

The Lord's Supper (1st)

(Today we will begin looking at the distinction between the Reformers and the Baptist regarding the Lord's Supper. In this lesson we will show some of the basic positions of the Reformers.)

When we look at the subject of the Lord's Supper and the differences between that of the Protestants and the Baptists, we find a more difficult distinction than that of baptism. This is because the Protestants too have differences with this subject. While Luther and his followers settled on consubstantiation, Zwingli and his followers maintain more of it being a memorial service, but Calvin and those who aligned with him believed in a somewhat mixed view of the Zwingli and Luther. Though the Protestants came out of Catholicism, they did not support the catholic view of transubstantiation which affirms that the bread and wine are changed into the literal blood and body of Christ. (There was no issue with wine being used in the Lord's Supper until the temperance movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, there was essentially no issue between the Baptists and the Protestants regarding the elements of the Lord's Supper.)

J. H. Merle D'Aubigné said, "It is not at Zurich or at Geneva, but in Wittenberg, the focus of the Lutheran revival," (Zwingli was at Zurich, Calvin was at Geneva, and Luther was at Wittenberg) "that we should look for commencement of that reformed Church, of which Calvin became the chief doctor. ... But when the question of the Lord's Supper was once started, Luther violently rejected the reformed element, and bound himself and his Church in an exclusive Lutheranism. The vexation he felt at this rival doctrine caused him to lose much of his natural kindness of disposition, and aroused in him a mistrust, an habitual discontent and irritation, to which he had hitherto been a stranger. D'Aubigné further commented about the Lord's Supper: "While on a superficial glance we see nothing but a trivial dispute about words, a deeper observation discloses to us one of the most important controversies that can occupy the human mind." *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. III, Book X, Chapter VII, pp. 368-369 (5 volumes in 1 by Baker Book House, 1976 edition).

Regardless of the position taken by a particular reformed group, they all agreed that it, like baptism, was a sacrament. Though we discussed the subject and meaning of sacrament in previous sessions, it will be good to review it somewhat here lest we forget the seriousness and importance of subject at hand. You may remember that the word for sacrament is derived from the Greek word *μυστήριον* which is translated as mystery. As Calvin said, "The old interpreter, whenever he wished to render the Greek term *μυστήριον* into Latin, especially when it was used with reference to divine things, used the word *sacramentum*." The "old interpreter" to which Calvin referred was Catholic Jerome who is known for translating the Bible into Latin, though there were others who contributed to this translation. This Latin translation is known as the *Vulgate*. Also, remember that the Latin word *sacramentum* was not used for the Greek word *μυστήριον* in every place. It was only "when it was used with reference to divine things." When using sacrament in reference to the Lord's Supper, Calvin "asserted that a sacrament was (1) a help to our faith, (2) an external sign, (3) a seal on our conscious of God's promises, (4) to sustain the weakness of our faith, and (5) a testimony of our piety towards God before Him and before angels and before men. Then he proceeds to say that this is all a mystery by using the Latin translation of the Scriptures by the Catholics where they substituted the Latin word for sacrament in the place of the Greek word for mystery." From Podcast 007 – "Ordinance or Sacrament."

As was noted earlier, the Catholics believed in transubstantiation which affirms that the bread and wine are changed into the literal blood and body of Christ. Luther and his followers believe in consubstantiation. While they did not believe that the bread and wine were changed into the literal body and blood of Christ, they did believe that the body and blood came along with the bread and wine.

In October 1-4, 1529, Luther, Melancthon, Zwingle, and Oecolampadius, along with others, met together for discussion of their differences and to try to come together regarding the basic doctrines. This was called the Marburg Colloquy because it was at Marburg Castle, in Marburg, Hesse, Germany. The Lord's Supper was discussed for days and at times with animated arguments. On Saturday, October 2nd, Luther began the discussion by taking a piece of chalk and writing in large letters HOC EST CORPUS MEUM, which was "this is my body." While Zwingle and Oecolampadius affirmed with various arguments and verses of Scripture that the phrase was merely a figure of speech. Luther strongly affirmed that it was the body of Christ. He said, "I do not ask what need we have of it; but I see it written, *Eat, this is my body*. We must therefore believe and do. We must do—we must do!—If God should order me to eat dung, I would do it, with the assurance that it would be salutary." (P. 529) The arguments are interesting but we do not have time to supply them. Finally, it was agreed that Luther write the articles of faith agreed on in the meeting along with the conclusion regarding the body and blood of the Lord in the Lord's Supper. After reading everything preceding the part regarding the Lord's Supper, the Swiss (i.e., Zwingle and Oecolampadius and those with them) agreed. Then came the last part regarding the Lord's Supper. Luther read:

We all believe with regard to the Lord's Supper, that it ought to be celebrated in both kinds, according to the primitive institution; that the mass is not a work by which a Christian obtains pardon for another man, whether dead or alive; that the sacrament of the altar is the sacrament of the very body and very blood of Jesus Christ; and that the spiritual manducation of this body and blood is specially necessary to every true Christian. ... In like manner, as to the use of the sacrament, we are agreed that, like the Word, it was ordained of Almighty God, in order that weak consciences might be excited by the Holy Ghost to faith and charity. ... And although at present we are not agreed on the question whether the real body and blood of Christ are corporeally present in the bread and wine, yet both the interested parties shall cherish more and more a truly christian charity for one another, so far as conscience permits; and we will all earnestly implore the Lord to condescend by his Spirit to confirm us in the sound doctrine.

D'Aubigné stated, "The Swiss obtained what they had asked: unity in diversity. It was immediately resolved to hold a solemn meeting for the signature of the articles.

"They were read over again. Oecolampadius, Zwingle, Bucer, and Hedio, signed them first on one copy; while Luther, Melancthon, Jonas, Osiander, Brentz, and Agricola, wrote their names on the other; both parties then subscribed the copy of their adversaries, and this important document was sent to the press.

"Thus the Reformation had made a sensible step at Marburg. The opinion of Zwingle on the spiritual presence, and of Luther on the bodily presence, are both found in christian antiquity; but both the extreme doctrines have been always rejected: that of the Rationalists," [This is how D'Aubigné and the reformers described the Baptists and other who maintain that the Lord's Supper is a simple memorial service.—JKB] "on the one hand, who behold in the Eucharist nothing but a simple commemoration; and of the Papists, on the other, who adore in it a transubstantiation. These are both errors; while the doctrines of Luther and Zwingle, and the medium taken by Calvin, already maintained by some of the Fathers, were considered in ancient times as different views of the same truth." *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Vol. IV, Book XIII, Chapter VII, pp. 524-536 (5 volumes in 1 by Baker Book House, 1976 edition).

However, this did not end the controversy. D'Aubigné went on to record, "As for Zwingle, he quitted Marburg in alarm at Luther's intolerance. 'Lutheranism,' wrote he to the landgrave, 'will lie as heavy upon us as popery.' ... 'The truth,' said he to his friends, 'has prevailed so manifestly, that if ever any one has been defeated before all the world, it is Luther, although he constantly exclaimed that he was

invincible.’ On his side, Luther spoke in a similar strain. ‘It is through fear of their fellow-citizens,’ added he, ‘that the Swiss, although vanquished, are unwilling to retract.’

If it should be asked on which side the victory really was, perhaps we ought to say that Luther assumed the air of a conqueror, but Zwingle was so in reality.”

Now that we have given this small overview of some of the discussions among the reformers of the Lord’s Supper and since the majority of the reformers did not follow the Lutheran doctrine, in our next study we will look at the basic Reformed view as given in the *Westminster Confession*.