

The Christian's Salvation

The elect (Eph 1:4-5) obtain eternal life (Rev 21:3-4) when the Spirit unites himself to them (Rom 8:11) (I John 2:20, 4:13) and brings them into union with the Son and the Father (Eph 2:18) (John 6:57, 17:20-23); from which union (which is a result of God's grace; not the elect's faith or works or God's foreknowledge of either [Eph 2:4-5]) proceeds the renewal of their nature: i.e. regeneration (Rom 6:18) (I Cor 6:11) (Gal 3:27) (Eph 4:24), the instrument of their one-time-occurrence justification: Faith in God's promises apart from works (Rom 3:28, 4:5, 4:20-25), and all the spiritual benefits (Gal 5:22-24) including means of their sanctification (i.e. the entire process of their salvation [Eph 4:13-16] [Phil 2:12-13] [James 2:14] [Eph 2:10]); namely, the preaching and hearing of the Word (2 Tim 3:16) (Rev 1:3) (Eph 1:13-14), the reception of the sacraments of baptism (Mat 28:19) (Acts 10:44-48); note that the Gentiles received the Spirit before they were baptized. Although it is possible for someone to receive the spirit when they are baptized, as either an infant [Acts 16:33] [Mat 19:13-15] [Mat 21:16] or an adult, the Spirit is free to unite himself to someone in his own time according to his own will.) and the Lord's Supper (I Cor 11:23-26), and prayer (James 5:16) (I John 5:14-15). This salvific bond is unbreakable (Rom 8:35-39) but false Christians (Gal 2:4) (Jude 4) were never united to Christ in the first place (Mat 7:21-23) (I John 2:19-20).

The Lord's Supper

The principal benefit of the Lord's Supper for the elect is a powerful confirmation of their faith that they are indeed united to Christ and are recipients of his benefits; some of which are actually and truly conferred to them through the operation of the Spirit when they eat the bread and drink the wine. The benefits that are confirmed to them include those one-time-occurrences of their salvation, such as the union with Christ, regeneration and justification. While benefits that are conferred to them include a strengthening of their faith, a renewed disposition for piety, and an active desire for good works. But just because the spiritual benefits of Christ's temporal sacrifice are confirmed to worthy participants of the Lord's Supper, this does not mean that his literal flesh and blood are miraculously and mystically multiplied (cf. John 6:11) and transferred into the future for believers to carnally ingest through the transubstantiation of bread and wine. In other words, the inward spiritual benefits from Christ are confirmed to the elect by faith through the outward physical signs of the consecrated bread and wine; not through the literal consumption of his flesh and blood. There is no scripturally-warranted logical necessity that the elect must eat Christ's flesh to receive his benefits. The efficacy of the sacrament (and Christ himself for that matter) is not tied to his flesh -as if his skin, muscles, and tissue had any supernatural powers if one consumed them- but rather to his sacrifice, figuratively called his 'broken body' and 'shed blood' in relation to the bread and wine.

A figurative interpretation of the flesh and blood must be correct for a multitude of reasons. For one, when the elect are baptized they are not literally 'buried with Christ' (Col 2:12) and do not literally 'drink the Spirit' (I Cor 12:13). This language is obviously figurative for the mortification of their sinful nature inherited from union with Adam (I Cor 15:22) and the life that flows from Christ to them through the Spirit (John 7:38-29) respectively. If the imagery of baptism is readily understood by many, why do the papists incongruously treat the Lord's Supper differently?

Like baptism, the Lord's Supper must be viewed in terms of union with Christ. John 15:4-5 reveals that the elect can only produce genuine fruit because they are united to Christ the vine (Rom 8:8). The branch cannot be nourished unless they are connected to the vine. (I Cor 3:1-2 and I Pet 2:2 continue to develop the nourishment theme as well.) But is this union really a result of the grotesque acts of cannibalism? The answer can be found after reading John 6:53-57 in the context of the entire gospel (especially John 14-17). In John 6:57

specifically, Christ here equates his own union and life with the Father with the union the elect have with him when they feed on his flesh and drink his blood. (Remember, the repeated insistent use of the words 'flesh' and 'blood' here is, in part, to dispel the popular heresy that Christ did not actually come in the flesh.) Now obviously, Christ is not united to the Father by virtue of feeding on his flesh and blood, for the Father does not have any. Rather they are united because they both share the same life. In other words, they both share in the same divine nature (or essence). Therefore, to understand what Christ is getting at, it is imperative that the doctrine of unity of the Trinity are briefly summarized. The following illustration elaborates these doctrines.

[Place for illustration]

The lines in the above illustration refer to possession: e.g. the Father possesses the divine nature, the Holy Spirit possesses the divine nature, the Son possesses both the divine nature (Col 1:19) and the restored human nature (2 John 7), the elect possesses both the restored human nature and the mortified remnants of the fallen human nature (until their death and resurrection), and the damned possess only the fallen human nature. The arrows refer to the relationships between the persons within the Trinity as regards their identity and divine action: e.g. the Father initiates (begets) work for the Son (Ps 2:7) (Isaiah 49:6) and the Spirit (Rom 8:11), the Son willingly and eagerly arranges the work initiated by the Father (John 10:17-18), and the Holy Spirit willingly and eagerly effects the identical work of the Father and Son (John 5:19) (John 16:13-15). The word 'in' or 'partake' refers to the mystical union between persons and/or natures, shown above in the diagram by the ability to trace through the lines: e.g. the Father is 'in' the Son and the Son is 'in' the Father (John 14:10-11), the elect are 'in' the Spirit and the Spirit is 'in' the elect (Rom 8:9), the Son is 'in' the elect (Rom 8:10), the elect are 'in' the Father and the Son and vice versa (John 17:21-23), the elect partake of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4) but do not possess it because the two are not directly connected by a line (if they 'possessed' the divine nature that would make them God), the restored human nature is 'in' the divine nature (Col 3:3), God is 'in' the elect (Eph 3:19), etc.

The [asterisk] refers to the fallen human nature being taken into Jesus Christ and his restored human nature only (not into the Father, the Spirit, or the divine nature) and being crucified on behalf of the elect (Rom 6:10). Being united to Christ, the elect are crucified to the fallen human nature as well (Rom 6:6) (Col 2:14-14).

What does all of this have to do with the Lord's Supper, one might ask.

Everything! Refer back to John 6:57. Jesus Christ has life because he feeds on the divine nature he shares with the Father. So also the elect has life because they 'feed' on the flesh-and-blood human nature Christ shares with them. They already possess this perfect human nature in full by imputation, but they also receive it gradually throughout this life by infusion (i.e. they begin to possess it in and of themselves) (Rom 6:12-14) (2 Cor 7:1) (Col 3:5-10) (1 Pet 2:11). They are completely, perfectly, and irreversibly infused with Christ's glorified human nature only at the resurrection (Col 3:4). Until then, Christ instituted the Lord's Supper as a means of confirming and conferring his grace. When the elect partake of the consecrated bread and wine, the Spirit mystically lifts their souls into the heavenly places (Heb 12:22-24) where Christ is (Acts 1:9) (Eph 1:20) and seals and applies to them the benefits of his sacrifices and nature -both of which are figuratively called his flesh and blood.

The revolting notion that Christians literally ingest Christ's flesh and blood (even if they 'appear' to be bread and wine) is absurd. As the Westminster Confession states, *"That doctrine which maintains a change of the substance of bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason; overthrows the nature of the sacrament, and has been, and is, the cause of manifold superstitions; yes, of gross idolatries."* Because the papists believe that the bread and wine become Christ's body and blood, they actually worship them as divine. That this false doctrine could cement itself mere decades after the apostles died is like when Aaron built a golden calf and called it Yahweh immediately after Moses returned up the mountain. Just because one worships an image (in this case bread and wine) and calls it God does not make it any less idolatrous. The beauty of the Lord's Supper and the elect's marvelous union with Christ is perverted into cannibalism, superstition, and idolatry by this false doctrine.

There are still those who worship Christ proper, however, and discern the true nature of this sacrament. It is my hope that this short essay enlightens this who do not yet understand it and results in a stronger relationship with their Lord.