

Responding to "Real Absence" Arguments

by Todd Wilken

*And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; **this is My body.**" Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For **this is My blood** of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."*

– Matthew 26:26-28

These words of Jesus teach the Real Presence. That is, that the body and blood of Jesus are really present with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Moreover, these words also teach that those who eat and drink the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus.

For the last 2,000 years, the vast majority of Christians have believed in the Real Presence. Today the vast majority of Christians still believe this teaching. Why? Because this is precisely what Jesus taught His disciples at the first Lord's Supper.

However, there are some Christians who hear Jesus' words very differently. Rather than hearing Jesus say that His body and blood are *present* with the bread and the wine of the Lord's Supper, these Christians hear Jesus saying the exact opposite: His body and blood are *absent*.

Jesus takes the bread and says, "This is my body..." They hear, "This is not my body..." Jesus takes the wine and says, "This is my blood..." They hear, "This is not my blood..." They believe in the *Real Absence* rather than the Real Presence.

How do we respond to fellow Christians who deny the Real Presence and teach the Real Absence?

1) Most importantly, stick to the words of Jesus, "This is my body... This is my blood." These words are the origin of the Church's teaching on the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23ff).

These words are also the center of the debate within the Church regarding the Lord's Supper. What a person believes regarding

these words determines what he will believe about the Lord's Supper.

These words are the real obstacle to those who deny the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper. If they refuse to deal with these words, any discussion of the Lord's Supper is useless.

2) Begin by answering their favorite argument. Those who argue for the Real Absence of Jesus' body and blood in the Lord's Supper often say that Jesus' words, "This is my body...This is my blood" are figures of speech.

Their argument is basically that the words, "This is..." regarding the Lord's Supper are like the words "I am..." when Jesus said, "I am the Door," or "I am the Light of the world."

But there is a problem with this argument. The non-literal elements in phrases like, "I am the Door," or "I am the Light of the world," are not the words "I am", but the words, "Door" and "Light".

In other words, when Jesus said, "I am the Door," or "I am the Light of the world" Jesus was claiming TO BE something, not merely TO REPRESENT something. He was not saying "I REPRESENT the Light of the world", He was claiming TO BE the Light of the world. The real question is not what Jesus meant by "I am..." but what He meant by "the Light of the world".

So, if these figures of speech are parallel to Jesus' words regarding His body and blood in the Lord's Supper, then the non-literal element in Jesus' phrase, "This is my body" is the word "body", not the word "is". Likewise, the non-literal element in Jesus' phrase, "This is my blood" is the word "blood", not the word "is". You might even write it out in two columns.

Literal

Non-Literal

I am...

...the Door.

I am... ...the Light of the world.

This is...

...my body.

This is...

...my blood.

Now, if the word "body" is non-literal, then to what (other than Jesus' literal body) does it refer? If the word "blood" is

non-literal, then to what (other than Jesus' literal blood) does it refer? There are no Scriptural answers to these questions.

3) Continue to ask: "Where did you get that idea?" When the proponents of the Real Absence say that "is" means "represents", ask them, "Where did you get that idea?" You see, they cannot have gotten that idea from the words of the text itself, or for that matter, from any other Scripture regarding the Lord's Supper.

The words of Jesus, if read in their plain and obvious sense, teach that the body and blood of Jesus are truly present with the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper. Our reason and senses, on the other hand, say that Jesus' body and blood cannot be present.

The fact is, there is no reason in the text itself to take Jesus' words metaphorically. The only reason to do so is not in the text, but in our minds, which cannot understand how His words can be true. And as so often is the case, Jesus words are to be believed over our reason or senses.

4) Ask them to clear up the situation. Ask, "If Jesus' words here are not completely clear, then how *should* He have said it?"

Now, this is obviously a trick question, and therefore one that they will probably not answer. But this question illustrates the real obstacle for Real Absence proponents: Jesus' words are in conflict with their own reason.

Now, reason is good, but reason is always used as the servant of God's Word, not as the master of God's Word. In the case of the Real Absence proponents, their reason dictates that Jesus' words can't mean what they seem to say. Instead, reason dares to dictate to Jesus what He *should* have said.

5) Ask, "Why, when giving His last will and testament, did Jesus use such potentially confusing language, as you allege?"

People who are about to be arrested, tried and executed don't usually mince words or speak in riddles. Jesus commanded His disciples: "Do this, as often as you drink it, in my remembrance." But if the "this" they were to do was not altogether clear, how were they to know what they were being commanded to do?

Then ask: "Does Paul clear up the confusion when he writes about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians?"

The answer is no; Paul uses precisely the same "confusing language" as Jesus did. In fact, Paul adds to the confusion by reiterating that the bread and cup are a participation in the body and blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). He also says that those who partake of the Lord's Supper must discern the body of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:27-29). Now, if Jesus really meant that the bread and wine only represent His body and blood, why would Paul say these things?

Then Ask: "Could it be that Paul uses the same "confusing language" because the language isn't confusing at all, but plain and clear and meant to be taken literally?"

6) Point out where the burden of proof lies. The burden of proof lies with anyone who wants to deviate from the plain and obvious meaning of Jesus' words.

You do not have to prove that Jesus meant what He said, rather, those who deny the Real Presence have to prove that He didn't. The only way they can do that is by forcing Jesus' words to conform to the dictates of their reason.

7) Pose this hypothetical scenario: Jesus says, "This is my body... This is my blood." Now, on Judgment Day, if I am wrong in taking those words literally, and Jesus rebukes me, "Why did you misunderstand my Supper?" I will be able to answer, "Lord, I was simply taking you at your Word."

But if Jesus intended those words to be taken literally, and I have taken them figuratively, what will be my answer? All I could say would be, "I trusted my reason more than your words."

Say: "I would rather be rebuked for taking Jesus at His word, than for not doing so."

While this scenario is a little silly and purely hypothetical, it serves to expose what those who question and deny the simple meaning of Jesus' words are really doing.

8) Don't be sidetracked by questions of "How?" At some point your friend will ask you, "How are Jesus' body and blood present with the bread and wine?" Answer: Jesus does not explain how His body and blood are present, He simply says that they are.

Scripture doesn't explain how God spoke light into existence, it simply says that He did. Scripture doesn't explain how Jesus performed His miracles, it simply says that He did.

In the case of the Lord's Supper, many proponents of the Real Presence find themselves denying what they affirm in almost every other case. The same Jesus who can speak the world into existence out of nothing at creation cannot speak His body and blood into existence at the Lord's Supper. The same Jesus who can heal the blind, deaf, dumb, lame and sick with a word cannot make His body and blood present at the Lord's Supper with a word.

9) Don't be sidetracked by the "Show me one passage" ploy. When your friend says, "Show me one Bible passage that says that the bread and wine are also Jesus' body and blood," answer, "'This is my body... this is my blood...' THAT is my passage."

They will likely respond, "No, I mean a passage *other than that one*." Answer: "Well, first tell me what's wrong with that one?"

You see, when they ask for another passage they are really just trying to avoid talking about Jesus' words. Besides, 1 Corinthians 10 & 11 are always there in case you need them.

10) Finally and again, STICK TO THE WORDS OF JESUS. Never let go of them. Those who deny the Real Presence will try to lead you away from His words. You must make them deal with His words.

But remember, all the arguing will get you no until those who deny the Real Presence are willing to take Jesus' words seriously.

In the end they will find that their argument is with Jesus, not with you. And only He can bring their faith in line with His Word.

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