

Why Christians Differ Doctrinally - Part XIX.

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Date: 18 December 2009

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[0 : 00] I want to state some propositions for you at the outset of the message, something that we've done a number of times in the past. And I want to put these in a propositional form and let you get them fixed in mind so you will have a better appreciation of where we're going and you will be able to follow, I trust, the message more clearly and more closely.

So here is the first. Our Lord Jesus repeatedly made connections between the physical and the spiritual throughout his ministry.

He did so to emphasize the importance of that which is often not realized, and that is the spiritual. The physical is obvious. It is tangible and experienced by all of our senses. The physical is seen and heard and touched and tasted and smelled.

In our preoccupation with the obvious physical, we often ignore the reality of the spiritual. That which is spiritual does not answer to any of the physical avenues of awareness.

[1 : 20] Yet, the spiritual has as valid an existence as does the physical. It is a vital part of our humanity. God created Adam physically and then animated or brought him to life by infusing the very life and breath of God into him.

And this was spirit. We read in Genesis that God breathed into Adam the breath of life.

And Adam became a living soul. The critical distinction between the physical and the spiritual must be recognized and accounted for in everything Christ taught.

He repeatedly uses one, that is the physical, as a bridge to the spiritual. These are very different entities, but they are connected.

We would not have a total human being without a body and a spirit. The body and the spirit combined constitute the human soul.

[2 : 43] The human soul represents the totality of our being. The physical is understood and appropriated by the body.

Everybody understands that. We touch, we feel, we smell, we taste, we hear. No argument there. However, and this is really important.

The spiritual is understood and appropriated not by the body, but by the mind. The spiritual is understood and appropriated by the mind.

And it engages the volition. It is in the mind. It is in the mind and the spirit that the human will resides.

That is your decider. That is that which determines what you are going to do with your body. It begins in the mind.

[3 : 54] The difficulty we have of getting a handle on this is that the mind is not physical. It is not material.

The mind is not the brain. The brain is material. It weighs about three pounds. It is physical.

The mind is to be distinguished from the brain. The brain belongs to the body. The mind belongs to the immaterial part of our being.

That is the spirit. And Christ constantly references both of those. If we do not make a distinction between one and the other, we will end up with some interpretations of scripture, such as are realized in John chapter 6, and have resulted in the construction of an entire religious ecclesiastical system to answer to what they believe are the demands of the text.

And we are talking about that phrase in John chapter 6. And if you would turn there, please. John chapter 6. We have a very enigmatic passage.

[5 : 22] And it has been at the forefront of a great deal of controversy for centuries. Matter of fact, I guess we could probably say for a couple of millennia from the first century on.

I should like to begin reading with verse 27 of John 6. And I want you to see how this ties in with what our Lord was saying in John chapter 4, when he was talking to the woman at the well. When he says, Whoever drinks of this water, meaning the liquid H₂O from Jacob's well, whoever drinks of this water will thirst again.

And the woman who met him there was well familiar with that, because she was accustomed to coming to that well every day and drawing water from it. But our Lord went on then to say, But he who drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst again, but shall have the water of life. Well, what does that mean? What kind of water is that? It is spiritual water. Is it wet? No.

[6 : 41] Because it isn't literal physical water at all. It is spiritual water. What does spiritual water look like? Doesn't look like anything.

Because it isn't anything that you can see. It is something that is real, and it is satisfying, but you cannot look at spiritual water.

You cannot pour spiritual water in or out of a glass. You cannot use spiritual water to slake a physical thirst. You can drink spiritual water, metaphorically speaking, but if your body is craving water or you are dehydrated, it is not going to answer that need.

You see, there is a distinct difference between the physical and the spiritual. We have no problem identifying with the reality of the physical, because we feel, we smell, we touch, all of the rest of it. We are very familiar with that. But the point that Jesus Christ is making, and the point that is made from Genesis to Revelation, is, you are more than your body.

[7 : 51] You are a spiritual being as well. You have spiritual needs, spiritual capacities. You have a spiritual yearning, such as is realized in the expression that God put into every human heart a God-shaped vacuum, and only God can fill it.

That is spiritual. And when we do not recognize the reality and the validity of the spiritual, and put all of our emphasis on the physical, like the world does, this is what the world does.

This is what the world is in touch with. This is virtually the only thing the world cares about, is the physical and the material. That is called materialism.

The world is steeped in it. The world tries to satisfy its deepest longings and desires with materialism. It never works.

But hope springs eternal. It doesn't keep them from trying. And they constantly try to satisfy a legitimate need with an illegitimate thing.

[9 : 04] You cannot satisfy a spiritual longing with anything physical, whether it is money, pleasure, sex, or whatever. Only the spiritual can address the spiritual.

That's the point that Christ is making here in John chapter 4, and we will see in John chapter 6 as well. Now let's begin reading what is a very difficult and enigmatic passage.

And we are going to start with verse 27 of John chapter 6. And those of you who have been at Grace for quite some time will recall that the last book I taught prior to my retirement was the Gospel of John.

And we spent five years in John's Gospel. And we spent quite a bit of time in John chapter 6, and I wondered if it would be all that beneficial to repeat some of this material.

But as I mentally look back over my notes, it's been at least eight or nine years since we were here. So it's probably relatively new, at least to some of you. So in John chapter 6 and verse 27, our Lord is speaking to a mixed multitude, and He says to them, Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life.

[10 : 31] Now can you not see right there in that statement, a recognition of these two realities we've been talking about. Do not work for the food which perishes.

What kind of food is it that perishes? It's physical food. It will rot and decay, and eventually become inedible. Now we need that kind of food.

Our body is dependent upon it, and He isn't putting it down. He's acknowledging the legitimacy of it, but He's saying, But there is another kind of food. Do you understand this?

So do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life. They're both food. One is food for the body.

The other is food for the spirit. Which the Son of Man shall give to you, for on Him the Father, even God, has set His seal.

[11 : 37] They said therefore to Him, What shall we do that we may work the works of God? Jesus answered and said to them, This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.

Now injected into this right away is the idea of the spiritual alongside the physical, and what He is saying is, The work of God, which is spiritual, consists of the activation of your volition that resides in your human spirit that will cause you and lead you to believe in me.

You can call this faith, or trust, or commitment, or whatever, but it involves the volition. It involves the will. And He is saying that that which is spiritual is appropriated and implemented by the human will.

It is an act of faith. It is a deliberate choice. In the same way, that you exercise your will when you feed your physical body, you also exercise your will when you engage that which is spiritual.

Verse 31. Verse 30. They said therefore to Him, What then do you do for a sign that we may see and believe you?

[13 : 11] What work do you perform? Give us a demonstration. Prove something to us.

Do some miracle. Give us a little razzle-dazzle. What work do you perform? Our fathers, now they're talking about their forefathers, because this was hundreds of years prior to this time, when the children of Israel were coming out of the land of Egypt.

Our forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written. He gave them bread out of heaven to eat. And this was a daily occurrence.

They got twice as much bread, twice as much manna on Friday to sustain them so they wouldn't have to gather on the Sabbath. You recall that? This is physical bread from heaven to satisfy physical hungers of a physical body.

Jesus, therefore, said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven.

[14 : 30] Now, what is he talking about? He is contrasting the true bread with the manna. The manna came via Moses from God.

The true bread is spiritual bread, and it comes from God via Christ. For the bread of God, verse 33, is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.

And this, of course, is spiritual life. The world already had life when Christ came. He did not impart life to the world when he came, but he did bring a different dimension of life that the world did not have when he came.

And that is spiritual life. This is what he meant when he said, I am come that man might have life and have it more abundantly. It is life on a different plane.

The bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven. And, of course, he is referring to himself. His own person.

[15 : 49] Not the manna that was provided by Moses. And yet, this gets somewhat mixed and difficult because who was Christ?

He was a man. He was a human being. He was the son of God. He possessed a physical body. And yet, he is telling us that in this physical body and through this physical body with which he had been provided at Bethlehem, spiritual life is going to issue forth.

Are you with me? This is very, very important. And what is hanging in the balance is whether or not you go with the Roman Catholic interpretation of this, which requires the institution and the sacrifice of the mass and all that accompanies that, or whether you go with the Protestant position which sees this as a metaphor and is not intended to be taken literally.

Now, both of those positions may be wrong. But both of them cannot be right.

Do you understand that? This is the law, the simple law of logic. It's called the law of the excluded middle. And that is, there is no middle ground.

[17 : 28] it is an impossible and an illogical position to take to say, well, they're both right, kind of.

No, you can say they're both wrong, but you can't say they're both right because they are mutually contradictory one to the other. And which one is right? Well, of course, we are.

And the other guys are wrong. And you talk to the other guys and what will they say? They'll say, well, we're right and it's those Protestants that are wrong. They missed the vote. So, we both have flaws and we both have areas of misunderstanding and misapprehension and all the rest of it.

And we bring flawed intellects to these things when we try to interpret them. I don't care whether you're Roman Catholic or Protestant. You just never do have it all together. And that's part of our being human.

But I want you to try and see what is involved here. After all, we're talking about why do Christians differ doctrinally.

[18 : 39] And one of the things that makes this even more complex is that everybody that is involved with whichever position they take is just as sincere and earnest as the day is long.

And they really believe that their position is the right one. And I would dare say that in the vast majority of the cases, the interpreters of each of these positions really have a sincere desire to be well-pleasing to the Lord.

And they are not evil people who are seeking to corrupt the faith of millions and send people to hell. They are following what they believe to be the best line of evidence.

and they are reaching their conclusions. And as I pointed out to you before, it's just a shame that our sincerity and our good intentions do not guarantee our conclusions.

But they don't. It is wonderful and it is necessary to be sincere and to be earnest. But that does not prove the validity of the position that we arrive at.

[19 : 49] because you can be ever so sincere and just be tremendously sincerely wrong about a whole lot of things.

So let's read on. Verse 33, the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven and gives life to the world.

They said therefore to him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. Doesn't that sound just like the woman at the well? He who drinks of the water that I give him shall never thirst again.

And the woman at the well says, give me this water. This is wonderful magic water you're talking about. You drink this water and you'll never be thirsty again. Think of it. I'll never have to come to this well to draw water.

That would be wonderful. Please give me this water to drink. These people are saying the same thing. Wouldn't it be wonderful if you didn't have to spend the rest of your life scrounging around for three meals a day and you just eat this miracle bread and you never get hungry again.

[20 : 56] All they can think of is bring it on. Serve us this bread. This is the bread. Do you know what this is? This is the flesh talking. This flesh is ever so much with us and we are so in tune with it and we cater to its every demand and often completely miss sight of the fact that we have another dimension to our being that is just as real and is far more important.

It's more important because it is that which connects with God and it is more important because it is that which is eternal. long after your body has any demands for physical food your spirit is going to be alive somewhere.

So their natural reaction is verse 34 Lord evermore give us this bread. Jesus said to them I am the bread of life he who comes to me shall not hunger and he who believes in me shall never thirst.

You must understand and I'm sure many of you do that this is an utterly ridiculous statement for anyone who is not deity to be making.

This is an outrageous claim. I am the bread of life well la ti da what makes you so special exactly.

[22 : 58] This is all connected with the identity of his person. He is the bread of life and he is the water of life because he is deity manifest in human flesh.

This is God speaking sustainer creator of the universe. He is not only the bread of life and the water of life. He is everything that life is about.

It is all summed up in him. And here is perfect grounds to dismiss this one as a premier example of egomania if he is not who he claimed to be.

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger. He who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe.

All that the Father gives me shall come to me and the one who comes to me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven not to do mine own will but the will of him who sent me.

[24 : 10] And this is the will of him who sent me that of all that he has given me I lose nothing but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in him may have eternal life and I myself will raise him up on the last day.

Utterly stupendous claim for this man to be making. But as we know he not only made it legitimately but he backed it up.

The Jews therefore verse 41 were grumbling about him. That simply means that these Jews were arguing among themselves. One of them was nudging the other and said did you hear what he just said?

I can't believe it. And another is saying well we need to hear more. And others are saying is it possible that this is the Messiah the one of whom Moses and the prophets so you've got this

aggregation of Jews there some who are inclined toward Jesus as the Messiah some who are inclined away from him as the Messiah and some who don't have a clue and haven't made up their mind one way or another they're just listening to what all is going on it's a fascinating scene they were grumbling about him because he said I am the bread that came down out of heaven and they were saying now wait a minute wait a minute how can he say he is the bread that came down out is not this Jesus the son of Joseph whose father and mother we know how does he say I have come down out of heaven Jesus answered and said to them do not grumble among yourselves no one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him and I will raise him up on the last day it is written in the prophets and they shall all be taught of God everyone who has heard and learned from the father comes to me not that any man has seen the father except the one who is from God he has seen the father truly truly I say to you he who believes has eternal life I am the bread of life your fathers or your forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness they ate physical manna that was designed for their physical bodies and then they died physically this and we are not told this in the text but I am satisfied maybe I'm guilty of reading in the white spaces a little but I am satisfied that Jesus is saying as he addresses this crowd he is saying this this is the bread of

[27 : 05] God come down out of heaven in reference to himself again an utterly stupendous claim for a man to make do you know of anyone else who has ever walked on this globe who was entitled to make a statement like that so that one may eat of it and not die this is the bread which comes down out of heaven so that one may eat of it and not die now it ought to be intuitively obvious that he's talking about and not die spiritually because those who were his apostles who in every way partook of

Christ did they die physically of course they did they died a couple of thousand years ago or maybe nineteen hundred years ago but they are very much alive spiritually they are with him spiritually dead physically their bones are lying in the Judean desert someplace but their spirits are very much alive these things he said in the synagogue as he taught in Capernaum many therefore of his disciples when they heard this said this is a difficult statement who can listen to this they said one to another can you stomach this this is really heavy so what is he talking about here this doesn't make any sense at all he is the bread of

God come down out of heaven eat of him and live forever what in the world I never heard such a thing in my life Jesus conscious that his disciples grumbled at this said to them does this cause you to stumble in other words does this throw you for a loop well there more to come what then if you should behold the son of man ascending where he was before in other words there are greater reasons for stumbling later on it is the spirit who gives life the flesh profits nothing the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life but there are some of you who do not believe for Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe and who it was that would betray him and he was saying for this reason

I have said to you that no one can come to me unless it has been granted him from the father as a result of this many of his disciples withdrew and were not walking with him anymore well now I want to come back to what is the very crux of this and let's come up to the middle of the portion in verse 52 the Jews therefore began to argue one with another saying how can this man give us his flesh to eat flesh Jesus therefore said to them truly truly I say to you unless you eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood you have no life in yourself he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and

I will raise him up on the last day for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him wow we know the Old Testament soundly condemns cannibalism but that sure seems like it's pretty close to what he's saying here eating his flesh and drinking his blood of what is speaking and here is a real line of demarcation and I want you to note it mentally because it will really come into play later on of what is this whole passage speaking our Roman Catholic friends very sincerely and very earnestly believe believe that Jesus is here speaking of and instituting the

[32 : 29] Eucharist or the Lord's Supper or the Last Supper or whatever you want to call it that he is here establishing the principle of the bread and the blood that is to be served in the communion service commonly called the Eucharist that is their official position has been for probably the last 2000 years the position that we take as well as most of Protestantism says that this is not the establishment of the communion service Christ is not here in John 6 instigating the Lord's table at

all this has nothing to do with the cup and the bread what he is talking about is giving of his physical body in a substitutionary manner to be slain on the cross there for the sins of the world it is

Christ's body containing his spirit which he is going to release when he says father into thy hands I commend my spirit it is speaking of the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross this is what this passage is speaking of it has nothing at this point in time to do with communion that's going to be established near the end of John's gospel on the night that Jesus is betrayed there he will say this cup is the blood this my this cup represents my blood and it is his blood that will ratify the new covenant and as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you show forth the Lord's death until he comes that's the establishment of the Lord's table here it is the sacrificial death upon Calvary that is about to take place this is what he means when he says he is going to give his life for the world now depending on which of those interpretations you take it will determine how you see the Lord's table we do not see this as being the Lord's table at all in fact our interpretation of this is that this is a figurative expression and I do not think that there is a greater example of the physical and the spiritual probably anywhere in the Bible or that has resulted in there being more differences between those who call themselves Christians than this particular passage here it provides the rationale for the Roman Catholic institution of the mass and it remains a major difference between Catholics and

Protestants it's all in how one interprets this passage here in John chapter 6 Protestants take the passage figuratively and believe that to partake of the body and blood of Christ means to accept him as one's very own personal savior by faith exercised as an act of one's will that is a spiritual transaction Roman Catholics take the passage literally and believe that one must receive Christ physically by receiving the consecrated host or wafer during the service of holy communion thus an entire structure has been created to facilitate partaking of the body and blood of Christ in a literal and physical manner so we have the literal and material interpretation versus the spiritual and immaterial interpretation both of them may be wrong but both of them cannot be right our interpretation is that this is a metaphor that when

Christ says that this is his body and when you partake of him eat his flesh and drink his blood he is speaking metaphorically not literally never intended it to be taken literally but the problem is and this is a problem there are those who look at the text and say but it says eat the flesh of the son of man and drink his blood and some would come back and object yes that's what it says but it can't mean that yes but that's what it says so what are you going to do with it how can this thing be maneuvered or worked in such a way as to convince yourself that you are being true to what the text says and that you are in fact imbibing the blood and eating the body of

[38 : 04] Christ now how can a construct of any kind be put together so that you can convince yourself you are actually doing that in obedience to what the text says because that's what it says now I tell you I would love to have been a fly on the wall when some of these conferences took place and some of these early church fathers got together and wrangled about these things I'm sure they had some long hot vigorous debates about this what does this mean we want to be responsive and obedient to the text what does it mean well it can't mean physical but that's what it says and that is what it says but is that what it means and one of the great principles of the interpretation of scripture is that you must take into consideration that the

Bible frequently uses figurative language language as well as literal language and it is the responsibility of the Bible student whether he is a minister or a missionary or Sunday school teacher or a lay person it is a responsibility of each to know something about this and to be able to bring it to bear on the text after all we are trying to arrive at the truth of the text and when we say this is taken figuratively we say the Bible uses figurative language from Genesis to Revelation the Bible uses non-literal language just as you do in everyday conversation and that's to be taken into consideration we talk about a metaphor and a metaphor is simply transferring one thing for another and we use these metaphors all the time in common language the

Bible has thousands not hundreds but thousands of metaphors in it Jesus said I am the door of the sheep fold that's a metaphor nobody thinks that Jesus is saying look at me everybody I'm a door see the knob see the hinges see the panels if you don't oil me I'll squeak he isn't saying that at all he is likening himself to what everyone knows that a door is and what a door serves a door is a way of access a door is something that you use to get from one place to another and Christ is simply saying metaphorically speaking I am the door of the sheepfold it is my father's house that is the sheepfold and if you want to go to my father's house you must come through the way of access and

I am the way of access I am the door of the sheepfold that's a metaphor and we know immediately that it is not to be taken literally he said

I am the true vine and you are the branches well nobody thought for a moment that Jesus was green and that there were leaves growing out of him and branches growing out of them and that these branches are you but he is saying metaphorically speaking figuratively and why do we use figurative language anyway why don't we just speak very very plainly and one reason is it gets boring we use figurative language for color for expression and for emphasis everybody does so it is only logical that the Bible is filled with literal language and figuratively I think I gave you the illustration before if you want to read something that has no figurative language in it at all no metaphors no similes no ascendant no anything it's just plain literal forthright language when you go home take out your life insurance policy or the insurance policy on your house and read it it's got to be the most boring thing you've ever read in your life there's no color in it there's no emphasis in it there's no interest in it it is just blah but the scriptures are just loaded with beautiful expressive colorful figurative language

I am the true vine you are the branches he is simply saying as the branches find their sustenance and nourishment and life in the main vine that's how you derive your life and sustenance and nourishment from me it presents himself as a very vital connection one upon whom we are entirely dependent and this is all throughout scripture it is found many many times and right here in John's gospel you will find as many as perhaps any place let's go quickly we've just got a couple of minutes left let's go quickly to Matthew chapter 13 very familiar passage contains a lot of parables and a parable is like an extended metaphor and let's see let's just jump in here anywhere verse 24 [44 : 46] Matthew 13 verse 24 he presented another parable the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field now when the expression is used compared to or like or as it's called a figure of speech is called a simile s i m i l e simile and it's the word from which we get the word similar there is a similarity and he is using this to make a connection and show you the closeness between the one and the other he doesn't say that the kingdom of heaven is a man who sowed good seed in his field but may be compared to a man now if you were going to make a metaphor out of that you would just say is I have a book here it's in excess of 1200 pages and it's well indexed with Hebrew and Greek from both the

Old and New Testament and the entire volume is devoted to figures of speech used in the Bible it is an education just to go through this book it was written by E.W.

Bollinger in the late 19th century and he lays out all of the figures of speech and the places they are used in the Bible and it is absolutely fascinating makes some of the most thrilling reading that I have ever engaged and it points out the necessity of understanding the use of figurative language and what is behind it and how it is utilized as a tool of communication and when you do and when you see that you will understand that the passage for instance in John chapter 6 is a metaphor Jesus is using that in a direct way now if he were using it as a simile he would say my body is like bread but he doesn't say that he says my body is bread that gives more forcefulness and more emphasis to it rather than saying like he is addressing it straight on and comparing it by calling it by calling the one thing the other thing and when you do that that leads an extra dimension of reality and forcefulness to the claim poets use this all the time and you will find it repeatedly throughout the

Psalms well I've given you some basis for considering what will follow and I will conclude this message with the consequences of how these things are interpreted between Catholics and Protestants and why it has resulted in one of the greatest rifts that exists in all of Christendom and continues to do so and I don't think my expounding on this is going to settle that but I want you to understand the rationale and the basis behind it is there a quick comment or question before we close sorry to leave you dangling what we need is another hour but if I started to take another hour even even though I would be doing it for good spiritual purposes you would allow the physical demands of your physical body to overcome you and you would say when is this guy going father we are truly grateful for the manner in which your word is put together and we recognize that in our flawed nature of humanity we often miss the truth that is there none of us has a corner on the truth certainly we do not here but we are grateful and appreciative for every modicum of truth that we have and we believe that your truth is all built upon itself it's all interconnected and interrelated and we want to see and understand better how that works thank you for our

Lord Jesus Christ coming and being for us a very real spiritual life that nothing in this world can begin to satisfy and our prayer is that each and every person here will know that peace and joy that

comes from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and for anyone who may not have it we pray for their sake that you will give them no peace and no rest until they find it all in our Lord Jesus Christ in his name we pray amen