

The Lord's Supper.

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THE LORD'S SUPPER.

THOSE whom the Lord first sent forth to make disciples of all nations were further required to teach the disciples to observe all things which He had commanded, and it is needful for those who are called to follow them in the first service to be prepared to carry out the second also. Now as the observance of the Lord's Supper was one of those things to be taught, it is needful for every preacher of the gospel to have a clear and correct understanding of this ordinance of the Lord. The importance of its proper observance in His estimation is evident from the fact that He did

not leave it to the apostles who were present at its institution to inform the apostle Paul about it, but He Himself instructed him. Therefore, when it was needful for the apostle to correct believers at Corinth concerning it, he wrote, "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." It is interesting to see how some modern notions are corrected by anticipation. Some tell us the observance of the Lord's Supper was Jewish, and not intended for Gentile churches, but here we find that the apostle had instructed this Gentile church to observe it, and was careful that they should do so in a worthy manner (1 Cor. xi. 23--34). Others say, it was only for the early days of the church, whereas Paul writes distinctly that they were in this

manner to "show the Lord's death till He come."

Though it is impossible in a brief paper to deal fully with the subject, two important points may be specially noted: (1) the simplicity of the ordinance; (2) its solemnity. Taking first its simplicity, we read, the Lord "took bread: and when He had given thanks He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My body which is broken for you." To understand the force of the word "is" we compare a similar expression from the Lord's own lips in Rev. i. Having given His servant John a vision of seven lampstands, in the midst of which He stood, and seven stars in His right hand, He explained, "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the

seven churches.” It is clear that *are* denotes *represent*; no one has ever imagined that a lampstand was a literal assembly of people, and this is the meaning of *is* in the Lord’s words, “This is [*i.e.*, represents] My body.” Yet Romish teachers and those who follow them maintain that after consecration the bread becomes the actual body and blood of Christ. Let it be observed that Scripture never speaks of such a thing as *consecration*. The Lord Himself did not consecrate the bread He gave on this occasion any more than He did that with which He fed the five thousand hungry people. In each case He *gave thanks*, and His people who obey His word “Do this” are to give thanks also, but that breaking the bread and giving thanks make no change in it is

here declared, for the apostle not only writes, "The *bread* which we break," but also "As often as ye eat this *bread*," showing that, as it is bread when it is broken, so also it is bread when it is eaten.

Out of this notion of the change of the bread into the very body and blood of Christ grew the idea of the Lord's Supper being a repetition of the Sacrifice of Christ. This is the doctrine of Rome, but some others hold it also, one Anglican writer saying that a *feast* according to Scripture implies a sacrifice. That is true, but he failed to notice the clear statement of 1 Cor. v. 7, 8, "Christ our passover hath been (R.V.) sacrificed for us; therefore let us keep the feast." The Sacrifice is entirely past—one completed act (as the Greek

verb shows) ; the feast is present and continuous ; that feast, however, is not the Lord's Supper, but the feast of the Christian's whole life, for we must be daily eating the flesh of the Son of Man and drinking His blood if we would live by and abide in Him (John vi.).

Attention to the Lord's own command would have preserved from the ideas just stated. He said with both the bread and the cup, " This do in [or for a] remembrance of Me." Therefore the prominent point in the ordinance is that of *memorial*. It is not a sacrifice, but that which calls to mind the sacrifice ; it is the remembrance of Himself, but Himself as sacrificed—His body broken, His blood shed. Though the Lord's Supper is never called a feast, yet it is truly a

feast to the believer in the measure in which he looks beyond material things and feeds upon Christ Himself. Our partaking of the bread and the wine is an expression of our personal appropriation of Christ, the "bread which strengtheneth" and the "wine that maketh glad" (Ps. civ. 15), speaking to us of His fulness to strengthen and cheer us on our pilgrim journey. When assembled at His table we may feed more fully upon Christ, yet only in the same sense as that in which we feed upon Him whenever we meditate upon Him as crucified for us and in the spirit of faith appropriate the precious results of His sacrifice as meeting our need.

This leads to the second part of our subject—its solemnity, which is of equal importance, for as only a firm

grasp of the simplicity of this gracious appointment of the Lord will preserve us from superstitious teaching, so only a true understanding of its solemnity will guard us against that concerning which the apostle warns—eating and drinking unworthily. How believers at Corinth were doing this is shown most plainly. They were coming together for a common meal, bringing their own provisions, and were not waiting for one another, so that there was not even the appearance of fellowship, and while one had a superabundance another lacked sufficient to appease his hunger; “one is hungry and another is drunken.” We are not in danger of doing as they did, but if ever we treat the Lord’s table as an ordinary, common thing, going to it as a matter of course,

merely because we are accustomed to do so, and without true exercise of heart before God, we are really eating and drinking unworthily. The corrective is, "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." Let him consider what he is going to do and why; let him take to heart what these things signify.

The first words of the apostle in telling what the Lord did may well lead us to feel how solemn the service is—"The Lord Jesus *the same night in which He was betrayed*" did this. Thus it was linked as closely as possible with His death and the instructions were given with His death fully before Him. It is that death which we "show" or announce in eating the bread and drinking of

the cup, and, though what we take is only bread, that bread is to us “the fellowship of the body of Christ”—that body in which He bare our sins when He gave it for us upon the cross; and, though it is only wine, that wine is “the fellowship of the blood of Christ”—that blood by which we were redeemed to God.

We should remember the Lord's death at all times, but at His table we join in an act of remembrance. And while that is simple, the thought of whom we remember and what we remember will surely banish anything like lightness and produce the contrite spirit and the worshipping heart. The fact that we have before us the greatest thing that has ever been known in God's creation—the death of His own Son—may well chasten

our spirits, while His own words "*for you*" must fill us with adoring gratitude and call forth our devotion.

Then let us note carefully the expression, "The Lord's death." Now it is specially in resurrection that He is "Lord and Christ," so that we are showing the death of the Risen One, and should hear Him saying, "I am . . . the Living One, and I became dead and I am alive for evermore" (Rev. i. 18). Let us also with the words "*for you*" link the words "*with you*" when He said, "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt. xxvi. 29). Thus as we look back and think of what He endured for us on earth, we look up and consider how He is occupied

for us above as our glorious High Priest, and we look forward to His joy in His Father's Kingdom, which He will share with us.

ADDITIONAL NOTE.

As some have been troubled with questions about the use of unleavened bread and some substitute for wine at the Lord's Supper, it may be well to add a few words on the subject. Seeing that instructions about the removing of all leaven from the houses of the Israelites in connection with the Passover were so clear and emphatic, we may well judge that, had it been the will of the Lord Jesus that the bread broken in remembrance of Him should be without leaven, He would have given some intimation of this. And if He had done this when giving instructions to His servant Paul, the apostle would surely have done the same when delivering them to believers at Corinth or when writing to correct their practices. Instead of this he seeks to raise their thoughts in 1 Cor. v. above the mere

material substance of leaven to its spiritual meaning and teaches them that they are to feed upon Christ with "the unleavened (bread) of sincerity and truth."

Then as to wine. It is foolish to speak of "unfermented wine," because there is not such a thing. The word wine, as well as the Hebrew and Greek words which it represents, denotes a fermented liquor. The Lord does not, indeed, use the word wine; He simply calls what He had before Him "fruit of the vine." But the Passover was fully six months after the vintage, and the juice of the grape could not have been kept that time without fermenting. That the Lord took the ordinary passover cup of wine is clear from Luke xxii. 20. But here again we may appeal to the apostle Paul. Had he at the beginning told Christians at Corinth to use anything special, he would surely have reminded them of it in his epistle, and if his first instructions had been partial we may judge he would have completed them when he heard of the disorders that were practised. But though in his reproof he speaks of some being "drunken," he does not tell them to substitute something else for wine; he rather shows them their fault in turning

the Supper of the Lord into an ordinary meal and seeks to lead them to a proper understanding of what they were called to do in remembrance of the Lord. He leads them to such thoughts of "this cup" as would save them from the misuse of it.

Thus with regard to both the bread and the cup we see the wise and loving thoughtfulness of the Lord in not burdening His people to obtain something special for the fulfilment of His gracious appointment, so that, whether in Central Africa or in some solitary island in the Pacific, whatever is recognized as bread, however much it may differ from our bread, may be used, and also any beverage which corresponds with that used by the Lord—anything that answers to the "wine that maketh glad the heart of man . . . and bread which strengtheneth man's heart" (Ps. civ. 15).