

Letter: 49e 100 W Kelly, Plymouth, July 16th, 1846

by John Nelson Darby

John Nelson Darby critiques the doctrine of transubstantiation, emphasizing the importance of understanding Christ's sacrifice and the elements of communion in light of scripture and faith.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:24

Topics: "Understanding Communion", "The Nature of Christ's Sacrifice"

Description

John Nelson Darby addresses W. Kelly regarding the doctrine of transubstantiation, arguing that it misrepresents the nature of Christ's sacrifice and redemption. He emphasizes that the true understanding of the Lord's Supper is rooted in recognizing Christ's broken body and shed blood as a representation of His death, rather than a literal presence in the elements. Darby asserts that the Roman Catholic interpretation undermines the essence of redemption and the significance of Christ's sacrifice, which is central to the faith. He critiques the modern origins of this doctrine and highlights the importance of understanding the spiritual truth behind the symbols used in communion. Ultimately, he encourages a faith that rejoices in the reality of a glorified Christ, rather than a dead one.

Transcript

p100 Dearest W Kelly, - First as to transubstantiation. I have generally found that in sincere Roman Catholics where there was a value for Christ, though in some respects natural, this remained the thought in their mind; it connects itself with a sensible apprehension of Him like a picture, and seems to be borne out by scripture - respects it though it do not rightly divide or understand it. Yet the scriptural reasons seem to me most strong and plain on the point, yet a person may be a true saint and hold it. If the mass or sacrificial part is given up, this touches the knowledge by faith of the completeness of the one sacrifice, and our known forgiveness by it. There is no need of Syrian or Protestant commentators to know, that it is used for designating things they represent. It is the universal language of man. I say of a portrait, that is my father; that is my uncle. No one doubts an instant what it means. "It is the Lord's passover." "I am the true vine." "I am the door" is the converse. And it is as much and as surely said of the cup as of the elements: "this cup is the New Testament in my blood" - thereby demonstrating the mode of speaking. As soon as the sense attached by the church to it is got rid of, our ordinary use of language would not convey the Roman sense to the mind. It is really an imposed one. Further, St. Paul positively calls it bread we break: why is this not literal? In what follows we have those figures which no language can speak without -

"the cup which we bless." Was it the cup he blessed? Proper literality in the strict sense would make nonsense of all language - is not its known sense. I drink a glass of wine - who ever doubted what that meant? It is not, as men speak, the literal sense to give the physical one. He drew a picture of vice in his sermon. Who thinks he drew a picture! So in a nearer case; a man brings his sin (chattath) to the Lord. Christ "was made sin." "These bones are the whole house of Israel." Does any one doubt what it means? There are many such in Ezekiel - only here we have no verb at all. And now as to the scriptural meaning and doctrine.

First, if the Roman Catholic one were true, it would be a sacrament, not of redemption, but of non-redemption. That doctrine holds that the body, blood, soul, and divinity of the Lord Jesus are all contained in each of the elements. But if the blood be thus united to the body, there is no redemption at all. It is the blood shed which is redemption; and therefore we are called to drink it as a separate thing. It is a broken body we are told of, and shed blood. If the blood be in the body there is no redemption. Christ has not a life of blood now, for flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom. If I take it shed, I own the great and blessed truth of redemption: take it otherwise than separate and as shed, and it is a sign that there is none. And this leads me further: there is no such Christ in existence as that signified by the sacramental institution. There is a glorified Christ with a glorified body in heaven, but this is a broken body and shed blood - that is, it is a dead Christ we, in the power of resurrection, recognise and feed on, that by which we were brought in - that all precious sacrifice. But there is no dead Christ now. There cannot be a broken body and shed blood now. There is no such thing in existence, while faith knows all its value in the one blessed act of the cross. Hence further, it cannot be literal, or rather physically true. "This is my body which is broken," but it was not broken then. The living Christ did not hold actually and literally the dead Christ in His own hand. And this is absolutely necessary to the literal, or rather (without meaning to offend the feelings of those who have learned to renounce it) the gross carnal sense. The broken body and shed blood clearly represent a dead Christ; we know the unspeakable preciousness of that wondrous fact such as none is like. It is all our hope, the death of the Son of God; but there is no dead Christ in existence; hence it cannot be a physical reality. It is shed blood I need for my soul - where is that literally? - and further, it was not literally true then. Christ was not broken and His blood shed when He spoke to His beloved disciples. And yet this feeding on death is the very thing that is precious. A Jew dared not; it was death to him. But now Christ is dead, death is life and gain to us. Hence too we must drink His blood; that is, take it as shed out; "he that drinketh my blood." The doctrine of concomitancy - that is, a whole Christ in each element - fails here; because the very point of power is drinking it, that is receiving it as shed, taking it as such.

Hence, while I find that the literal is merely an imposed sense, contrary to the plain meaning of the words according to all habits of language, I find that it is on scriptural grounds - as to the eternal truth of Christ's doctrine and Person - an impossible thing; that is, contradicts the truth. There is no dead Christ now; but this is clearly a dead Christ. And further, that it subverts the sense and spiritual power attached by Christ to it - His broken body and shed blood - and makes it really, though unwittingly, a sacrament of non-redemption. Such is Satan's craft. Further, it cannot be literally true that Christ held Himself dead in His own hand: nor, as the breaking really represents His suffering and death, did He in any sense do this indeed at any time. Though after it He gave up His Spirit to His Father. Hence I lose all, by this pseudo-literal sense, my soul wants, my faith enjoys - a suffering Christ, a dead victim. It is my salvation. I adore the grace in it. My soul feeds on it. I need it: I worship and joy in it, though humbled at what called for it; and my heart goes out to these sufferings, and to Him who endured them. But there is no such Christ now - no dead Christ to be literally true. If it is not a dead Christ, it is nothing at all to my faith. If it is a dead

Christ, it clearly cannot be a literal one, for we all together who love Him through grace rejoice in His exaltation.

The fact is, it is a very modern doctrine. It was never established till Innocent the Third's time, in the Council of Lateran, and was written against by esteemed doctors just before. And while you find many magniloquent though unintelligent expressions in the Fathers, one of the earliest - if the Roman doctrine be maintained - is a heretic, Irenaeus. I remember that he says that after the $\frac{1}{4}$ of the bread, two things were there, bread and Christ. I attach no importance to this as authority. I think him wrong, imperfectly taught by the Holy Ghost in it; but it is a proof - not of truth, I never would use it as the smallest authority for it, but - that the Roman doctrine was not held by an early saint. Consubstantiation was more the common thought of doctors I think who took a real presence. To me one is as unsound as the other. It mistakes the object of faith, a Christ dead and shed blood.

I do not add the common arguments, "Whom the heavens must receive" therefore, not here. Nor the ubiquity of Christ's body being unsound as to its reality. You will be familiar with them. To a faithful soul, though these be true, the meaning of the Holy Ghost will have more power. I agree with you as to "In remembrance of me." I must give more room than remains to me to the authority question, which (D. V.) I will write about speedily.

Thank you, dear brother, for your news of the saints, and your interest in my poor body. But we are privileged to say - may we be enabled to act on it ! - the body is for the Lord and the Lord for the body. It is a happy thought that even in this (it) is so.

Ever, affectionately yours

In the blessed Master.

Plymouth, July 16th, 1846.

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