

## Letter on the Lord's Supper

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Dear brethren in Christ,

I salute you in the Lord, having learnt that you have received the gospel by faith; and that you have left the world-church to follow Christ, not the tradition of men, whether Romanist or Protestant, You have been called to liberty. Hold it firmly then, and be not drawn anew under a yoke of bondage. Though your faces are unknown to me in the flesh, I have not ceased to pray for you since the day that I heard of your earnest desire to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a manner conformed to scripture.

Allow me to write to you a few words on a subject so dear to our hearts and so important for the glory of Christ. In Christendom some regard the Lord's Supper as the principal means of obtaining life eternal; others neglect it, far preferring a fine discourse.

What says the apostle of the Gentiles? "I have received of the Lord that which also I have delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and, when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. Likewise also [he took] the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye announce the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11: 23-26). The best text is here followed and translated faithfully.

The evangelist preaches the good news of God; he proclaims the gift of life eternal and remission of sins to all such as believe in Jesus. The pastor and teacher, publicly and privately, tells the whole counsel of God to the faithful; that they may be built up in the truth and filled with the knowledge of His will, so as to walk worthily of the Lord and to please Him in all respects.

But as often as the children of God take the Supper in accordance with the Lord's institution, they announce corporately the capital truth of Christianity, "the Lord's death till He come." Doubtless, when thus gathered together, they read God's word prayerfully; with adoration in the Spirit they praise the grace of the Father and the Son; but in the midst of all else we may say that the Supper has a very distinct voice. The death of the Lord is there remembered; and the believers announce His death every time they are partakers of the Supper. It is true of those whose voice is not heard in the assembly, yea, even if some were dumb. What an immense privilege, dear brethren! Jesus alone could confer it on us, Jesus exclusively in virtue of His sacrifice, so precious to God, and so efficacious to blot out our sins.

Before those symbols, faith recognises that all was evil on our part, but sovereign grace on the part of God. We feel profoundly humbled, and yet more by our Saviour's love and His death than by our own sins, numerous and shameful as they were. There Christ in His death is the real and direct object of our souls. This it is that attracts and suffices us, that absorbs our minds and fills our hearts. The Son loves us, as does the Father too; and we honour the Son as we honour the Father. But it is Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of man, Who alone suffered for our sins, the Just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God. And God in His wisdom has here willed our joy, founding a feast on the great Sacrifice, a feast the most blessed on earth, where in communion one with another, we recall the death of Jesus. We there proclaim also the unity of the body of Christ, with thanksgiving to Him Who loves us without bound or end to the glory of God the Father.

Search the scriptures, and scrutinise the ways of God from the beginning to the end as they are therein made known to us: you will find that, in fact, as in divine purpose, the person of Jesus, the Second man, eclipses all others born of woman ; and Jesus is also the Last Adam. There is, there can be, none comparable with Him. He answers to all the thoughts, to all the affections, and to all the counsels of God. All the acts of Jesus are perfect, each in its place; yet is there one which is distinguished from the rest and rises above all. It is "the Lord's death." There was nothing but evil and pride in the creature. We were even conceived in sin, we were dead in sins, one quite as another. But in Christ God in His love went down below our sins to take them away; and Christ is exalted above all to send us pardon and peace. Where sin abounded, grace much more abounded; that, as sin reigned in death, so also might grace reign through righteousness unto life eternal by Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this basis of righteousness God sends the good news of His grace in all the creation that is under heaven. The same Lord of all is rich toward all that call on Him. Whoever believes in Jesus is justified by Him. Thus it is that God saves. And the Supper is the privilege of the saved, not the means of saving; it is the happy portion of those who believe and know that they have life eternal (1 John 2: 12; 1 John 5: 12). As for such as believe not in the Saviour, they remain responsible for His death, as well as all other sins of theirs; but for those that believe in Him, their sins are forgiven for His name's sake, themselves are justified by faith. So speaks the word of God. We receive now the end of our faith, soul-salvation (1 Peter 1); by-and-by at His coming our bodies will be saved (Rom. 8).

Also the Lord instituted His Supper, to which He invites all that are His. His name is their passport and guarantee. His Supper is the constant feast for the family of God: they break the bread, they drink the cup, in remembrance of Christ. Before inaugurating this feast, Jesus had already in His view the dangers His own must meet, the difficulties they have to surmount, the decline and the fall of Christian profession; and He had consoled the disciples with those words of love, "Where two or three are gathered together unto My name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. 18: 20). This is His real presence; it is our need, and His assurance. His word ever abides, His love never fails.

The Supper then is the common privilege conferred by Christ on all His members, excepting those that justly incur His discipline for bad morals or evil doctrine. If the blessed institution of the Lord is perverted or neglected in Christendom, none the less does it subsist in all its reality for such as adhere to scripture; and faith appropriates it when observed accordingly, which alone carries the stamp of divine authority. In man's hands with this institution were soon mixed worldly elements, which altered its character so that it was no longer His. Nevertheless His Supper is not lost for those who submit in humility to the revealed will of our Lord. When the Corinthians tampered with its nature, the apostle (ver. 20) denied it to be the Lord's Supper, It became their own supper, not His.

The Lord's Supper is not a question of administration or of presidency; still less is it a ceremony wherein the priest stands between the faithful and God. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4). The Lord Jesus *is* the sole High Priest; and we who believe are His house. God no longer has, as in Israel, a people His yet without. "Through Him (Christ) we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father." The Epistle to the Hebrews teaches explicitly (Heb. 7 and Heb. 10) that, the priesthood being changed, there is also of necessity a change of the law; and that as holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, we have full liberty to enter into the holies by the blood of Jesus, the veil being rent and the two now making only one.

Reversing the Jewish rites generally, the Supper is a "Communion," and even specifically the communion. It has nothing of a ministerial charge. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of

Christ? For we, the many, are one bread, one body; for the whole of us partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. 10: 16, 17).

Therefore scripture, as all may easily see, leaves the Supper open. In presence of the Head, the distinctions among Christians vanish from view. It is good for the most honoured servants to have a time and place to efface themselves in the presence of Jesus; this time and this place are found in celebrating the Supper. After thanks are given, one breaks the bread and eats in remembrance of Him; and a similar thing with the cup. *He* gave it to them, we read (Mark 14: 23), and *they all* drank of it. For the believer it is the most simple, the most touching, and the most solemn of observances. How incomparable an occasion to contemplate the infinite humiliation and the perfect grace of our Saviour! What happiness for the saint to rejoice, with all saints round him in spirit, not only in their blessings, but in His presence, the Blessed and the Blessor, conscious that they are objects of perfect love to the Father and the Son, and knowing all things in the power of the Holy Spirit Who dwells in us! (1 John 4.)

There is also in the Lord's Supper a moral bearing on which the apostle insists, because of the profane levity of some at Corinth. Let us never forget it. "Therefore whosoever eateth the bread or drinketh the cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let each prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup; for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment against himself, not discerning the body. Therefore are many weak and sick among you, and some fall asleep. But if we discerned ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world" (1 Cor. 11: 27-32). That is not the damnation of unbelievers, but a judgment which the Lord exercises at present over His own. They had treated the holy feast unworthily; they had not distinguished His body, for this is what the breaking of bread means. Accordingly the Lord now judges those who fail to discern themselves. In view of His supper, in remembrance of the Lord's death, each of His own is called to search himself, and thus to eat and drink: if not, he does it unworthily, and this is irreverence toward the Lord Who judges those that do not judge themselves. But even in this case it is not His eternal judgment. On the contrary it is His chastening, "in order that we should not be condemned with the world."

As for the time when the Supper should be celebrated, it is clearly indicated in Acts 20: 7, "And the first day of the week, when we gathered together to break bread, Paul discoursed to them," etc. His discourse was a great boon, but purely casual, The Supper, in which the breaking of bread took place, was a thing fixed, not only for the disciples at Troas, but for all the saints wherever they might be. The confessedly right reading is "when we were gathered together," here implying that "the first of the week" was the day now settled for the Supper everywhere. At Pentecost and for some time after, the saints broke bread every day "at home" (not of course in the temple), because all the blessed of the Lord were then found in the same city — Jerusalem. But this passed away when the call of God's grace went forth and souls believed everywhere. In Acts 20: 7 we have the regular order henceforth applicable to the church anywhere, as recognised by the Holy Spirit. It is for us, in the evil day, to act in faith and in obedience, with thanksgiving. Have faith in God, beloved.

Ever yours in Christ the Lord, W. K.