

Exposition of the Sedes Doctrinae of the Lord's Supper

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{Originally printed in the March 1926 issue of *Theological Monthly*}

The words of institution of the Lord's Supper have, in the history of the Christian Church, been the subject of much controversy and dispute. Although it would appear that anyone who peruses these words with an unbiased mind cannot fail to arrive at the one true intended meaning, nevertheless these words have been subjected to various interpretations, with the result that much scandal and dissension have thereby been perpetrated within the Church and that the minds of many Christians have been bewildered and confused. It strikes one as being rather strange that, in these clear passages of Holy Writ, there has been such wanton deviation from the safe and sane rule of interpretation, viz., that, in expounding Scripture, one must not depart from the plain, simple, common, and established meaning of the words in question, unless there be sufficient grounds to warrant such departure. The reason for all such deviation in interpreting the words of institution of the Lord's Supper, however, lies in the fact that reason has ever been consulted as to the comprehensibility of the simple import of these words; and finding that the simple meaning of the words lies beyond the grasp of human reason, this meaning has been rejected, and the words have been interpreted according to the dictates of human reason. Reason, however, does not furnish sufficient grounds for departing from the aforementioned rule; Scripture itself must make the deviation imperative. And thus, in seeming keeping with this requirement and in a vain endeavor to give a human fabrication the appearance of a Scriptural doctrine, other passages of Holy Writ have erroneously been regarded as the seat of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. As the Baptists have sought to give their false doctrine of Baptism Scriptural support from Rom. 10:14 "How shall they believe in Him of who they have not heard?" just so the Reformed church-bodies have resorted to the 6th chapter of the Gospel of St. John in search of Scriptural proof of their doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

Now, it is not the purpose of this paper to show in detail which are, and which are not, the words of institution of the

Holy Supper. However, since chapter 6 of St. John's gospel has constantly been misapplied to disprove the clear meaning of the essential part of the actual words of institution, it may be well before taking up the theme, to state briefly a few reasons why this passage of Scripture does not treat of the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. In the first place, these words were spoken by the Lord about one year *before* the time of His actual institution of the Holy Supper. Again, no earthly elements are here mentioned, whereas such elements are essential to constitute a sacrament; neither do we here find any reference to a *bodily* eating and drinking, which is another essential part of the Sacrament according to the plain words of institution. Furthermore, the assumption that these words treat of the Lord's Supper results in the following, viz, 1.) That no one can be saved unless he has partaken of the Lord's Supper; for, applied to the Lord's Supper, such must be the meaning of Christ's words in the 53rd verse: "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, ye have no life in you*"; 2) that every communicant has eternal life; for in the following verse Jesus says: "*Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life.*" Accordingly, all who depart this life before partaking of Holy Communion, which is often the case, especially with children, perish eternally, regardless of whether they believe in Jesus or not; and on the other hand, communing saves, be the communicant worthy or unworthy, a believer or an unbeliever. All this, however, is so directly contrary to the clear teachings of Scripture that it appears superfluous to cite passages in refutation thereof. Of the malefactor on the cross, although he had never communed, we know that he entered Paradise after death, Luke 23:43; of Christian children who die in faith before partaking of the Lord's Supper Jesus gives us the same assurance, saying: "*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,*" Mark 16:16; and of the unworthy communicant St. Paul says, "*He eateth and drinketh damnation to himself.*", 1 Cor. 11:29. Holding fast, then, to what the Scriptures plainly teach, it becomes clear and certain that chapter 6 of the Gospel of St. John does not treat of the Sacrament of the Altar, but speaks of a *spiritual* eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood, i.e., of an appropriation of the merits of the Lord's suffering

and death, which is done by faith. Indeed, the entire disputed portion of this chapter of St. John's gospel speaks of faith, sometimes expressly, as in verses 35, 40, 47, *et al.*; sometimes figuratively, as in verses 51, 53, 54, 56, 57, *et al.*

The words of institution of the Lord's Supper in which the true doctrine of this Sacrament is to be sought, are none other than the quaint words which the Lord spoke in the same night in which He was betrayed. Of these words we have a fourfold record. It has pleased the Holy Spirit to have these words repeated by four of His inspired penmen: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul. The purpose of the repetition is nicely stated in our Small Catechism thus: "That they [these words] may be unto us all the more clear, sure, and important."

The following are the words as we find them in the various records. Matthew states them thus: "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is My body. And He took the cup and gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Matt. 26, 26—28. Mark writes thus: "And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them; and they all drank of it. And He said unto them, This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many." Mark 14, 22—24. Luke has the words thus: "And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body, which is given for you; this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you." Luke 22, 19. 20. St. Paul writes as follows: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood; this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." 1 Cor. 11, 23—25.

While a comparison of these passages with each other manifests a great similarity among them, especially between the words of Matthew and Mark, and those of Luke and St. Paul, respectively, yet it is true that the four records do not harmonize with each

other verbally. Even in the words which the Lord spake while distributing the elements, bread and wine, there is a slight difference among the four records. But while there is an apparent difference in the wording of the various records, there is no difference as far as their import is concerned. Considering their import, these passages rather coincide with each other perfectly. No matter how one studies or examines them, whether separately or jointly, one will gain identically the same doctrine therefrom.

Nevertheless, the opponents of the true doctrine have ever attempted to find in the existing verbal difference among the records sufficient ground for circumventing the words of institution and for resorting to other passages of Scripture for proof of their false doctrine. They say that it is impossible to determine which are the *ipsissima verba Jesu Christi*, impossible to determine which are the very words the Lord actually used at the time of institution. And from this they draw the conclusion that, in formulating the doctrine, a strict adherence to the individual words in these passages is unessential. To this latter bold assertion we answer: Study each passage separately, and the result, in each instance, will be, as already stated, the same doctrine. Moreover, it is not true that we cannot determine which are the very, the actual, words of Christ. The sainted Dr. Stoeckhardt gives a plausible explanation in regard to this when he writes in his *Bible History of the New Testament*, p. 266: "In making the round among the disciples, the Lord sometimes used the one and sometimes the other formula. No matter, however, which words He chose to use, in each instance the import thereof was the same." But even granting that this explanation is only a matter of conjecture, the unimpeachable fact remains that each passage, whether written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, or St. Paul, is a true reiteration of the *ipsissima verba Jesu Christi*, and that verbatim; for these men framed not their own thoughts or speculations in their own words, wrote not from their own memory, but were inspired by the Holy Ghost. The verbal inspiration of Scripture, taught by the Bible in and of itself, 1 Cor. 2, 13, applies in its fullest measure also to these words of Holy Writ. Hence, when asked which are the very, the actual, words of Christ, we can safely say: All the words of each and every passage are the *ipsissima verba Jesu Christi*.

In expounding the *sedes doctrinae* of the Lord's Supper, we may, then, choose any one of the four passages as the basis of our exposition. We will expound the record of St. Paul, which is not only the most detailed, but also the oldest, it being written about

57 A. D., while none of the gospels was written before 60 A. D. We shall, however, take cognizance of the verbal differences between this and the other passages in their proper order.

The apostle begins with the words: "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you" — *Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν*. The particle *γὰρ* indicates that the following is an explanation of, and a reason for, the foregoing. In the preceding verses the apostle rebukes the Corinthians because of their corrupt practise and the conduct shown at their public services. Discord, divisions, and schisms among them were apparent there; instead of "endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," Eph. 4, 3, they entered into strife and wrangling with one another, and thus their coming together for divine worship did not benefit and better them, but rather harmed them. But worst of all, the apostle must charge them also with abuse and profanation of the holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This they celebrated in connection with their love-feasts. From the contributions toward these love-feasts the necessary bread and wine for the Lord's Supper was to be taken. This, however, was not done. Instead, every one ate and drank his own contribution, as the apostle says: "In eating, every one taketh before other his own supper," v. 21; consequently "one was hungry, and another was drunken," according as each had brought. And so it happened that not only the feast itself had lost its charity character, — the poor being despised and deprived of that which was to be contributed toward their benefit, — but that the holy Sacrament was also scandalously abused. Therefore the apostle, for the purpose of curbing the existing corrupt practise, finds it necessary to remind the Corinthians, in the following verses, of the sacredness of the divine ordinance. It was not being celebrated by the Corinthians in a manner consistent with its divine character. Nor is the manner in which it is celebrated immaterial. The Christian congregation is not privileged to act in this sacred matter according to its own notion and fancy. The Holy Supper is not an ordinance founded and established by the Church; it is of divine institution, an ordinance of God, instituted by the Lord Himself. "For," says the apostle, "I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you."

"Of the Lord" the apostle received that which he delivered to the Corinthians. At the outset he assures them, and confirms them in their belief, that that which he had long since delivered

to them is not his own, not a mere human ordinance, but that it is of divine origin, an institution of the Lord. In the same breath he also states how he came by the knowledge thereof: he *received it of the Lord, i. e.*, by special, direct revelation. Some deny this. They hold that the apostle merely wishes to say that the record of the institution of the Sacrament had been communicated to him as being of divine origin, as a word of God, and that he, in turn, had communicated it to the Corinthians as such. They say that tradition was the source of Paul's knowledge of the record, that the first disciples, the eye-witnesses of the institution, had related these facts to him. They base their claim upon Paul's use of the preposition *ἀπό*, contending that, if the apostle had intended to refer to an immediate revelation, this would have necessitated the use of the preposition *παρά*. Now, it is true that Paul, in connection with the word *παραλαμβάνειν*, in other instances, does use the preposition *παρά* to state of whom one has received. Gal. 1, 12; 1 Thess. 4, 1; 2 Thess. 3, 6. Nevertheless, the idea of an indirect, or mediate, communication finds no support in the connection of this passage. Why should the apostle emphasize that he had received the record of the institution of the Lord's Supper merely as one of divine origin, as a word of God? There was not a particle of doubt as to this in the minds of the readers of his letter. Why, then, lay such special stress upon something which every one already believed? Why the use of the pronoun *ἐγώ*, and that at the beginning of the sentence? Does not the apostle thereby wish to emphasize, by means of contrast, the special privilege which had been conferred upon him in that he, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, had received an immediate, direct revelation from the Lord while others had not? Many had heard and received the record of the institution as a word of God by tradition, from the first disciples. To say that he, the apostle, had come by the knowledge thereof in like commonplace manner would have been nothing special, exceptional, or noteworthy; and in such case the use of the pronoun *ἐγώ* would have been insignificant, yes, the entire sentence would have been superfluous. But no; Paul had received the record immediately, directly, from the Lord — by direct revelation. This is the intended meaning of the apostle's statement, as the connection indicates. As the apostle at other times emphasizes the fact that he had received his Gospel, not from man, but by direct revelation of the Lord, Gal. 1, 12, so also here. Nor does the use of the preposition *ἀπό* prohibit the acceptance of this as the intended meaning. In other passages of the New Testament

this preposition is used in the same sense, *viz.*, to indicate direct communication; cf. Col. 1, 7; 1 John 1, 5. Thus we have before us in these words of St. Paul not a traditional, but the Lord's own word and record of the institution of His Last Supper. And "in this circumstance," writes Chemnitz, "lies the highest authority of Paul's testimony," *viz.*, in this, "that he did not take his description of the institution from the other apostles, so that he, by virtue of his apostolic authority, might have changed, transposed, and explained some of the words; but the Son of God Himself, after His ascension into glory, communicated the institution of His Supper to Paul, so that he might, by repetition of some words, and by change, transposition, and explanation of others, manifest how he would have them explained and understood." (*L. C.*, p. 43.)

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," thus the apostle writes to the Christians at Corinth. As their apostle, as a faithful steward, Paul delivered, communicated to them the revelation which he had received. He delivered it to them verbatim, without adding thereto or taking therefrom. What he had received he communicated to them just as he had received it, namely, this, "That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread," etc. — *ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον*. In these first words of the revelation the attention of the Corinthians is directed to the institutor of the Sacrament. It is none other than Jesus, the Son of God and man, the Savior. And this Jesus is the Lord, the true God, the all-wise God, who knows not only what He says and whereof He speaks, but also how He must speak in order that man may not fail to arrive at the true import of His words, if he will but accept them according to their simple meaning. Being the Lord, He is also truthful; truthfulness is one of His inherent qualities, wherefore guile or falsehood never was, and never can be found, in Him. What He says He fulfils to the letter. And even though reason may marvel at the substance of His word and promise and say, It cannot be so nor done, yet one may rely upon the fulfilment thereof with implicit trust; for He is the Lord, the Omnipotent One, with whom nothing is impossible. — Having thus reminded his readers of the divine origin of the Sacrament, to wit, that it was instituted by the Lord Jesus, the apostle proceeds to state the time of the institution. It took place in the night in which He, the Lord Jesus, was betrayed, — betrayed in such contemptible manner by His own disciple Judas Iscariot;

in the night which preceded that memorable day when Jesus, as the Lamb of God, burdened with the sins of the whole world, went forth on that painful journey which terminated in His crucifixion and death on Mount Calvary. In reminding the Corinthians of the circumstances attending the institution and of the momentous occurrences of the following day by designating the time as being the night of the Lord's betrayal, it is unquestionably the object and purpose of the apostle to rebuke the Corinthians because of the indifference and disorder which attended their celebration of the Holy Supper. He calls their attention to the fact that the Lord's Supper is a sacred institution; as such it demands due reverence and respect on the part of the Christians. It is the Lord's last will, or testament, wherein He bequeathed to His people the benefits and merits of His suffering and death. *(To be continued.)*