

COMMUNION AS INTERPERSONAL

Virgil Warren, PhD

As with any ritual or formal act, the Lord's Supper means for us only what we mean into it. The bread and the grape juice are transformed in our minds into the body and the blood of the Lord. The elements represent rather than are. "*This is my body*" uses "*is*" in the way a new grandfather does when he pulls a snapshot out of his wallet and says, "*This is my grandson.*"

Communion means as much as we mean into it, and it means something only if we mean something into it. It has intended meaning, so we should put that meaning into our observance. If we do not do so, it has no meaning at all and therefore no benefit.

Treating the elements in this personal way contrasts with sliding the ordinance over into the impersonal category: being (hypostatics). Transubstantiation and consubstantiation interpret the words of institution in the foreign category of substance (hypostasis). Such a context gets into alien distinctions between essence and accident since the elements at the time of partaking have all the characteristics of bread and grape juice instead of flesh and blood. Whether the elements are partially or completely transformed or whether they are intermingled with the miraculously present real body and blood of the Lord does not properly get at what Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to mean. In any form, the doctrine of "real presence" (impanation) confuses the point of the Eucharist; it conceives of an interpersonal process in hypostatic terms.

I. The Lord's Supper is an act of identification with Christ.

The Lord's Supper is fellowship with a person as symbolized by ingesting into ourselves what pictures his body and blood. "Eating" his body and blood means internalizing the life he lived in that body when he carried his obedience to the Father to the point of allowing his body to be killed and his blood shed for righteousness' sake. It is a pledge of allegiance to Christ, an act of commitment that is total because it is to the point of death as his was, an allegiance that is permanent because it is a commitment till he comes, an exclusive allegiance because it cannot be shared with the table of demons. It is participation with Christ by putting ourselves in his shoes. It is an act of worship inasmuch as it expresses ourselves to him as a present, superior, second person.

II . The Lord's Supper is an act of worship.

We consciously look up to the One who cared about us enough to undergo what we are bringing into the present through these emblems.

III. The Lord's Supper is an act of identification with the people of Christ.

It amounts to a plea for unity (1 Corinthians **10:17**) and a proclamation of his death. It restates his death for us all.

christir.org