

The Lord's Supper

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We should, on divine authority, and in spiritual, scriptural intelligence, hold to it, that the Lord's supper is the due characteristic expression of the Lord's-day — that which should then be made principal. If we read Luke 22: 7-20, we shall learn that the passover of the Jews and the supper of the Lord being then exhibited successively — the one after the other — the latter thenceforth was to displace the former, and that for ever. The former, with other meanings attached to it, was the foreshadowing of the Great Sacrifice which was in due time to put away sin. The latter is now the celebration of the great fact that that sacrifice has been offered, and that, for faith, sin is put away. After the Lord's supper therefore is instituted, it is impossible to return to the passover. It would be apostasy — a giving up of God's lamb and of the atonement.

But if the supper has thus displaced the passover, we may then inquire, Is anything to displace *it*? We may read our answer in 1 Cor. 11: 26, and there learn that the Lord's supper is set as a standing institution in the house of God till the Lord's return. The Holy Ghost, through the apostle, gives it an abiding-place all through this age of the Lord's absence. I conclude accordingly that we are not to allow anything to displace the supper. It is of our faithfulness to our stewardship of the mysteries of God, to assert the right of that supper to be principal in the assembly of the saints. It has displaced the passover by the authority of the Lord Himself; but we, on the authority of the Holy Ghost, are not to allow anything to displace it. It is the proper service of the house of God. The Lord's-supper is the principal thing for the Lord's-day. This comes out naturally in the progress of the story of Christianity in the New Testament. We read in Acts 20: 7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread." And again, in 1 Cor. 11: 33, "Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another."

If we abandon the supper for a sermon, or for a large congregation, or for any other religious scene or service, we have given up the house of God in its due characteristic and divinely appointed business and worship. So far we are guilty of apostasy. We have not returned, it is true, to the displaced or superseded passover; but we have allowed something or another to displace or supersede what the Holy Ghost has set as principal in the house of God. And were we right-hearted, we would say, "What sermon would be more profitable to us? What singing of a full congregation more sweet in our ears than the voice of that ordinance which tells us so clearly and with such rich harmony of all kinds of music, of the forgiveness of our sins, of the acceptance of our persons, and of our waiting for the Lord from heaven, and all this in blessed and wondrous fellowship with the brightest display of the name and glory of God?"

Yea, the table at which we sit is a family table. In spirit we are in the Father's house. We are made by the table to know ourselves in relationship, and that lies just outside the realm of glory; for "if children, then heirs." If we be in the kingdom of God's dear Son, we are next door to the inheritance. (Col. 1) And there the table is maintained until Christ comes again.

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A Memorial of Christ.

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The Lord's supper is to be eaten as a memorial or remembrance of Christ.

This is His own interpretation of it. The bread was mystically His body, the cup His blood, accomplishing the remission of sins. To eat and to drink of this feast was to partake of the virtues of His sacrifice, or to express such participation (1 Cor. 10: 18); and it was thus eaten in remembrance of Christ, in token of the soul's fellowship with what His sacrifice had accomplished for sinners. It was therefore to be eaten simply with thanksgiving. The remembrance of what the sacrifice of Christ had accomplished would properly be accompanied with nothing else. No supplication would be needed, because it is a finished work, a full remission which the table records.

To pray about the forgiveness of sins would be discordant with the voice of the table. It might be quite unintended, yet really a reproach upon the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. It would be building again the things which Christ had destroyed, and, in the language and sense of Galatians 2, making Him the minister of sin, making His blood like the blood of bulls and goats, only the remembrance and not the remission of sins.

But to surround the table with thanksgiving, to wait on the feast with praise for redemption, this would be knowing the work of the Lamb of God which the feast sets forth; and accordingly it is always as thus accomplished that the scripture presents it to us. Jesus, on taking the bread and the cup, gave thanks. (Matt. 20; Mark 14; Luke 22.) He did nothing else.

The Lord's blessing and giving thanks are, to all moral intents, in the same sense; and in the like mind the apostle calls it the cup of blessing, which we bless, the cup at the taking of which we bless, or speak well of the Lord, because by that cup, or by the death and blood-shedding of Jesus which. it sets forth, He has rightly entitled Himself to praise, or to hear Himself well spoken of; and again, speaking of it he says that, when the Lord parted the bread and cup among His disciples, He simply gave thanks. (1 Cor. 11: 23-26.)

It may be accompanied with confession of sin, because it implies our utter death in trespasses and sins, and therefore that would not be in discordance with the supper.

But still we do not find this attended to in any of the passages that refer to the supper, but in them it takes the simple form of a eucharistic feast, or a season of thanksgiving for the remission of sins. It says, as another once observed (at least the Table has this voice in it), "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto them that be heavy of heart: let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

This is so indeed. It is this precious strong drink which reminds us that our misery is gone, and our heavy hearts are then lifted up. It tells us not, like the blood of bulls and goats, that sin is remembered, but it is remitted. This is its peculiar characteristic voice. To give thanks in company with it is harmony, to pray about our sin is discordant.

But the service of self-judgment or self-examination may well wait on this feast, because we are

by the remission of our sins called to holiness; just as of old the feast of unleavened bread accompanied the Passover. And as the Israelites celebrated the redemption from Egypt, they also searched the house for leaven; that they might put away all that offended Him who had redeemed them. This is most fitting, and indeed without this the Passover was not kept.

So with us, if we do not walk in a self-judging spirit, we are really not the blood-redeemed people, we do not discern the Lord's body; in other words, I believe we do not keep the feast of the Lord aright, if we are not honestly and holily searching for, and removing, all that would grieve the Lord. (1 Cor. 5; 6.)

This is in as full harmony with the Table, as thanksgiving is; and the cleansing out of the leaven should be done both from the congregation (1 Cor. 5) and from our individual selves. (1 Cor. 11: 28.) For we are one in our standing, an unleavened lump, and so should we be in our desires and diligence of soul. For the Lord's supper shows forth the Lord's death till He come.

The death of Jesus had this twofold sense. It published remission of sins, and all God's hatred of sin. It releases the sinner, and condemns the sin; and the supper eaten, both with thanksgiving and in the spirit of self-judgment, will be accordant with this. Eaten with prayer about our sins, or with a careless heart, in indifference to our sins, it will be utterly discordant.

It is to be a Passover in truth, with feast of unleavened bread, and therefore there is to be the expression of conscious redemption from Egypt, the place of death and scene of judgment; and this is thanksgiving. There is also to be the expression of renouncing that which has brought us into death and judgment; this is self-judgment. Such I believe to be the simple character which the scripture puts on the supper of the Lord.

Many indeed, and various, have been the additions which human religiousness has attached to it, but the word of God reproves them.

There is no warrant for consecrating the elements or separating them by process to the service of the Lord's table.

The bread and the wine are laid on the table as bread and wine; broken and poured out to figure the broken body and shed blood of Jesus; but no form or process is needful to give them title to be on the table for this use.

Neither, do I judge, have we warrant for asking God to bless us in the observing of this service, simply because it is our worship, or setting forth of His praise, rather [than] a waiting upon Him for some benefit to ourselves, either in soul or body. We bless Him in this act, rather than ask Him to bless us; we speak good of His name in it, by setting forth the memorial of what He has done, and do not supplicate Him to bless us or to speak good to us by conferring some fresh favour upon us.

I believe, if the word of God were very simply attended to in this matter, this beautiful service would be relieved of much that religiously encumbers it, and the table would give forth no uncertain sound.

Supplications about it, moreover, is utterly discordant with the service of this table; confession of sin might be made, but there would be no felt need of it; consecration of the elements would be altogether refused; seeking a blessing would not be thought of by the worshippers, [but blessing because we are blessed].

These common things would be laid aside, and the service would be an act of worship, giving the Lord the honour due unto His name in this age, until He comes again to gather fresh honours from the

lips of His countless redeemed ones.

And it is this service or worship that ought to gather us to His name every eighth or resurrection day; and then things may be there given us of the Lord, such as the word of exhortation or of teaching, or the voice and spirit of supplication.

But we should go there to give to the Lord His praise such as the Table (which publishes through the riches of His grace the remission of our sins) does give Him.

This is entering His house, duly entering it, with praise, because He has already blessed us, and not with supplication for a blessing; entering it in the spirit of conscious victory over our enemies; tearing asunder all bonds, and silencing every tongue that would charge or condemn us.

It would be entering His house in a way worthy of that house, where mercy has rejoiced against judgment, where the sword of the destroying angel has been gloriously staid; where, therefore, the spirit of the worshipper says as he enters, "In the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion, in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me upon a rock, and now shall my head be lifted up above my enemies round about me. Therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy, I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord." (Ps. 27.)

May His courts be thus entered in spirit now! for the bread and cup are there, and the veil is gone.
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