

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Represents or Re-presents?

(Jerry Fite)

Upon the first day of the week followers of Christ assemble together to partake of “*the Lord’s supper*”. This is the name the inspired Paul gave to the partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine in commemorating the death of Jesus Christ (*I Corinthians 11:20, 23-26, Acts 20:7*). Jesus instituted His supper with His apostles when he partook of the Passover meal with them for the last time before His death. He took the bread (unleavened), gave thanks for it (blessed it), break it and said, “*This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me*” (*I Corinthians 11:24, Luke 22:19*). Jesus then took the cup, and after giving thanks for it in like manner as He did for the bread, He said, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me*” (*I Corinthians 11:25, Luke 22:20, Matthew 26:28*).

In our weekly observance of the Lord’s supper, how are we to interpret Jesus’ words, “This is my body” and “This is my blood”? Do the bread and fruit of the vine “represent” Christ’s

body and blood offered for our forgiveness of sins? Or, do the elements of bread and juice “re-present” the literal body and blood of Christ?

This latter view is the Roman Catholic doctrine known as “Transubstantiation”. Under the heading of the “Eucharist” – “The Sacramental Sacrifice: Thanksgiving, Memorial, Presence”, we read, “*The Eucharist is thus a sacrifice because it ‘re-presents’ (makes present) the sacrifice of the cross...*” (1366). According to Catholic doctrine, when the priest consecrates the bread and fruit of the vine, the elements literally become the body and blood of Jesus. The substance of the bread changes mysteriously into the body of Christ, and the substance of the fruit of the vine likewise changes into the blood of Christ.

Does God want us to think the bread and fruit of the vine become the literal body and blood of Christ within us? Is this what Jesus meant?

Jesus said the cup “*is the new covenant in my blood*” (*I Co-*

rinthians 11:24). Did the cup literally become the new covenant? We know it did not, but that Jesus is referring to the contents of the cup (the fruit of the vine) as representing the new covenant ratified by Jesus’ shed blood.

We should interpret Jesus’ statement of “This is my body” the same way. The bread represents his body given for our behalf on the cross; while the fruit of the vine represents Jesus’ shed blood offered for the remission of our sins under the new covenant.

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s supper, the concept of the bread representing Jesus’ body and the cup representing His blood was surely the correct understanding. Jesus’ literal body was standing before them as He took the bread and said, “This is my body”. As His disciples partook of the bread, they knew it represented his sacrificial body. We so partake of the elements today remembering Jesus’ bodily sacrifice and death on the cross.

“Represents” hyphenated to “Re-presents” does not convey the same meaning.