***Gifts of the Reformation (2)***

***The Gospel versus Tradition***

John Frith (1503-1533) was imprisoned in the tower of London and then executed for denying the doctrine of purgatory and the doctrine of transubstantiation. Both doctrines, which are based on human tradition, undermine the gospel of Christ.

Purgatory—the place where Christians suffer to purify their souls before entering heaven. Time in purgatory can be shortened by penance (religious good deeds assigned by a priest during confession). This contradicts the instantaneous transformation of believers at the return of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Purgatory and penance detract from the sufficiency of Christ’s death.

Transubstantiation—conversion of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. However, the body of Christ is in heaven (Acts 1:9-11; 3:19-21), not on earth. Transubstantiation leads to idolatrous worship of the consecrated bread.

**What is the problem with adding tradition to the word of God?**

**1. Tradition undermines God’s *honor***

Because tradition *captures the heart*

**2. Tradition undermines God’s *word***

Because tradition *replaces the commandment*

**3. Tradition undermines God’s *salvation***

Matthew 23:13

Because tradition *hides the gospel*

**Conclusion** – John Frith (and John Calvin) taught that the body and blood of Christ are spiritually present in the Lord’s Supper so that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, Christ nourishes our souls with His flesh and blood (1 Corinthians 10:16).

# For Additional Study or Family Discussion

Did the Lord speak to you today about Himself and His ways? Did He show you a duty you need to perform or a promise you need to claim? What was either encouraging or challenging in the sermon?

1. When is it proper to follow tradition, and when is it not?

1 Corinthians 11:2; Colossians 2:8; 2 Thessalonians 2:15; 3:6

*The cause of my death is this; because I cannot in conscience abjure and swear that our prelates’ opinion of the Sacrament (that is, that the substance of the bread and wine is verily changed into the flesh and blood of our Saviour, Jesus Christ,) is an undoubted article of the faith necessary to be believed, under pain of damnation* (John Frith).

2. Our bodies on earth are members of Christ in heaven (1 Corinthians 6:15) because His Spirit indwells our bodies (vv. 17, 19). So also, the Spirit of Christ enables us to be nourished by Christ’s flesh and blood when we eat the bread and drink the cup (1 Corinthians 10:16), even though His body is in heaven and we are on earth.

Frith’s view of the Lord’s Supper precedes the similar view of John Calvin –

*Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ’s flesh, separated from us by such a great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our sense, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space* (Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV. xvii. 10).