

Thoughts on the Lord's Supper

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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 sets forth His body; — the Cup His blood, — accomplishing the remission of sins.

To eat and drink of this feast is to express our participation in the virtues of His sacrifice (1 Cor. 10: 18). And it is thus eaten in remembrance of Christ, in token of the soul's fellowship with what His sacrifice has accomplished for sinners; it is therefore to be eaten with thanksgiving. This remembrance of what the sacrifice of Christ has accomplished must be accompanied with that. No supplication is 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 would be (quite unintended, it might be) a reproach upon the sacrifice of the Lamb of God. It would be a building again the things which Christ had destroyed; and in the language and sense of Gal. 2 making Him "the minister of sin": — making His blood, like the blood of bulls and of goats, only the remembrancer and not the remitter of sin. But to surround it with thanksgiving, — to wait on the feast with praise for redemption, — this would be honouring the work of the Lamb of God, which the feast sets forth; — and accordingly it is always as thus accompanied that the Scriptures present it to us. Jesus, on taking the bread and the cup, "gave thanks" (Matt. 26, Mark 14, Luke 22). He did nothing else. The words "blessing" and "giving thanks" are, to all moral intent, used 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 death and blood-shedding of Jesus, which it sets forth, He has richly entitled Himself to praise, or to have His name well spoken of. And again speaking of it, he says, — that when the Lord parted the bread and the cup among His disciples, He simply "gave thanks" (1 Cor. 11: 24). It may be accompanied with confession of sin, because it implies our utter death in trespasses and sins; — and therefore the confession of that would not be discordant with it. But still we do not find such confession either enjoined or observed in any of the passages which refer to the supper; but in them it takes the form of a simple eucharistic feast, or a season of thanksgiving for the remission of sin.

It says, as another has once observed, (at least the table has in it this voice) "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine to those that be of heavy hearts: let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more" (Prov. 31: 6, 7).

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

But the service of self-judging, or self-condemnation, may well wait on this feast, because we are, by the remission of our sins, called unto holiness; — just as of old, the feast of unleavened bread accompanied the passover, — the Israelites celebrated their redemption from Egypt, — but they also searched the house for leaven, that they might put away all that offended Him who had redeemed them; this was most fitting, and indeed without this the Lord's passover was not kept.

And so with us, if we are not walking in a self-judging spirit, we are not behaving ourselves as

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 honestly and holily searching for, and removing all that would offend the Lord (1 Cor. 10, 11).

This is in as full harmony with the table, as thanksgiving. And the leaven should be put away both from the congregation (1 Cor. 10), and from our own person (1 Cor. 11); for the supper shows forth the Lord's death: and the death of Jesus has this twofold sense, — it publishes remission of sin, and also God's hatred of sin; — it releases the sinner, but condemns the sin; — and the supper eaten, both with thanksgiving, and in the spirit of self-judging, will be accordant with this; eaten with prayer about our sins will be utterly discordant. It is to be a passover in union with the feast of unleavened bread, and therefore there is to be the expression of conscious rescue from Egypt, the place of death, or scene of judgment, — and this is thanksgiving; and there is to be also the expression of our renouncing of that which brought in death, — and this is self-judgment. Such, I believe to be the simple character which the Scriptures put 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 preserves them.

There is no warrant for the thought of consecrating the elements, or of separating them, by some 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 body and blood of Jesus, broken and shed for us; but no form or process is needed to give them title to lie on the table for this use.

Neither, do I judge, have we warrant for asking God to bless us in the observance of this service; simply because it is rather our worship, or setting forth of His praise, than a waiting on Him for some benefit to ourselves, either in soul or body. We bless Him in this act, rather than expect Him to bless us. We speak good of His name in it, by setting out the memorials of what He has done: — and do not supplicate Him to bless us.

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

Thus, 1st, Supplication about sin would be silenced as utterly discordant with the voice of the table; 2nd, Confession of sin might be made, but no necessity for it would be felt by the worshipping; 3rd, Consecration of elements would be altogether refused; 4th, Seeking for blessing would not be thought of.

These things would be laid aside, and the service would be an act of worship, or giving the Lord the honour due to His name in this age, till He comes again, when He is to gather fresh honour from the lips and praises of His countless ransomed ones.

And it is this service, or worship, that ought to gather us to His house every first or resurrection day; other things may then be given to 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 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 gloriously been stayed, where therefore the spirit of the worshipper sings as he enters, — "In the time of trouble He shall hide me, He shall set me on 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: 5, 6).

May His courts be thus entered in spirit now, for the bread and the cup are there, and the veil is gone. The memorials of the ransom have displaced those of sin, and at this alter it is only "the sacrifices of praise" we offer.