

“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (Jn 20:29)

✠ Lecture XIV: Orthodox Reply To Protestant Objections ✠

The basic Protestant objection to the doctrine of real presence is not that it is against Holy Scripture, but that it is **against reason**. Protestants do not interpret our Lord’s straightforward words about the Eucharist symbolically because that is the obvious way to interpret them, but because a literal interpretation seems to be contrary to reason. The conservative Protestant theologian Louis Berkhof, in his famous work *‘Systematic Theology’*, insists that the doctrine of the real presence “... violates the human senses, where it asks us to believe that what tastes and looks like bread and wine, is really flesh and blood; and human reason, where it requires belief in the separation of a substance and its properties and in the presence of a material body in several places at the same time, both of which are contrary to reason.” (Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburg, 1958, p. 652)

Holy Scripture defines faith as “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things **not seen**” (Heb 11:1). St. Paul said “hope that is seen is not hope” (Rom 8:24). Indeed, we as Orthodox “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). It is ironic that our brethren the Protestants, who insist that faith is the *only* requirement for salvation, do not have faith in Lord Jesus Christ’s words concerning the Eucharist. In what follows, we shall, by the grace of God, provide replies to their most common objections:

✠ Objection # 1: The Lord said, “The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life” (Jn 6:63) This means that His words about eating His flesh and drinking His blood are symbolic.

→ **Reply:** There is a difference between “spiritual” and “spirit”. There is not a single time in the Holy Bible where the word “spirit” means symbolic. God is Spirit; He is obviously real and not symbolic. Also, since when does the word “life” mean symbolic? Right before saying that His words are “spirit and life”, our Lord said that He would ascend into heaven (Jn 6:62). Now, do those Protestants who deny the real presence actually believe that the Lord ascended symbolically or figuratively to heaven? Or do they believe, like we do, that He literally ascended to heaven after His Resurrection? So they take part of Lord Jesus Christ’s words literally and the other part they take symbolically to support their false teaching concerning the Eucharist. Likewise, Lord Jesus Christ said, “The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (Jn 6:51). If indeed the flesh that we eat for eternal life is meant in only a figurative way, then so is the flesh of the crucifixion. Either they are both literal, or they are both figurative.

✠ Objection # 2: The Lord said, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Lk 22:19) Therefore, it is a mere memorial of the crucifixion and death of the Lord.

→ **Reply:** A memorial, in Holy Scripture, is through one of 4 ways:

- a) **Substantial (real – true) Memorial:** Like the real manna that was kept in the Arc of the Covenant as a memorial (Ex 16:33-34)
- b) **Archaic Memorial:** Like the stones that Joshua the Prophet ordered to be taken from the midst of the Jordan river (Josh 4:9)
- c) **Pictorial Memorial:** Like the two Cherubim that God ordered Moses the Prophet to make as a memorial of the heavenly things (Ex 25:17-22)
- d) **Documental (written) Memorial:** As concerning the defeat of Amalek (Ex 17:14)

Now in order for the Eucharist to serve as a remembrance of the Lord’s death, it has to fall in one of the above categories of a memorial. The bread and wine are not ‘archaic memorials’ since they are not the tools with which the Lord died, they are not ‘pictorial memorials’ because they do not depict the Lord’s crucifixion, and they are not ‘documental memorials’ for this is what the four Holy Gospels are. Therefore, in order for the bread and wine to be for the remembrance of the Lord’s death, as He ordered, they must be transformed to the real body and blood. The same way the real manna was a memorial for itself.

✚ **Objection # 3: They wonder, “How could the material bread be a spiritual food?”**

→ **Reply:** The term “spiritual food” is a biblical term used to describe the manna, which was a symbol of the Lord and the Eucharist, “All ate the same spiritual food” (1 Cor 10:3-4). Now if the manna that the Israelites ate and died (Jn 6:49) was called “spiritual food”, shouldn’t the living bread (Jn 6:51) of the Eucharist be called “spiritual food” as well. This term means that it is a food beneficial to our spirits.

✚ **Objection # 4: St. Paul said, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Cor 11:26)**

Since the apostle calls it “bread” then it is not literally changed to the body of the Lord.

→ **Reply:** St. Paul calls it “bread” because to our eyes it is still bread and also because it was actually bread before the consecration. This doesn’t compromise the fact that it is changed to the real body. For example, it is written, “For every man threw down his rod, and they became serpents. But Aaron’s rod swallowed up their rods” (Ex 7:12). Holy Scripture still called them “rods” even though they *literally* changed to serpents. This objection brings to mind the Arian heresy, which neglects the clear verses about the Divinity of Lord Jesus Christ and focus on the verses that speak of His Humanity. Likewise, Protestants neglect the many clear verses that speak about the real presence of the Lord in the Eucharist and focus on one single verse, which they misunderstand and misinterpret.

✚ **Objection # 5: How could the Lord give His disciples His body to eat while He was actually sitting among them?**

→ **Reply:** This objection brings to mind the words of the unbelieving Jews who said, “How can this Man give us His flesh to eat?” (Jn 6:52) Therefore, we shall just quote back the words of our Lord, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you ... My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed” (Jn 6:53,55)

✚ **Objection # 6: How could the Lord give us His blood to drink, while it is forbidden to drink blood?**

→ **Reply:** Lord Jesus Christ gives us His blood to drink Sacramentally, without the involvement of the senses and consequently we don’t break the law that forbade drinking blood because the physical appearance of the wine remains without change. For example, Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples that He is not going up to the feast of the tabernacles (Jn 7:8) yet it is written, “He also went up to the feast, **not openly, but as it were in secret**” (Jn 7:10). Now our Lord did not lie to His disciple since His going up to the feast was “not openly, but as it were in secret.” Likewise since we drink the Lord’s Blood “not openly, but as it were in secret” we are not breaking the law that forbids the drinking of blood.

✚ **Objection # 7: How could the real body be present in many places at the same time?**

→ **Reply:** The same way this real body went through the birth canal of Virgin Mary without affecting her virginity, walked on the water, entered the upper room while the doors were closed, and ascended into heaven against the earth’s gravity; *miraculously*.

✚ **Objection # 8: How do you know that the words about the Eucharist are not just another parable?**

→ **Reply:** The same night of the institution of this Sacrament, the Lord explicitly said, “I will no longer speak to you in figurative language” (Jn 16:25). Therefore, the disciples said to Him, “See, now You are speaking plainly, and using no figure of speech!” (Jn 16:29) Moreover, the Holy Gospel of St. John, where the Lord speaks in length about the Eucharist (Jn 6), does not contain a single parable!

* This lecture is adapted from ‘*The Sacraments of The Church*’ by Archdeacon Habib Guirgess.