Acts 2:38)
2. Eucharist (John 6:65-58)
3. Confirmation (Acts 8:17)

4. Penance (John 20:22-23)
5. Extreme Unction (James 5:14-16)
6. Holy Orders (2 Timothy 1:6)
7. Matrimony (John 2:1-12)

The reformers attacked the sacramental system. Most agreed that the list should be whittled down to 2, baptism and the eucharist. They were not content with the way these two were interpreted. The distortions of the efficacy of the Lord's Supper and the presence of Christ were also noticed by Protestant Reformers.

Luther was clear in his disagreement with the doctrine of transubstantiation^{xii}, "but for more than twelve hundred years the church believed rightly, during which time the holy fathers Never at any time or place, mentioned this "transubstantiation" (a pretentious word and idea) until the pseudo philosophy of Aristotle began to make its inroads into the church in these last three hundred years... In red-hot iron, for example, the two substances , fire and iron, are so mingled that every part is both iron and fire. Why should it not be even more possible that the glorious body of Christ be contained in every part of the substance of the bread?" He calls us to "believe with simple faith that Christ's body and blood are truly contained there , and leave the argument about what contains hem to those who have nothing else to do with their time... "Both natures are simply there in their entirety."

Luther, did however retain a view of the real presence. Luther and Zwingli could not agree on the words "hoc est corpus meum" (Matthew 26:26 "this is my body"). For Luther "est" meant "is". For Zwingli "est" meant signify.

Melanchthon argued the Christ is the true sacrament (Colossians 1:22 and 1 Timothy 3:16), and that signs do not justify but they do have a wonderful benefit (Romans 4:10-12). Melanchthon argued that "faith alone justifies"... "Therefore, signs do not justify, but the faith of Hezekiah and Gideon had to be secured, strengthened and confirmed but such signs. In the same way our weakness is strengthened by signs....Practice the Lord's supper as if God himself were to speak with you or to show forth some other miracle that would related directly to you. Signs are given for the purpose of stimulating faith."

The First Helvetic Confession (Protestant) on the Efficacy of the Sacraments, article 20 stated that, "The signs, which are called sacraments, are two, namely, Baptism and the Lords Supper. These sacraments are significant, holy signed of elevated and secret things. However they are not empty signs.... On the contrary we confess them to be signs of divine grace by which the ministers of the church work with the lord for the purpose and to the end which he himself promises. Offers, and efficaciously provides. We confess, however, that all sanctifying and saving power is to be ascribed to God, the Lord alone."

The Council of Trent reaffirmed transubstantiation, "After the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially contained in the venerable sacrament

of the Holy Eucharist under the appearance of those physical things... This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and correctly called "transubstantiation".^{xiii}

As we have seen from Canon 8, the Council of Trent affirmed the efficacy of the sacrament.

Why does it matter?

The question is, "Is the grace of Jesus really sufficient to save you?" Millard Erickson concludes "what all of this amounts to is that salvation is dependent on the church."^{xiv} He highlights that the Catholic view does not teach that the sacraments force people against their will but that there has to be a willing disposition. This makes a possibility of a saving faith that is a passive faith. If all we must do is not resist or object, then we can be saved without desire. God calls us to a faith that hungers and thirsts. Not that our hunger merits salvation but it does pursue God where we find salvation.

If Christ is literally present in the Lord's Supper then we crucify Christ every time we partake.

Hebrews 10:11-14 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

The gospel is distorted when we believe that an additional sacrifice is required. Christ crucified is enough. In what ways have you been deceived into thinking that he is not enough?

The efficacy of the Lord's Supper distorts the gospel by offering an alternative to by grace through faith alone.

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation that Canon #8 got it wrong. The body and blood of Jesus are precious, not because they are present in the Lord's Supper but because they were given for us to save us from sin. We got to Canon #8 though a distortion of the gospel, we get back with clarity about the gospel.

Jesus pleases with us, "Do this in remembrance of me." What a tragedy that we could partake in the Lord's Supper in a way that takes our eyes off of who Jesus really is and what he has done for us. Remember Jesus. Remember his sacrifice for you. Remember that he alone can save you.

The Council of Trent says that Jesus is not sufficient. The Lord's Supper proclaims that he is.

We all have our own version of Canon 8. The devil makes sure of that. It is a message that tells you that faith in the divine promises is not enough. God's grace isn't sufficient for us. Not without a little extra help on our part. The Lord's Supper is a correction of the Canon 8 message that plays in our minds. Jesus is enough!

So let's take back Canon 8 by changing one crucial word and affirming the Biblical truth that "If anyone says that faith alone in the divine promise is sufficient to obtain grace, let them be ~~condemned~~ **SAVED**.^{xv}"

ⁱⁱ Hubert Jedin's *The History of the Council of Trent (Geschichte des Konzils von Trient)*

ⁱⁱ Decrees on the Sacraments, March 3, 1547, Canon 8

ⁱⁱⁱ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology (Second Editions)*, page 1116

^{iv} Eph. 20.2 (Grant, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 4:53)

^v Smyr. 7.1

^{viv} see the Fundamentals message on salvation. It tells a similar story of Church history in which the church began to think that salvation is rotted in God's response to human acts and not the other way around.

^{vii} *De fide orthodoxa*, 86

^{viii} *De corpore et sanguine Christi*, III.1; III.4; IV. 1

^{ix} *De corpore et sanguine Christi*, 2, 9-11, 16

^x *De corpore et sanguine Christi*; in *Beati Lanfranci archiepiscopi Cantuarensis opera*, ed. J. A. Giles, Vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1844), p. 167

^{xi} *Summa Theologiae*, IIIa, q. 75, aa. 2-5

^{xii} *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church (1520)* vol. 6, 509.22-512.4

^{xiii} 13th session, Decree on Sacraments, Canon 13

^{xiv} *Christian Theology*, 2nd Edition

^{xv} Decrees on the Sacraments, March 3, 1547, Canon 8