

## The Lord's Supper

1 Cor. 11.

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The Lord's supper differs from the other standing institution of Christianity in this, that while baptism is individual, the breaking of bread is congregational. Personal enjoyment merely is not God's mind in the supper, but rather communion. The gospel gives high value and scope to what is individual; and we need this, for it is the first call from God to man, and should take precedence of all else. That soul is never right which loses itself in a crowd. One's soul needs to be set right with the Lord in His grace by faith.

In baptism, being individual, each one is said to put on Christ as the sign of His death; for "as many as were baptised unto Jesus Christ were baptised unto His death. Therefore we were buried with Him in baptism unto death." Burial unto His death is the aim; but it is individual, even if ever so many were baptised at the same time. There is no fellowship one with another in baptism. Baptism by proxy is an absurdity, if not worse. Christian baptism is the privilege of owning Christ's death. There the soul is brought under solemn responsibility (though immense favour too); because he that is so baptised is called to walk as one alive from the dead. But this has nothing to do with others — it is one's own responsibility, and is independent of association with any.

The Lord's supper is another thing. It was not a mere circumstance that the disciples were assembled when the Lord instituted it. Their gathering to partake of it together is not merely a fact but a principle. It is therefore a question of fellowship with saints. There is no such thing in scripture, or in the meaning of the institution, as an individual taking bread and wine in remembrance of Christ; the doing so would rather be an error to be forgiven. The blessedness of the Lord's supper consists in this, not only that it is essentially remembering Christ in common, but soon after also the one body of Christ. Being the expression of our joint Christian worship, what does not leave room for every member of His body, walking as such, destroys (as far as it goes) the character of the Lord's supper. Not of course, that in many a city all could eat together in one spot; but let them eat in ever so many, it was and must be on the same ground, and in real inter-communion. The truth indeed embraces all saints walking as such: whatever does not is not the Lord's supper.

There is another remark to make. Not only was Christian baptism liable to be perverted (and surely this has been the case far and wide in Christendom), but the Lord's supper was even more easily misused. Whether Christian baptism was or was not perverted in very early days is not now taken up; but certainly the Lord's supper was so almost immediately. It was the more open to have its character forgotten because it demands spiritual fellowship. The First Epistle to the Corinthians testifies to this. Even in apostolic times the Holy Spirit has recorded gross failure. How great the humiliation, and how deep the grief, for the apostle to expose it! But though to write 1. Cor. 11 was to spread and even perpetuate the bad tidings, the Spirit of God felt it necessary for their good and also for the welfare of all the assembly.

The way in which the misuse of the Lord's supper came in at Corinth is highly instructive. The Corinthians valued the social character of Christianity more than moderns; and it is a very valuable trait. In those early days Christians loved to be together, and so partook of a love-feast. No doubt, plausible reasons were not wanting for uniting this with the Lord's supper. As all were assembled then, it would be a saving of time; why not on the same occasion take the two together? Was there not something like it at the last Passover when the Lord was here in person before instituting His supper?

Perhaps many Christians now are willing to take the Lord's supper together who would shrink from taking a meal in common. But the Corinthians had not yet lost sight of the bonds which unite the holy brotherhood. They had a stronger sense of it than some who like to speak of their faults. Nevertheless their low moral state exposed them to evil and error; and this effect, not being corrected in the Spirit, brought out dangerous fleshly activity. There was levity and looseness among them; Christ was forgotten. At these love-feasts they each brought their fare as for the convivial feast (or ἔρῳς) of the Greeks. This was in point of fact a contribution meal. What a descent from Christianity to heathen practice, when each would bring his own! and thus the rich came with plenty, and the poor had little or nothing! Hence the open result of their coming thus together was, that selfishness, not love, characterised them. Those well off soon proved how easy it is to have too much; and the poor were made to feel lack on these occasions. So the whole scene became a reflection, not of heaven and God's grace in Christ, but of the proud heartless world; and the holiest feast on earth — the Lord's supper — gilded and turned into a disgrace to His name that covered all. In fact, their state at this very time was such as to bring down His hand in judgment on His people.

Many wonder how this could be in the "church of God." They forget Satan's wiles and enmity; yet some go so far as to draw conclusions favourable to themselves and their own time. But the Spirit of God never leads to such thoughts. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" and those only read it to profit who by it judge themselves rather than their brethren, and still less saints of primitive times just emerged from paganism. Let me inquire of each, Do you compare your ways with those of the Corinthians when beguiled of the enemy? How much wiser to judge yourselves, not by what they slipped into, but by what the apostle wrote, and what the Lord instituted! And let none think this too hard; for it is fair to ask, Who is entitled to alter the institutions of Christ? Has the church such a licence? Is she not, on the contrary, called to submit herself to the Lord as a virgin espoused to Him? What should we think of one who set herself up against her husband? Yet this is but a small part of what Christendom has done — taking advantage of His name to speak proudly and act independently; and most especially that church which claims for herself to have altered nothing, whereas to her remains scarce a shred of Christ in truth, love, and holiness.

But let us look at scripture, not to condemn Rome, but to prove ourselves. Let us search and see whether and how far we are doing the will of the Lord. How are we to know we are pleasing Him? His word is our only sure guide.

We have the description of the institution of the Lord's supper given to us in three of the Gospels — by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Eternal life and the gift of the Holy Ghost are the great themes of John. Neither baptism nor the Lord's supper enters into either his Gospel or his Epistles; but in the synoptists, or historic Gospels, we have a full account.

The apostle Paul too had a fresh revelation about the Lord's supper, not about baptism. He expressly tells us that the Lord did not send him to baptise but to preach the gospel. The others were given by Himself a commission to baptise. "Go ye therefore, and disciple all the nations, baptising them unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." But the apostle Paul was called from heaven, and from his very conversion hears that the Christians are one with Christ. Of this the Lord's supper, not baptism, is the suited sign; and so it was revealed to him, though of course he was baptised and did baptise like another, at least occasionally.

Baptism is the confession of Christ, emphatically of Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord's supper is the symbol of unity with Christ, founded on His death Who is now on high. That those who

partake of the one loaf are the one body of Christ is the great idea, as well as the announcement of His death. Hence the apostle Paul, who beyond all made known the mystery of Christ and the church, has a special revelation concerning this given to him from heaven. "For I received from the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night in which he was betrayed, took bread."

Nothing strikes one more than the extreme simplicity of the materials the Lord was pleased to use for His supper. He "took *bread*." What is more common than a loaf? He blessed, and broke, and gave to them, while they all remained in the same position. He blessed; but there is no thought of consecration here, still less of consubstantiation or of transubstantiation. He gave thanks; but He did exactly the same when distributing the five barley loaves and two fishes, though nobody would say that they were consecrated or changed. It is a delusion to conceive any miracle in the elements. Scripture intimates very expressly the contrary. The disciples ate bread and drank wine; and the whole blessing is the power of faith coming in and investing what was before it, though the simplest materials, with the deepest associations of God's grace in the death of His beloved Son. "Ye announce the death of the Lord till He come." What so solemn in itself, so precious to God, so loving to us, so separative from sin and the world!

Every scheme which exalts the elements, or aggrandises those who "administer" to the communicants, takes away from Christ. Any accessories of sight or sound accompanying it are human accretions contrary to His word. Scripture repudiates them as not of the Spirit, and of the first man, not of the Second. The Lord's supper is of Him and to Him, and this so specially that to bring in anything else is to slight Him, being an infringement of His heavenly glory, as well as of the cross, whereby the world is crucified to the Lord, and the saint to the world. For He that hath His word and keepeth it, he it is who loveth Him. It is in vain to think we care for His glory if we slight scripture that reveals it.

He says to all His own, "Take, eat." Not, Take *thou*; because this would bring in individuality, which is never the intent of the Lord's supper, but the body; communion in the remembrance of Christ, but of Christ in death. In this His love is everything to the heart, and the common blessing of all is in and with Christ. His death separates believers from the world, and as His body we are one with Him Who is in heaven.

The love-feast was what we may call the Christians' supper; this was its primary aim. It was *their* feast; but the Lord's supper is far more. In it, therefore, so far from a person eating or drinking for himself alone, it is intended to contemplate the whole body of Christ, save those who may be outside through discipline or self-will. Whatever narrows this holy circle, either in principle or in practice, infringes on the Lord's object in His supper. Hence the moment you bring in your peculiar doctrine, discipline, or polity, only admitting those who expressly or virtually subscribe to *it*, you make it *your* supper and not the Lord's. If guided of Him, we meet there as members of His body; and everything else is set aside as secondary but Himself.

What can be more valuable in its place, and for God's ends by it, than Christian ministry? It embraces rule as well as teaching, pastorship as well as preaching. There are those that can teach who have not the power of ruling; as, again, others who rule well, having great moral weight, who could not teach. Some again have the gift of preaching who themselves need teaching, and are not at all fit to lead on, clear, and establish the church of God. Nor does a gift for ministry in itself carry moral weight for rule. Thus scripture teaches, and so we see in the facts of every day.

Christian ministry was founded by the Lord Who died for us; but the spring flowed when He went up to heaven. If He gave gifts to men, it was after He ascended on high (Eph. 4: 8-11).

This is very important; for if Christian ministry had commenced while Christ was on earth, it

might be said that things have wholly changed since. There has been no change for Christ, but only alas! among Christians, since He went up to heaven. He is the risen Head now as then.

Our Lord Jesus when here below sent out twelve apostles in relation to the twelve tribes of Israel; as He sent out the seventy afterwards with a final message, but still in testimony to Israel. Was *this* Christian ministry? Not so. It was after His ascension that He gave gifts to men — apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Not that these are all; but those named in Eph. 4 are enough for my purpose now.

When the Lord Jesus accomplished redemption and went to heaven, He from His ascension glory gave gifts to men. It is quite a new source of supply from above. What He did publicly when on earth was for Israel. The disciples were even forbidden to preach to the Samaritans or to the Gentiles. This therefore could not be Christian ministry. No doubt those previously used were again sent forth now; but they had a fresh mission when Christ went up to heaven. Has Christ then, I ask, ceased to give gifts to men? or is He still owned by us as the Head of the church, not in word only but in deed and in truth? And those who in practice and principle deny this and take His place, are they not really conspiring against Him and His rights as the fountain of all gifts for the church? Rome is the chief of the conspiracy against the headship of Christ. Babylon — the false lady, the would-be queen — was not content to be subject, and is ever denounced as a strumpet going to be judged by God. Take care that you fall not into a similar error of disowning Christ's headship in another form, to speak of no other corruption.

Christian ministry is a divine institution and a permanent one. It is not like the local charge of elders, which required apostolic intervention, direct or indirect. If others plead for change, do you hold that it is the same now as when Christ first ascended? Christ, and Christ alone, through the Holy Ghost, has all authority in His hands. He gives gifts: not the foundation gifts of apostles and prophets (for that work has been done perfectly), but all needed to carry on the church, as evangelists, pastors, and teachers. Christ alone has the title of Head of the church; and the Holy Ghost is come down as alone competent to carry out His mind on earth in accordance with God's written word, as He acts and dwells in each saint.

But while we hold up the place of Christian ministry, and slight none who are Christ's gifts, owning all who are really His, and disowning all who are not, still there is one occasion where distinctions disappear, where only One is or ought to be the prominent one, even Christ in His grace to us; where, no matter what our position and standing in the church, everything for the time gives place to Christ and His death; and this occasion is the *Lord's supper*. Human presidency *there* is avoided in scripture. How precious therein to merge all else and have nothing before the soul but Himself Who died for us in infinite love! This the Lord (the night in which He was betrayed) commended to the saints. This He would have us to do in remembrance of Him till He come. It is wholesome for the most highly gifted not always to be in the position of giving out; and it is well for the simplest saints not to be ever taking in. An evangelist, *e.g.*, might else get so occupied with winning the souls of others as to forget he has a soul of his own to praise and remember the Lord; and so with every other gift. "They made me keeper of the vineyards, but mine own vineyard have I not kept." It is good for the heart of any man, no matter what his gift, to have for Christ a little quiet time; and that these quiet times should not be too far apart.

All this is provided for amply in the Lord's supper. Souls should have such seasons when occupied neither with delivering nor with hearing a sermon. It is blessed when even the apostle is merged in the saint, when we and all are occupied only with the remembrance of Christ. There is a

feast provided by His love, in which we all may enjoy Him together, and enjoy Him to the full; for He does not want us to treat His love as an uncertain sound. He would have our joy to be full. But if you value not this feast, because of its own nature and His love Who invites you, no wonder you cannot enjoy it. If you join in a rite which bears His name but with its character altered, how can you expect it to pass as the feast to which He invites you and guarantees His presence? Some make an idol of the Eucharist and worship its elements; others, running away from the idolatry of Rome, seem to have forgotten His word and to put His supper nowhere, save as a gloomy appendix to the sermon, and that but a few times in the year.

The early disciples came together not once a year, nor once a quarter, nor once a month, but the first day of the week to break bread. It is no new theory, no notion of moderns or ancients, but what God has written in Acts 20: 7. Does it not concern you as much as me? It is Christ's feast for His own — what in a special way concerns you, children of God, though Christ and His glory even more.

I remember the time when the Lord's supper was a duty of dread, lest one might fall into the condemnation supposed to be written here — of eating and drinking "damnation," — guilty in respect of the body and the blood of the Lord. No wonder with such a danger before one, the Lord's supper could not be enjoyed, and to the believer, with no one to show any better, it was so much the more awful a burden. It was no feast, but a fast of the most trying description. It was a misrepresentation of the Lord's supper that produced so unhappy a result. Somewhat similar alas! is the condition of many a soul now, though the mistake is publicly corrected, but not in the Book of Common Prayer. It is "judgment" in the shape of sickness or death, but not "damnation."

But the Lord Jesus died on the cross to suffer for the sins of believers, and to blot them out. Yea, He glorified God about sin itself, instead of leaving it to stand as a perpetual reproach to God. The Son of God, having gone down under our evil in love, and risen again without it in righteousness, He from the glory gave these words to Paul for us. They come, in the infinite grace of God, from the Saviour Who witnesses to judgment borne for us, from resurrection accomplished, from the right hand of God: thence the Lord commends to us this institution of His grace. Do not treat it as a mere commandment, and hence "a means of grace" for those who have not faith. It is a call of love, embracing all who are His, and only for His own, by faith. "Do this in remembrance of Me!" It is not for those who, slighting His love, love Him not. Christ's death was God's judgment of sin as truly as His remission of our sins.

For whom it is, need one say more? The only persons who have the smallest title to the Lord's supper are those who rest on Him and His redemption. You might even be converted, and not yet be in a fit state to partake of this feast.

For the Christian state is more than being by grace turned from one's evil ways to God. Besides this, the Christian believes the gospel of his salvation; he has peace with God, being justified by faith. He does not wait for righteousness, but is become God's righteousness in Christ. We therefore wait for the hope of righteousness, that is, for glory. We do not require righteousness when going to heaven. There we shall have it gloriously; but here by grace we receive it, the object thenceforward being to glorify Christ whilst in the presence of His enemies and now called to serve Him. Here then we confess, by faith in His cross and glory, how truly all the evil is already judged; all the good is already given by our God and Father, whatever remains for the body at Christ's coming.

For what does a person come to the table of the Lord? Is it to pour out his doubts? If he has them, he surely will; but this makes it an ordeal, not a feast. You would scarcely like this even at your own festivities. A gloomy heart or face suits not a marriage feast: it would slight the bridegroom and the bride, and might spoil all for everyone else. Such a person would be best away; and the more you loved

him, the less could you desire his presence thus, because of the pain to all concerned.

The soul that is troubled with doubts and fears had better look to Christ and listen to God's gospel. The Lord's supper is the best and holiest feast on earth; but whatever does not consist with His presence in peace and liberty, love and holiness, has no title to be there.

Ministry is not meant to furnish, adorn, or fence the table; he whom God sets first in the church comes there simply as a saint. Ministry deals with souls, preaches the gospel, gives meat in due season, guides, instructs, corrects, and rebukes. But to the Lord's supper we rightly come only as members of Christ's body — as once sinners but now saints, justified, happy in Christ's love, full of peace and joy in believing. "If we walk in the light:" such is the condition of a Christian. Hence the responsibility is to walk in accordance with the light in which we are. This is the object of ministry, to fit souls for and keep them in their place at the Lord's table. Thus the Lord's supper is the present practical end of the ministry for the worship of God; and the end is greater than the means.

As for the notion that you may have the Lord's table without the Lord's supper, it is beneath sober Christians. We may distinguish where we cannot separate. All such speculations are but the fruit of idleness with a certain small activity of mind, but none the less injurious to faith and practice.

One may well scruple to call it the Lord's supper when not taken according to the Lord's institution. But we may notice that there is a difference in the way in which the apostle speaks in 1 Cor. 10 as compared with the language in chapter 11. In the first it is not the Lord's supper viewed from within. Neither their right state nor their wrong state is the point here discussed, but communion with Christ compared with what was outside. The apostle is contrasting it with what the Jew or the Gentile had. It is not the internal view of eating worthily or not; but, contra-distinguishing the Jew and the Gentile in their worship, he proceeds to show what the nature of the church's is. "We being many are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread."

"The table of demons" has been foolishly applied to that which is not celebrated according to the Lord's word. This is certainly not the meaning of the apostle's words, but a grave error on the part of those who have so misapplied it. The apostle is contrasting what the Christian has with the Jew on the one hand and the Gentile on the other. What the Gentiles sacrificed was to demons. The idol might be nothing; but their danger was from forgetting the demon that was behind it. Israel, again, had their peace-offerings their symbol of communion with Jehovah's altar. The church of God, as he shows, is as distinct from the Jew as from the Gentile. Thus the apostle is contrasting both with the Lord's table of which Christians eat.

But in chap. 11 he deals with the state of soul of those who partake of the Lord's supper. It is a question of Christians rightly or wrongly communicating. If you remember the Lord and His death, do not satisfy yourself with the fact that you are a Christian. You are made worthy by faith in Him and His blood; but ever test yourself whether you partake in a worthy manner. If the day comes round, and you go as a religious habit, it is an unworthy partaking of it. Familiarity breeds contempt where the soul is so unexercised. Where self-judgment is kept up, the spirit of worship is strengthened and enlarged. The Lord's supper makes a distinctive appeal to the conscience, as it has a special place for the heart. This is not a theory, but the doctrine of God in 1 Cor. 11.

A word to you who have no doubts. Your danger is in coming to the Lord's supper without adequately weighing your ways and state of heart. "Let a man examine himself," not to see whether he be a Christian, as some say. But if assured of salvation as we ought to be, the Lord intends that there should be a solemn challenging of the soul every time, with a view to seeing in what spirit and state we come to the Lord's supper. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily is guilty with respect to the body and

blood of the Lord. He falls into no small offence against Christ who treats His supper irreverently. Consequently the Lord does not fail to vindicate the honour of His name thus set at nought, as we see He did at Corinth.

It is not supposed that, when one has thus tried himself, he will stay away. "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat." It is well to search, judge, and blame yourself. For it is always assumed that a Christian is one who is here to obey and please God. To partake unworthily then means, not that the communicant is not a Christian, but that the Christian partakes without due self-judgment.

But, again, "damnation" here is quite wrong. The word κρίμα means "judgment." Its only possible force here is judgment in this world. The context is decisive and plain even for those who have no knowledge of the language in which the Holy Ghost wrote. The saints have to judge themselves in order that they may not be condemned (or damned) with the world. Thus the solemn guard of the Lord maintains gravity and holiness among those who partake, on the peril of His judgment now.

When a soul begins to be careless, the first thing the Lord does is to make him feel miserable and distressed as to his ways, applying the word to his conscience. If he bows to the word, it is well — he is humbled and walks more softly in future. If he is hardened by not heeding the word, then comes in the work of those over him in the Lord to admonish, entreat, or rebuke, seeking to restore. A little evil unjudged always leads to a great deal more. If those that are gathered to His name fail, the Lord never fails to judge here by sickness or even by death. Such is the meaning of "sin unto death" (1 John 5: 16). It is death in this world. So Ananias and Sapphira sinned unto death. The time and circumstances made their sin heinous, and brought down on them the Lord's dealing in a peculiarly solemn form; but the principle is the same.

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