

The Real, Spiritual Presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper

From John Calvin, *Tracts*, Vol. II, trans. Henry Beveridge (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1849), 170-171, English updated and emphasis added.

The following comes from John Calvin's *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*.

The importance of the real, spiritual presence of Christ in communion:

12. HOW THE BREAD IS CALLED THE BODY, AND THE WINE THE BLOOD OF CHRIST.

We begin now to enter on the question so much debated, both anciently and at the present time — how we are to understand the words in which the bread is called the body of Christ, and the wine His blood. This may be disposed of without much difficulty; if we carefully observe the principle which I lately laid down, namely, that all the benefit which we should seek in the Supper is annihilated if Jesus Christ be not there given to us as the substance and foundation of all. That being fixed, we will confess, without doubt, that to deny that a true communication of Jesus Christ is presented to us in the Supper, is to render this holy sacrament frivolous and useless — an execrable blasphemy unfit to be listened to.

13. WHAT IS REQUISITE IN ORDER TO LIVE IN JESUS CHRIST.

Moreover, if the reason for communicating with Jesus Christ is to have part and portion in all the graces which He purchased for us by His death, the required thing must be not only to be partakers of His Spirit, but also to participate in His humanity, in which He rendered all obedience to God His Father, in order to satisfy our debts, although, properly speaking, the one cannot be without the other; for when He gives Himself to us, it is in order that we may possess Him entirely. Hence, as it is said that His Spirit is our life, so He Himself, with His own lips, declares that His flesh is meat indeed, and His blood drink indeed (John 6:55). If these words are not to go for nothing, it follows that in order to have our life in Christ our souls must feed on His body and blood as their proper food. This, then, is expressly attested in the Supper, when of the bread it is said to us that we are to take it and eat it, and that it is His body, and of the cup that we are to drink it, and that it is His blood. This is expressly spoken of the body and blood, in order that we may learn to seek there the substance of our spiritual life.

14. HOW THE BREAD AND WINE ARE THE BODY OF JESUS CHRIST.

Now, if it be asked whether the bread is the body of Christ and the wine His blood, we answer, that the bread and the wine are visible signs, which represent to us the body and blood, but that this name and title of body and blood is given to them because they are as it were instruments by which the Lord distributes them to us. This form and manner of speaking is very appropriate. For as the communion which we have with the body of Christ is a thing incomprehensible, not only to the eye but to our natural sense, it is there visibly demonstrated to us. Of this we have a striking example in an analogous case. Our Lord, wishing to give a visible appearance to His Spirit at the baptism of Christ, presented Him under the form of a dove. St. John the Baptist, narrating the fact, says, that he saw the Spirit of God descending. If we look more closely, we shall find that he saw nothing but the dove, in respect that the Holy Spirit is in His essence

invisible. Still, knowing that this vision was not an empty phantom, but a sure sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit, he doubts not to say that he saw it (John 1:32), because it was represented to him according to his capacity.