

His Last Request

F. B. Hole.

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Not many episodes in the life of our blessed Lord are recounted as many as three times in the four Gospels, yet the institution by the Lord of His supper on the night of His betrayal is one of them. The Apostle John, the only one of the four Evangelists who omits it, occupies his time in giving us a full account of the wonderful words spoken by the Lord to His disciples on that occasion, and his divinely-ordered omission is made up for by the Apostle Paul being inspired to tell us in 1 Corinthians 11 how this ordinance of the Lord was specially confirmed to him by revelation from the Lord Himself. He received it, not from Peter or John or some other one of the eleven who were actually present on the occasion but "from the Lord." Having so received it he faithfully delivered it to the Corinthians, and to us.

Did we read only the accounts given to us in Matthew 26 and Mark 14 we might be led to regard it as a touching little ceremony specially designed to affect the hearts of the disciples on that most sacred occasion, but without any bearing upon ourselves, for no word is there recorded which makes it clear that it has an application to days to come. The same thing might almost be said also concerning the account given us in Luke 23, only there we do get the word, "This do in remembrance of Me." That might leave us with the impression that in saying this the Lord had the future in view, but it would be only an impression for there was still no definite instruction from the Lord's lips. "This do" might after all only be meant to apply to that particular moment on the betrayal night.

But when we turn to the inspired words of the Apostle Paul we are no longer left to our impressions: we have the certainty of divine instructions. He recalls the words of our Lord in connection with the bread, as also with the cup; only in the case of the latter he records words omitted by the other three — "as oft as ye drink it." Then upon these words he adds his own inspired comment, "for as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." (1 Cor. 11: 26). It is absolutely certain then that the Lord requests His disciples to observe this simple ordinance throughout the time of His absence until He comes again.

The question now arises as to what was the Lord's intention and purpose in instituting His supper that it might be observed during the period of His absence? We will summarize our answer to this under three heads.

REMEMBRANCE.

The first and obvious answer is that He desired to be remembered by His saints and He knew very well that they were to pass through a world where Satan would be multiplying every possible kind of distraction, every device that would have the tendency to blur the distinctness with which He should stand out before the faith and love of their souls. Hence His words, thrice repeated in Scripture, "This do, in remembrance of Me."

He loves to be remembered by His people, there can be no doubt about that. He particularly loves to be remembered during this time of His rejection, the time in which He is practically forgotten by the world. Does not this fact appeal to us apart from any other consideration, and move our hearts towards a response to His desire?

There is however the other consideration of that which is good and needful upon our side. To

have Him in abiding remembrance, to be kept under the gracious influence of His love is most necessary for us, and hence not only the institution itself but also the nature of it. Both the elements represent before us His death. The bread He spoke of as His body. The cup He spoke of as His blood. Not both in some way together, as though they represented a living Christ upon earth, but entirely separated the one from the other, representing His body given for us and His blood poured forth in death. As we eat and drink of them we have before our very eyes the symbols of the Christ who died for us and who thereby enabled us to say, "Hereby perceive we the love of God." (1 John 3: 16).

We should of course have Himself and His death in abiding remembrance but this is no reason for our neglecting these special seasons which are according to His word. If the early disciples at Troas habitually came together on the first day of the week for the breaking of bread — as evidently they did, according to Acts 20: 7, and there is nothing to show that they were singular in so doing but rather the reverse — do you not think that twentieth-century disciples might well observe the ordinance with similar frequency? These at Troas lived in close proximity to the great event commemorated, it occurred doubtless within the lifetime of many of them. We are nearly nineteen centuries removed from it. Is not the great commemoration for us a more vital necessity, if possible, than for them?

And if our Lord and Master had bidden us do some great thing would we not have done it? How much more then when He has set before us such simple symbols, with the request that we should do so small a thing as eat and drink for a remembrance of Him? And see His wisdom in this, for man's way is frequently enough to raise the most elaborate monuments to keep alive the memory of persons or things which eventually turn out to be of little real moment.

The Lord's way was to use the simplest possible means to set before us that which is of infinite and eternal importance. Were it otherwise we might have all our thoughts centred on the emblems and overlook their significance. As it is, the extreme simplicity of the emblems is calculated to lay all the stress on the great realities that they represent.

Besides remembering Him in His death when we partake of His supper we also "show the Lord's death" or "announce the death of the Lord." This indicates that the Lord intended the ordinance to have an evidential value before men. It is the

STANDING WITNESS

to the fact that He has died, a witness of a character that cannot be gainsaid. It consists of an outward act to be performed originated at the very moment when that which is commemorated happened, and continuing to be performed up to the present "moment. The great force of this witness may not be apparent to many of our readers, if so, as space forbids any elaboration of the matter here, we refer them to a paper entitled, *Christianity True: an Unanswerable Argument*.

The death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is of course the theme of the Gospel so that a testimony to it is presented to men whenever the Gospel is faithfully preached. Yet this does not take the place which the Lord's Supper has in this connection. The Gospel proclaims His death and its wonderful results, whereas His Supper furnishes the abiding and standing witness to its reality. Both are needed, but in the first only a few comparatively can take part, whereas in the second every true-hearted saint may have a share, joining together in the making of the great announcement. Does not the thought of doing so make a very definite appeal to your heart?

In the third place the Lord instituted His supper that it might be expressive of fellowship — the fellowship of His death, and connected with this are certain

RESPONSIBILITIES.

This is unfolded to us in 1 Corinthians 10: 15-22. It was not instituted nor is it to be observed as an individual matter. It is "we, being many" who partake of it and thereby we express the fact that we "are one bread and one body." Note very carefully the wording of these verses. The one loaf of the Lord's supper sets forth the sacred personal body of Christ given for us in death. Our joint-participation in eating of that one loaf sets forth our oneness as belonging to the one body of Christ, the church. It is not the one loaf which sets forth the oneness of believers but rather *their act in partaking of that one loaf*. Thereby we each and every one express our identification with His death and commit ourselves to all the responsibilities flowing therefrom.

The poor heathen offering and eating of things sacrificed to idols had fellowship with demons. This verses 19 and 20 tell us. The Israelite who ate of the sacrifices was put into touch with God, partaking of His altar, and consequently he had to be very careful how he ate, as is witnessed by Leviticus 10: 12-14. This verse 13 tells us. So it is for the Christian as verse 21 tells us. Partaking of the Lord's table we must necessarily exercise great care. We cannot touch the "table of demons" and many another defiling and inconsistent thing. The responsibility rests upon us to be true to the One who died and who is the Centre of our fellowship. The point is not that we all have to be true to each other, but that *we all have to be true to Him and to the fact that He has died*. This is a responsibility indeed.

And to that responsibility the Lord will hold us. As we infringe it we provoke Him to jealousy, as verse 22 reminds us, and as is exemplified in 1 Corinthians 11: 29-32. But of this we cannot say more just now.

The responsibility is there and we must face it. Even were we to ignore this last request of our Lord, as some alas! do, we should not thereby evade the responsibility, but only incur greater responsibility. And after all it is nothing hard or irksome to the one who really loves the Lord.

The appeal of His last request is to our heart's deepest affections. Is there not within us each that answering love which will lead us to respond?