1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (Christopher James Davis) 211507

Basics for Believers, Chapter 2: A Scriptural Inquiry Respecting the Lord's Supper and the Lord's Table (10:16-17)

Read 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:23-34

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 being many are one loaf [it is translated bread, but it should be loaf 'one loaf'] and one body; for we are all partakers of that one loaf.

"For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks he brake it and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation [it should not be 'damnation' but judgment—'eateth and drinketh judgment'] to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

There is nothing in the whole range of scripture, there is nothing that has been revealed in the word of God, which is fraught with deeper or more important lessons—lessons which the Holy Ghost would have every child of God to learn, every believer to enter into, as the truth about the LORD's Supper.

I said on a previous occasion, that there was no truth which Christians ought to seek more to understand, than the truth about the one body. But with that truth the Lord's Supper is intimately associated—so closely, indeed, that the Holy Ghost uses the bread, or rather the "one loaf" broken at the supper for the purpose of illustrating the oneness of the body. "Because we, being many, are one loaf" (1 Cor. 10:17, DBT).

When I understand that I am a member of that one body—a member of the church of which Christ is the head—then my affections must necessarily go out to Him, with whom I am linked. More than that, my love in Him must go out also to His (my fellow) members, with whom I am connected in Christ: so that my knowledge about the truth of the one body, of which I am a member, brings me into direct association with Christ the Head, and with every member.

And the Supper is the occasion when the family, all the members, get together (at least ought to be together, and would be together if they were subject to the Lord) and express their corporate communion with the Lord, and consequently with each other. Can you conceive, beloved, of richer love than this? Could anyone desire a more effective plan for sustaining the due relationships between the exalted Head and the members? Such is wisdom, and such is love suited to HIM only. Alas! that so few of us enter into it at all. Like many other truths, that about the Lord's Supper as instituted by the Lord Himself, and observed in Pauline days, has been warped and distorted in no small degree. So much so, indeed, that it is now no easy matter for the godly saint to find that which corresponds to the scriptural idea of the Lord's Table and the Lord's Supper. Popery, that most perfect counterfeit of God's assembly ever issued by Satan, regards the Eucharist as a bloodless sacrifice for the sins of the living and of the dead. The Establishment again, lowering it to a "sacrament," admits parishioners, not necessarily believers, as partakers. Dissent, not much better, makes its own human regulations for the "sacrament," and celebrates it according to human expediency. More than this; in nearly all the churches, almost every kind of service has a higher rank afforded it than this blessed institution. Indeed, the general idea of most is, that the Lord's Day is, pre-eminently, the day for sermonizing. A most suitable time it is, indeed, for going forth in service to the unconverted; or for seeking the edification of the saints; inasmuch, as, thank God, it is a day with us of rest. But in Pauline days the Christians' primary object on the Lord's Day was to break bread. The Lord's Supper, with them, stood in the foreground of their movements on the Lord's Day. A departure, then, from this is merely human, and to go on with it is surely beneath a godly saint, who sees what the mind of the Lord is. In the midst of such confusion, then, what are we to do? Some may reply, "Of all the evils choose the least." To this I rejoin, Through the Lord's mercy, I will choose neither. What? Choose the least evil? Certainly not. If it be evil, may grace be afforded, at all cost, to turn away from it. Another says, "Let us stir here and look there, or go anywhere"; while the advice of a third is, "Give it up altogether." Now, beloved in the Lord, some of such counsel might certainly suit, if our blessed Lord had vacated His seat on high, withdrawn the Holy Ghost from us, and left us, without His word, to seek our own ways of escaping out of the labyrinth of evils surrounding us. But, ever blessed be His name! His care for His saints today is as unchangeably the same as it was when He was upon the earth. His love towards us, and consideration for us, are now precisely what they were in the earliest days of the church's history. The Holy Ghost, given to "abide with us forever, and to lead us into ALL truth," is present still to direct the simple-hearted. The word, the truth, preserved in all its preciousness, under the special guardianship of the Holy Ghost, is in our hands today as ever. Is this enough for you, beloved? Need you resort to tradition, synods, conferences, creeds, or articles, in the face of incomparably richer mines? Will any of us grieve our dear Lord by questioning His sufficiency? Has it indeed come to pass that faith in the all-prevailing and the omnipotent name of the Lord Jesus is lost by the saints? What have we come to? Shall we remain then in such condition? Shall we not betake ourselves, in deep humility, but in all child-like dependence, to Him? May we not look to His word, in the consciousness that light from Himself will shine in upon it? Surely we can. In such a condition of soul, then, let us pursue our inquiry into what is The Lord's Supper.

It may be helpful to arrange our thoughts under the following divisions:

l. Whom does the Lord invite as worthy partakers of the Supper?

2. Whom does He exclude?

3. What was the Lord’s intention respecting the Supper?

4. How often, and till what event, did He desire it to be celebrated?

I. Whom Does the Lord Invite as Worthy Partakers?

The communicants are spoken of in the 20th of Acts as being disciples of the Lord Jesus—“upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread.”

Again, in Acts 2, when many souls were converted by the preaching of Peter, you will find that they, the converts, they who were believers, “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in BREAKING OF BREAD, and in prayers.”

It is very important to notice the four things in which these young believers continued. They continued steadfastly—first, in the Apostles’ doctrine; that is the very foundation—nothing more or less than the truth to stand upon. I know nothing more interesting than to observe God’s order, even in the arrangement of details. It is not said that they continued steadfastly in prayer, breaking of bread, fellowship, and the Apostles’ doctrine. No; saints must first know the teaching of the Word of God—“the doctrine.” Other steps follow upon this.

Second, and fellowship—“They all were of one heart and soul.” Why should it not be so now? The hindrance, I need hardly say, is not in God; it is in ourselves. Depend upon it that those early saints entered practically into the “doctrine” of the oneness of the body, into which they were that day baptized by the Holy Ghost. Thus they “endeavored with lowliness, meekness, long-suffering, etc., to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” I am convinced that an energetic adherence to “the doctrine” today—such as God the Holy Ghost gives (I do not say man’s doctrines, but a cleaving to the word of God, respecting the mind of Christ, about the one body and the one Spirit), would induce most happy “fellowship” one with another: because all would in that way have “fellowship” with the exalted HEAD.

Thirdly, in breaking of bread; and fourthly, in prayers.

We see, then, from this scripture that those who broke bread who were, in Pentecostal times, partakers of the Lord’s Supper, were those who, through the preaching of the word applied to their hearts and consciences by the Holy Ghost, were brought to know Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

Constituted worthy by Him whose grace invited them, they “kept the feast”—they were obedient to their Lord. They broke bread in remembrance of One they knew and loved.

And if we look back to the original institution (Matt. 26), whom do we find gathered to that supper? The disciples—those who were attached to their Lord. They were those whom He had gathered to Himself apart from Judaism and outside of Paganism. At the time Christ came into the world there were two classes of individuals—Pagans or Gentiles, and Jews. From among the Jews the Lord Jesus had been pleased to gather round himself a handful whom He called His disciples. As to nature they were “children of wrath even as others”; but they were brought out of the position in which they stood naturally and religiously, and brought into connection with the Lord Jesus; and such were they whom He brought around Himself on that memorable night, and requested to eat bread and drink wine, then in His presence, and after He had left this world, in remembrance of him.

Without referring to any other scriptures, I think you and I must see, that the communicants are saved souls; and only such can enter into God’s thoughts about the value of Christ. We cannot be engaged with hearing and learning who He is, nor what the value of His work, till we have the knowledge in our souls—till faith is exercised in His own word—as to our own security. Hence the disciples (assembled with closed doors for fear of the Jews, John 20) were allowed by the Lord to look at “His hands and His side.” Very touching this! As if He had said, “See the everlasting marks, the unquestionable tokens of my love to you!” But when were they asked to remember the cross? After—mark this—after He had pronounced, “Peace be unto you.” He had already done that, by which He could eternally link believers with Himself and with His God and Father.

If God, who had Himself dealt with sin, in all its phases, through the innocent One,1 who was made sin, that we, the guilty, might become the righteousness of God in Him—I say if such was His God, so was He ours. “My God and your God.” His Father now became our Father . “Go and tell My brethren, that I ascend to My Father, and your Father; to My God, and your God.” Can you, beloved friends, listen to such gracious words from the lips of the risen Man, and not have the peace which, dying and rising, He secured? The fact is, that God, so to say, binds Himself now to glorify the Man, who was the only One that ever brought perpetual glory to Him, in the very scene in which man perpetually dishonored Him.

Hence, blessings “in Christ,” “through Christ,” and “with Christ,” are such as God can now impart, “according to the riches of His grace” (Eph. 1), in a manner suited to what is due to Christ. Nothing is now too much to be done to Him, whom God delights to honor. God, before the cross, could bless a nation, “according to the promises made to Abraham.” The same rebellious nation was saved from imminent judgment for Moses’ sake. But now, God hath blessed us with all spiritual (not earthly) blessings; in the heavenlies (not in Canaan); in Christ (not in Abraham).

And will any say that the Lord Jesus is not far more worthy than an Abraham or a Moses? The question is not, Are we more worthy than Abraham? If that were so, I for one should answer, certainly not. What a path of faith was his! What a path of failure ours! But CHRIST is now before God’s eye, and we are blessed in Him, and by Him, and with Him.

Now, when the soul learns to look out of wretched, doubting self and to look off unto Jesus, and to accept what God gives through Him, such a soul has peace; and such a person is a fit partaker of the Supper of the Lord. His blood, not our merits, gives the fitness.

In this day, when Christendom has done its worst to cover up this most blessed institution with all sorts of mysteries and superstition, it is well to see what is taught about it.

First of all, if the Supper were for the putting away of sins, how can it be called a “bloodless sacrifice,” as the Church of Rome says it is? If it were a bloodless sacrifice, it would be a sacrifice worth nothing; for the Scriptures tell us that “without shedding of blood there could be no remission” of sins.

To put away sin, blood must be shed. Therefore this bloodless sacrifice of Popery cannot be a sacrifice for sin. Some who speak strongly against the Church of Rome—and we cannot speak too strongly against it, however much we love the saints in it—but some who speak strongly against it, are not much more enlightened about the Lord’s Supper. In the Establishment it is called a “sacrament,” and so also in many dissenting associations. Need I tell you that “sacrament” is immediately derived from a Latin word, which means a soldier’s oath, and that the idea does not occur once in Scripture? Now, I maintain that the Lord Jesus never called upon His disciples to take any oath whatever. The Lord’s Supper, of which I am speaking, is not a sacrament; indeed, the Lord never intended it to be. There are some outside the Church of Rome who have come out from her , who teach concerning this institution that it is “a means of grace”—that we go to the Lord’s Supper in order to get blessing. Now, I do not say that it is not a place where God is pleased to bless His saints. On the contrary, there is nothing a saint may do, in faith and obedience, in which he does not get blessing. But this is not a prominent thought at all in the mind of the Lord Jesus in connection with this institution. Those who go to the Supper are really, distinctly, and absolutely, saved souls. In other words, those who have been blessed, and those who go to break bread and SHOW the Lord’s death, are those that know the value of His death; those that go to remember the Lord are those that know Him. We are never asked to remember a person we never knew; yet at the institution of the Supper, the Lord Jesus said, “This do in remembrance of ME.” If, then, it was for a remembrance, those who are to remember Him, surely must be those that have KNOWN Him. The idea, then, of going to the Lord’s Table with the view of being blessed, in getting sins forgiven, or indeed to have anything to do with sin, is against the Scriptural idea of the family feast—the Lord’s Supper. This cannot be laid down too strongly. The Lord’s Supper is a supper for believers; the communicants are those who are absolutely saved souls; who have come to God through Jesus, and have accepted the gift of God, eternal life in Christ; those whose sins have been put away by the sacrifice of Christ, and who are indwelt by the Holy Ghost; those who can sing—

Those who know without any doubt that “my beloved is mine and I am His”—those who can say with the Apostle John in Revelation, “Unto Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God, and His Father be glory”—those who are in that position and condition are such as should take the Supper. They are those of whom God says, “I have cast thy sins behind my back”; and again, “I, even I, am He, that blotteth out thy transgressions, for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.”

In other words, the communicants are members of the “one body.” A believer might refuse to take his place as a member of that body, and go on in his own self-will; but he is a member for all that; and he is constituted a communicant, a worthy partaker in the Lord’s mind; and should, as such, claim his place at the Lord’s Table.

2. Unbelievers Cannot Be Communicants

If the foregoing be the case, then, it must appear very clear to you that UNBELIEVERS CANNOT BE COMMUNICANTS; and if not, then, that which admits them cannot be the Lord’s Table: though some believers may join with them, they do not eat the Lord’s Supper.

Don’t you know of many who venture to approach, outwardly into the place of worshippers, who never passed the altar of burnt-offering? Will it be denied that some are allowed to be in company of those whose privilege it is to eat the “fatted calf,” who never received the pardoning kiss? Is it not known that these things are allowed? A few days ago, when remonstrating with a minister of the gospel about allowing unbelievers to go and take the “sacrament,” his reply was, “How are we to know them?” My heart sank at such an answer as that; I was grieved to hear such a reply. I turned rather sharply, I fear, upon that dear man, and asked him, “When the Apostle wrote, ‘Greet one another with an holy kiss,’ who were to be greeted? Was the holy kiss to be given to any one?” “Certainly not,” he replied; “it was to be given to the believers.” Well, if so, must they not have been known? The Apostle John says, “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.” Must they not have known the brethren in order to love them? At the time we read of, in Acts 2, when the disciples went from house to house2 breaking bread, and praising the Lord with one heart and one mind, did they not know one another? Surely they did! Such an answer as that, given by the Christian brother to whom I have alluded, shows what a perfect revolution has been brought about by Christendom, in its thoughts about this blessed institution of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is not for unbelievers; it is for those who are the Lord’s.3

Now (because the Holy Ghost is given to each member of the body, to kindle the most intense love to the Lord, and to each other), I should not be backward in speaking of the things of Christ to those I met at the Lord’s Supper. But is it true that all who profess to eat it know the Lord? Alas, for the answer. Just follow some, and speak to them, on the next day about the Lord Jesus; and they will tell you, “This is not the place, this is not the time for such conversation; the church is the place, and Sunday is the time to speak about such things.” In other words, they have no heart at all for the Person whom they said they went to remember on the day before. I should like to be shown one passage from the New Testament, which teaches or implies that any other than believers broke bread worthily or ate the Lord’s Supper. We know, as a historical fact, that the persecution, which followed believers in early days, who identified themselves with a rejected Lord—persecution frequently unto death—deterred any but His own from “breaking bread in remembrance of Him.”

The table of the Lord, then, is not for unbelievers; it is for believers only; the communicants are the members of “the body,” baptized into such by the Holy Ghost. Those that go to remember the Lord are such as know Him; and those who go to show His death are those that know the value of His death.

3. The Object Which Communicants Have in Coming Together to Break Bread

This object is fourfold—

(1) the showing or commemorating the Lord’s death;

(2) the remembrance of the Lord Himself;

(3) worship; and

(4) owning the oneness of the body.

1. Showing the Lord's death. The Apostle Paul, in 1 Cor. 11, says—"As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come."

I do not think that word DEATH is dwelt on enough. I would have put it in the largest letters I could find. Believers gathered to break bread are to show, to announce, to memorialize the Lord's death! And why His death? If you look back to the original institution of the Supper in Matthew 26—for such a thing did not exist before the Lord instituted it there—you will find that it was instituted on a very solemn occasion. On what occasion? The apostle in 1 Corinthians says it was "the same night." There is not an accidental word in Scripture, brethren; every word is essential; but why is it, that the Holy Ghost takes pains to say that it was "the same night?" A thousand precious recollections hang round that night; precious to us now, although the occurrences were deeply sorrowful, and deeply harrowing, at the time, to Him who instituted the Supper. It was the night "in which He was betrayed"; when He was come to give up His soul unto death: when He was about to accomplish that of which He had before said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" He was about to do that which filled His soul from all eternity. On the night in question the hour was come. Yes, that solemn hour—an hour to which the eternity that is past, if I may so speak, looked forward; and to which the one that is future will look back with the deepest interest. It was the hour when God was about to deal with sin, in the person of the sinless Substitute; when God was to be glorified, through Christ in man, who, in Adam and his posterity, had so thoroughly dishonored God. Man, I say, in Adam and all his descendants had insulted God, and acted shamelessly in this earth. Man, in the person of the Son of Man, God manifest in flesh—blessed forever! The Son of Man, I say, on that memorable night, had before His soul the immense barrier of separation between man and God, which He only could remove. Again, Satan was to be bruised; and, further, it was the hour when the Lord Jesus should die to purchase His bride. Christ dearly loved His church, and gave Himself for it; but the hour in which He did so, was an hour, of all others, deeply sorrowful to Him, yet full of joy withal. He knew what was before Him—the deep sorrow and the full cup of joy; for He knew that He was doing the will of His Father. He looked forward to the time when He should have, through all eternity, a church purchased by His blood. He knew, moreover , that the very nation at whose hands He was suffering, should need His sympathy in the hour of their calamity (Isa. 43). Further, as everything entrusted to man was spoiled in the using, so He knew that, for all things to be reconciled to God, it must be "by the blood of His cross" (Col. 1:20). With all this before him, and ten thousand times more than our poor hearts can understand, the Lord Jesus, on the "same night," instituted this Supper.

He also saw His own dear disciples who would forsake Him and flee; and, indeed, with reference to one, He had distinctly warned him, "Simon (Peter), behold Satan hath desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat, but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." (The Lord says He has prayed, not that Peter might not deny Him, but that He might not be given up to despair after he had denied Him.)

But further, the Lord Jesus looked forward, and knew what wrath awaited Him. Beloved, this is a solemn part of the subject. In the Garden of Gethsemane, under the very shadow of the cross, if I may so speak, the Lord Jesus, on that night, knew all that awaited Him; for although perfect man, He was also perfect God—wonderful mystery! There, in the shadow of the cross, He says—"My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." And, indeed, so great was His agony, that His sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground. You or I may put on a distressed expression of face, and appear to be in sorrow, although it be unreal, but when we read of the Lord Jesus being in an agony, we read what is true. He said what He meant; He meant what He said! He, indeed, was in an agony. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me!" What cup was that? The cup of the wrath of God—the cup which you and I filled to the very brim—which He, the innocent One, was to take for us the guilty ones, and drain to the dregs. He was perfectly innocent4—He was without sin, neither was guile found in His mouth. (I cannot lay too much stress upon these things, because there are persons, who take their filthy hands, and attempt to tarnish the Person of the spotless Lamb of God.) He it was who took the cup of the wrath of God, and drank it to the dregs. He knew all that He was to do and suffer. He knew that God was to hide His face from Him. He knew that before God could ever look with complacency upon His children, He must hide His face from Christ; that in order that we might be blessed, He must take the curse due unto us; that in order that we might be made righteous in Him, He must take the place of the sinner. In view of all this then, the Lord Jesus called the disciples aside, and instituted the Supper.

It was instituted on the night of the Jews' Passover. In Exodus 12 it is called Jehovah's Passover. In John 2 it is called the Passover of the Jews, and in Matthew 26, the Passover, the feast of the Jews. Why this difference? The difference is very great. That which Jehovah had instituted to be a very holy and solemn thing had dwindled down to that which the Jews took into their own hands, lowered, tarnished, and spoiled. That which was to commemorate the deliverance out of Egypt, the Jews made into a feast of their own; they lost sight of its original design; God was shut out from it. So the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, has been lowered, in many instances, into man's supper and man's table. I cannot speak too plainly upon this subject. I do not say at all, that everything I see today around me is man's table; for who am I to judge? But I am grieved to say, that in many cases, what the Holy Ghost says (in 1 Cor. 10:21, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils; ye cannot be partakers of the table of the Lord, and of the tables of devils") may be truly applied; substituting "tables of man" for tables of devils. Anything I spread, not on the ground of the one body, and which does not answer to the Lord's own institution, is not the Lord's Supper. If anything be the Lord's Supper, it must be that which answers to His own institution. I must embrace all believers, contemplate them all; take them all in; and we should be in fellowship with it; it must be that which shuts out all unbelievers. It must be that which contemplates all believers, and excludes every unbeliever, as having no part nor lot in the matter.

Now, beloved friends, it was His death He contemplated upon that night. The Jews, at Jehovah's Passover, were to remember the blood sprinkled upon the door-posts in Egypt, to save them from the destroying angel, when the Israelites were being delivered from Pharaoh. And what are we to show in the Lord's Supper? The death of the Lord by which we obtained eternal peace. Now, you and I ought to be deeply ashamed and grieved that that which is the remembrancer of the Lord's death has dwindled down to a mere "sacrament," or something else.

With whom are we linked up? We are linked up with a rejected Christ. It is not said that we are to show the Lord's resurrection. Surely we know He is risen from the dead, and is set down at God's right hand, to receive the reward of the work He has done. Every believer's life is safe, being as the Apostle says, "Hid with Christ in God." Moreover, none can rightly remember Him in His death, who know not, in some degree, the power of His resurrection.

The death of the Lord Jesus is that which cuts us off from this world, and from all which is not of Himself. Hence we are called upon to remember it in connection with One who has been rejected—One whom the world will not own at all; and whose Lordship many, alas! of His own blood-bought ones refuse practically to admit. When we rightly understand, beloved, what it is to show His death, can our wills be allowed to dictate? We break the bread, and what does it whisper into the spiritual ear? The Lord's body once broken, given. For what? Ay, who can give a full answer? Was it not to gather together in one the children of God scattered abroad? Then at the Supper divisions cease; no sects are known; no rivals claim. Was not His death that by which all my sins were forever washed away? Then my sins must have no place at His Table. Could greater proof of His love be afforded than in His death? Then what so calculated to draw out mine, as to be dwelling upon His in His death? But think of the manner of the love which could institute such a precious Supper, at such a time of sorrow to Himself! Yet again: the Apostle Paul, or rather the Holy Ghost, bids us while at the table not only to look back at the death of the Lord, but also to look forward to His coming—"Show ye the Lord's death till He come." Hence, at the table, we eat as those who may be in glory with Himself before next Lord's Day. How weaning, then, is the feast calculated to be when partaken intelligently!

We must not forget, however, that abundant blessings flow forth to them who, though they have very little intelligence as to these things, nevertheless eat bread and drink wine together in obedience to the word of our departed Lord—"This do in remembrance of Me."

I do not speak here of privilege, but of obedience. "Why call ye Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Is it because He is at present not seen by our eyes, that, therefore, there should be no loyalty of heart? It is amazing how little of true regard is paid by us to the word of our Lord. Truly may He ask us, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things that I say?" Thousands of believers, with not a few excuses, but with no good reason whatever, absent themselves from the table of the Lord. The veriest trifle, which would have no influence in keeping them away from business, or even from pleasure so-called, is made excuse enough for their remaining "at home." The loving heart hails the first day of the week, and cheerfully the obedient feet move towards the assembly of saints, who are gathered unto the name of Him who says, "This do in remembrance of Me."

In appearing at the table of the Lord once a week, the disciples of the Lord manifest, in His own appointed way and time, their loyalty to one whom the world cast out. In this, of which the religiousness of the world has been always ashamed, the followers of Jesus, as the despised Nazarite, glory. They remember Him, not in His resurrection, not in His glory, but in His death.5 Hence, moreover, the supper of the Lord stands forth as a silent condemnation to all who are not found owning Him; and, of course, to such as are ashamed to be identified with those who show His death till He come.

Now the Lord in His death cut Himself off from all that was of the old creation, and from all that was Jewish as to worship. Indeed, looking at His death as that in which man was the agent, we may say that natural men and religious men ("Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel") formed a confederacy for killing the Prince of Life, whom God raised from the dead. What depth of grace, beloved, do we behold in Him who has been pleased to call us out of the ranks of His enemies, to show His death! Of course nature and religiousness are opposed to Him still; consequently faithfulness in Him today will incur the hatred of His enemies. But what of that, my dear brethren? Would it not be our highest privilege even to die for such a One? Surely it would. This, however, He does not ask. O may His grace be afforded us, that we may not be ashamed to confess Him fully; that we may not shrink from taking up our cross and following Him.

In announcing His death, therefore, we are reminded that we too have died out of our "old Adam" condition; that we are in no way linked up with a religiousness that is of man; but that we are one with the Lord, who is risen out of it all.

2. There is another thing that we do in the breaking of bread—we do it in remembrance of the Lord Himself. We not only show His death, but we remember HIMSELF. Could you have affection more strong and touching than His? A person says to a friend, "I will give you a ring to put on, and when you look at it, think of me." Many friends may be very dear to us, and we would almost worship them, so long as we could see them; but when they go away from us, we forget them. Now, the blessed Lord well knew the thousand things that might so attract our hearts as to cause us, in a measure, to forget Him. Hence He designed to institute this feast as a remembrancer of Himself.

Looked at from this point of view , we see no superstitious mysteries attaching to the Lord's Supper; we see no need for any oath-taking (sacrament) process; we behold no barrier in the way of those present being fully engaged in soul, mind, and conscience, with the Person of Christ; and if so, there would be abundance of worship.

I know that the word is applied to meetings such as preaching the gospel, etc.; and I know that the great majority of Christians do so; but, beloved brethren, it is a false humility that accepts ideas, because large numbers of our forefathers taught them, when the word of God explicitly teaches the contrary. (Martin Luther was right in mooting the long-lost truth of justification by faith. But do we not know that he stood alone with the word of God while hundreds of monks, with their traditions, opposed him?)

Now, worship is the spiritual act of believers, in which, by the power of the Holy Ghost, they offer to God spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to Him through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2).

Worship is the proper occupation of a saved soul with Christ, and supposes:

(a) The reception of the "gift of God" (John 4:10), "If thou knewest the gift of God." Here is no legality at all; no carnal preparations. No; the question is, Do you know the free-giving of God? Do you know Him as the one full of grace and mercy to a poor world, who, for the sake of His beloved Son, gives eternal life to all who believe? Have you peace in your own soul with Him? else you cannot worship.

(b) "And WHO it is that saith unto thee," etc. Before the Lord could talk to the woman about worship she needed to know God as a giver, and further, to know CHRIST.

The worshipper under the Jewish economy had this in type in the altar of burnt-offerings, which was the first object he encountered at the entrance to the holy place. We (Christians) have boldness to enter in as worshippers through the blood of Jesus. It is our security; His name our passport. Indeed, the Apostle (in Heb. 10) exhorts us to "draw near," because we have "an high-priest over the house of God."

The Lord Jesus is that high-priest. And He is such over “the house of God” inhabited by the Holy Ghost, in contrast to Moses’ house (Heb. 3), where God was never revealed as the “Father,” who seeketh such (spiritual worshippers) to worship Him.

To be a spiritual worshipper, then, I must believe God as to my place and standing before God “in Christ” (Eph. 1); that I am “accepted in the beloved, in whom we have redemption through His blood the forgiveness of sins.” Being in Him, I am clean delivered from the law of sin and death (Rom. 8). His preciousness (1 Peter 2) God counts to me. O may we learn more of what it is to be in Christ! I do not wonder that many believers, who are ignorant of the complete salvation wrought out for them by the death of the Lord Jesus, are still beset with doubts and misgivings, and, therefore, are not free to worship.

(c) There is a third qualification for a true worshipper. He must be indwelt by the Holy Ghost. The Lord evidently referred to Him in His conversation with the woman, when He told her about the living water which He would give her. (Compare John 4:10; 7:38-39.) We find in these three qualifications the diagnostic marks of a Christian. I do not say a saint—for such were all believers who lived before Pentecost—I say a Christian. I am aware that to many this is a strange bit of news; but if it be true, its strangeness must lie at our own doors, and not to vagueness of expression in the word of God.

A Christian, then, is one who knows God as the free-giving God; Christ as his peace; and is indwelt by the Holy Ghost; and such is sought by the Father as a worshipper.6

The worshippers are separated people, sanctified to God. They can truly say, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in the wicked one” (1 John 5:19). It is God who in His rich grace has made the “difference between” that “we” and the “world” (see Ex. 11:7).

A false humility, if not the veriest unbelief, will prefer “not to be quite sure.” Faith’s language is, “We know.” And further, “we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him, that is true (even) in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life” (verse 20).

None can worship that cannot adopt such language; all should who can. I said before, that while worship may be the occupation of saints very frequently, although they only break bread once a week, yet that it was a very prominent feature of the feast of the Lord’s Supper. When He instituted the Supper He “gave thanks” (Matt. 26:26). It is not said that He blessed the bread, but He gave thanks (the margin is said to be right). (See Mark 14:22-23; Luke 20:11, 19; 1 Cor. 11:24.) Many, ignorant of the nature of the Supper, “bless the elements.” But what have not tradition, superstition, and ignorance led to? The Lord is truly very gracious in bearing with us so long and tenderly. May the result of our “inquiry” be to find us in fellowship with Him about His Supper!

To return. The Lord’s Table is a place for solemn, holy, spiritual joy. If the design were otherwise, sorrow would have filled the assembly on the night that the Lord instituted the Supper.

Who can fathom the depths of grief into which His soul was sunk on that memorable night? Who but Himself knew the bitterness of the cup of wrath which awaited Him?

Did He not know that Peter would deny Him? Think you that it cost Him no pang, when all the disciples forsook Him and fled? Was it nothing to the Son of God that His own creatures should as dogs howl at Him, and as bulls of Bashan beset Him round about? (Psa. 22). As to Israel, the nation to whom He came, see how, in their chief priests and rulers, they cast Him out: and say, “Was there ever sorrow like unto His sorrow?” Above all, He was soon to be forsaken of God (Matt. 27:46).

Yet after the Passover with His disciples, on creating this new feast, “He gave thanks.”7 Yes; there were the unquenchable flames of love within His own bosom, which all the storms of Satan and the malice of wicked men failed to reach: they burned on that occasion without a flicker. High above these strata of sorrow were plateaus of verdure that delighted His heart. He rose superior to His griefs: He unselfishly (dear His name!) looked forward to the blessings to flow from His death. Hence, “for the joy that was set before Him, He endured the cross, despising the shame.” He could find a joy even in the sufferings which awaited Him: hence “He gave thanks.”

To bring then, our sins, our failures, our sorrows, our cares to the table of the Lord, would be to dishonor Him: through Him the Father can say, “Let us make merry and be glad.” Surely it is to Him that we should carry our sins, failures, etc.; but the time for them is not the Supper-time, nor the place the Lord’s-table. It is the time and place for worship, adoration, giving of thanks, and praise.

Indeed, what circumstance is there more calculated to elicit our praises as the showing the Lord’s death—remembering Him?

Are we then reminded that by His death we live? Then, at the Table, we praise the life-giver. Was it the Father—our Father—who gave Him to die? Then we bless “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Is it the Holy Ghost that brings to our souls a vivid remembrance of Him whose love was stronger than death? Then we ascribe praise for the Holy Ghost, who takes of the things of Christ and reveals them unto us.

Of course, much may be done to favor, to feed, worship, at the Supper. But all the meeting should tend that way. One brother present, for instance, may open the meeting with a portion of the Word or a hymn, etc., relating to the person or work of Christ. If he be subject to the Holy Ghost, it will be the key-note of the praises of the assembly; and will, therefore, commend itself to all the spiritual.

Another (or the same one) may engage in leading the expressions of praises; while another may read another portion, give out a hymn, and so on (1 Cor. 14); but the tendency , I say, is towards worship—giving of His own, to God and to the Lord Jesus, who supplied that which hearts, bubbling over, return to Himself.

Here let me venture a remark on Exodus 12:8—“unleavened bread” and the “bitter herbs.”

The paschal lamb, “roasted with fire”—type of the wrath endured by our Lord—caused joy to every Israelite; but when eaten it was to be with “unleavened bread and with bitter herbs.”

So at the Lord's Supper, no leaven (evil) is to be allowed; there is not to be found the least degree of unholiness. Indeed, how could it be, in the presence of that which reminds us of God's righteous judgment on sin? "For Christ, our passover, is sacrificed for us." I believe, too, that while a holy, consistent, spiritual walk is essential to the partaking worthily of the Lord's Supper, the believer who thus partakes is strengthened for practical holiness. The two are made to react upon each other.

The "unleavened bread," then, suggests mora1 fitness in the believer, and supposes self-judgment. An Israelite ate the Passover, and every believer may partake of the Supper; but leaven was to be excluded by the one, and every impurity of mind and life is to be judged by the other.

But what do we learn about the "bitter herbs"?—A very solemn truth. Herbs with meat are not food; but they impart their savor to the food.

Those taken at the paschal feast were to be "bitter."

Are our spirits subdued as we meditate at the table upon the sufferings of Christ?

Do we seek to realize anything of the cost to the Lord of our place of blessing?

Do not tell me about the shedding of tears on such an occasion; I ask whether the soul lingers at the scene of suffering, while we remember the Lord as the One that died. If not, do meditate upon the significance of the "bitter herbs."

It is only when these two things are strictly observed, namely, practical holiness daily, and a broken, chastened spirit at the table, that the soul can truly contemplate Christ, and so truly worship Him. Many beautiful examples of worship are given in the Word of God—

(a) In Deuteronomy 26, a man in the land of Canaan is to carry his basket full of first-fruits to God, and worship before the Lord his God (vv. 2, 10).

Then we learn respecting worship—

l. It is by one in Canaan, not in Egypt. Answering to this is the heavenly position now before God in Christ of every true believer (Eph. 1). A Christian worshipper today must be a believer.

2. Every one in the land was to present his basket of first-fruits. Every believer today should be a spiritual worshipper.

3. He went as a giver; and his was to be a basket full. The Lord is pleased to say, "Whoso offereth praise glorifieth Me" (Psa. 1:23). How condescending to place us in the position of givers! Such is His grace.

4. The basket was to be a full one. For this, I judge, there was a constant gathering up. How blessed it would be if, all the week through, we were so dwelling in the presence of God, so delighting in Himself, so learning of Him from His Word, as to have a full (how large?) heart of praise and worship, to offer to God on the first day of the week, as we are gathered to break bread in remembrance of Him [The Lord.—ED.]

5. It was, moreover, a basket full of first-fruits. The youngest believer should be an instantaneous worshipper.

(b) Look at the leper (Luke 17:17). When he found that he was healed, he turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God. Gratitude filled his heart. He "gave thanks."

(c) From John 12 we may learn how much beyond service the Lord estimates the adoration of His person. Many of us today, alas! reverse this, and indulge the vanity of Judas, rather than the humble, quiet worship of the woman. Am I, by this remark, to be accused of finding fault with service? Nothing is farther from my thoughts. Would to God that all of His dear saints could be less busy with each other's failures, and with plans of self-indulgence, so as to be freer for His use in various departments! But the fact is that even our service may revolve around our insignificant selves, and be in the Lord's sight worthless. (I have frequently wondered, if we could carry our memoranda of service with us to the judgment-seat (2 Cor. 5), how many of our jottings would stand.) On the other hand true worship leaves the mind with such an exalted sense of God's majesty that abhorrence of self is the result; and such is just the condition of vessel the Lord can use (Judges 7:16; 2 Cor. 4:7). The woman was endeavoring to show her admiration of the Lord's blessed person; and when Judas found fault, the Lord said "Let her alone." So, beloved, we may also see here that when by illness we are laid aside and cannot serve actively, we may worship and adore One who observes the simplest outflow of affection for Himself. Is there any one in heaven or earth so precious as He?

(d) Have you never been struck with John's conduct in the Isle of Patmos? Just observe him. Turn to Revelation 1. From verse 1 to the middle of verse 5 he is narrating—"And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth."

Properly speaking, the narrative continues in verse 7, "Behold He cometh with clouds," etc. Intermediately there is a parenthesis. Then why the sudden halt in verse 5? We notice the eye turned away from the "seven assemblies" (ἐκκλησίαις) towards "Him that loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood."

Why, have you never suddenly stopped on your way to admire an attractive object which unexpectedly presented itself to your gaze? Yes, you have.

Well, the most lovely object of Heaven presented Himself to John's mind at the mention of His name; and straightway he uttered his "Selah." He halted and worshipped—"To Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." He could not help himself.

Numerous similar examples are found scattered in Paul's writings (Rom. 11:33-36; Eph. 1:3; 1 Tim. 6:16).

(e) I will cite just one more passage (Rev. 5:12-14) for it is very suggestive. (I may say that the best critics omit the last seven words of verse 14.) Now, we gather from this Scripture that worship may either be attended with utterance of the lips, as in verse 12, where the crowned elders said, with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb,” etc.; or worship may be silent, as in verse 14, where, after the “Amen” by the “living creatures,” the elders merely “fell down and worshiped.”

I have frequently wondered why saints at worship meetings sing as if they were afraid to let their voices be heard. The elders say with a loud voice. But I prefer to judge myself, for the very little silent, quiet worship paid by delightful opportunities for the very little silent, quiet worship paid by my soul at such meetings. The quiet pauses at worship meetings are delightful opportunities for discharging the full baskets. I think I should say that nothing is more indicative of the paucity of worship as when brethren are seen turning over leaves of books, staring about, and acting as if there was no divine power for contemplating the glories of the person of Christ.

Is it not because we are in His presence so little? Is it not because we do not fill our baskets during the week? We must not wait till the Lord’s Day to fill our baskets. That must be a poor, barren meeting, as far as worship is concerned, when we do so.

There needs, therefore, much self-judgment while we sit at the table. It may be nothing but nature desiring to be heard that leads me to announce my favorite hymn or chapter, or to indulge “a speech” in public praise. A natural disposition, I say, may prompt this. Such is not spiritual worship; self is unbridled.

On the other hand, a natural timidity or nervousness, or fear of being found fault with, may keep me silent, when the mind of the Holy Ghost was towards my utterance. This, too, is unjudged nature. Yet, again, a false notion to please lookers-on may induce me to break the solemn silence of the worshippers, and so to keep up a sort of excitement. I need to be at Gilgal. I require the “bitter herbs.” Thus we need to be very much in the presence of God where alone self is displaced, ere we can be true spiritual worshippers. (How gracious of our Lord to bear with our failures in this respect.)

Let us not forget that, although He who seeks worshippers is our “Father,” yet that “God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Falseness may escape detection by our brethren; but He looks for “truth in the inward parts”; and however much we estimate our own acts, He who is sole judge values them according to His estimate.

If the worship be in Christ, such as the Spirit of God prompts, well; else it is only so much shadow to Him; and utterly void of substance, is regarded as worthless. (If these suggestions be Scriptural I need hardly say that they stand in wide contrast to much that is called “worship” among the Ritualists, etc., now-a-days.) May nothing short of spiritual worship be yielded, henceforth by every one of us, beloved brethren. If any are found identified with what the Word condemns, may grace be afforded us to quit it instantly whatever the cost.

What Christian, who is subject to the Lord, can, in the face of such Divine truth, uttered by God Himself in the person of Christ, sanction by his presence that which is neither purely Jewish nor purely Christian? I desire every Christian reader to weigh this question with all humility in the presence of God.

4. Besides celebrating the death of the Lord, remembering Himself, and worshipping; do we not find another object in the Supper? Is it not to manifest the oneness of the body? I think so. Let us see. In 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, this idea seems to be fairly deduced, as we read, “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, being many, are one bread (or one loaf) and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread (or loaf). We saw on a previous occasion that the Lord always contemplated “one body,” “one assembly.” And this should be expressed in the one unbroken loaf set upon the table, afterwards broken and divided among the gathered saints.

(1.) A table spread on any other basis than that of God’s assembly is sectarian, and therefore has no claims on the godly.

To be more explicit, let us suppose that all of us in this room now, who are believers should agree to break bread tonight, and should spread the table for ourselves only, without providing, according to the Scriptures, for all the “approved” saints. Then we might “break bread”; but it would be our own, and not the Lord’s supper; for the Lord’s Supper contemplates all the members of the “one body.”

Again, contemplate any society of Christians meeting as a society, subject to regulations arranged among themselves, and to which all the members are agreed. Let such meet as a society to break bread. Then, I say, from 1 Corinthians 10 and 11, they eat a Society’s supper, and not the Lord’s, although they attach, with the most pious motives, His name to their feast.

Differently constituted as our several minds are, we cannot be unanimous in accepting plans suggested by each other. Hence, when such plans are forced there must be divisions. And this is just what the Apostle tells us in the portion before us. “There must be heresies (a heretic is one with an unsubdued will; this, indulged, leads to schism), that they which are approved may be made manifest” (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

But let all, with broken wills (“spirit of meekness”) be subject to the same LORD, be directed by the same SPIRIT, from the same Divine book, and can you expect schism in such a case?

However, in this day of abundant heresy (self-will which leads to false doctrines and divisions), we need to search diligently for our path.

Beloved brethren, I hesitate not to say that such a search is not very easy. But the very difficulty of it should lead us in all meekness and self-abnegation to Him who can conduct us along “a way which no fowl knoweth, which the vulture’s eye hath not seen: the lion’s whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it” (Job 28:7-8; Psa. 107:7).

I say nothing here of societies that knowingly admit unbelievers to their communion. I confess to be no little surprised at any godly saint being in fellowship with such. The difficulty we have to encounter is with companies of Christians, real believers, who themselves endeavor to exclude, as far as they can judge unconverted persons. One of the tests is given in the Scripture before us. I should therefore inquire, Are you gathered on the principle of the one body? That is, could every true believer, every godly saint, be gathered with you according to the Word of God? Or are you gathered around a minister, a doctrine, or a few doctrines?

(2.) Again, to be an expression of the “one body,” for there to be communion of the body of Christ, there needs to be a oneness of judgment as to the Divine and spotless person of Christ the Head.

“No man, speaking by the Spirit of God, calleth Jesus accursed” (1 Cor. 12:3). Therefore that cannot answer to the manifestation of the “one body,” which allows of evil teaching respecting the Lord Jesus: for it must not be forgotten that it is the presence of the Holy Ghost which constitutes the one Body; and He never sanctions anything derogatory to the Lord. But some may ask, Who are to be the judges of the doctrine? To such I reply, Take heed of the spirit which prompted the question. Am I to infer that any teaching may be allowed in an assembly without being challenged? The Holy Ghost gives a standard in the text I last quoted, and the godly must compare with it. Has it come to pass that saints of God are to be less careful of what is taught about the person of Christ than they are about doctrines, which, in their opinion, more directly concern their safety? How quickly, for instance, would the statement be challenged that if a believer died without partaking of this Holy Eucharist he would be lost? Yet many pass heedlessly on, as if they were perfectly indifferent to any heresy respecting the person of the Lord. I say, therefore, that that cannot be the expression of the “one body” of Christ, where evil doctrines as to His Divine person are persistently held and taught.

It is perhaps necessary that I should call special attention to these remarks, for there are not a few assemblies that at first sight seem to be the perfect model of what answers to an expression of the “one body,” and saints unwittingly have fellowship with them.

But other difficulties present themselves. In the same place there may be two or three assemblies, ostensibly gathered on the same ground, and yet not in fellowship with each other. What then! (May the Lord Himself teach us, in all our difficulties, to lean on His unerring wisdom.) Am I to choose that at which there is most teaching? Shall that in which there is the most love attract me, or shall I rather identify myself with that which receives every and any one on his own testimony? Respecting the last, let us bear in mind that even Paul the Apostle was not received into the fellowship of the Jerusalem brethren till Barnabas took him by the hand, till he was introduced (Acts 9:26). If godly care is not thus exercised, who then might not sit at the table? I should certainly refuse on this principle to break bread with such a gathering.

As to a second having “very loving and dear saints at it,” I rejoice before the Lord when saints love one another. Would that we dwelt more in company of Him whose name is Love, that so we might love each other more! But alas! that that external appearance, very pleasing to nature, should attract so many. In dealing with the things of God I need an exercised conscience besides a loving heart. Now, CHRIST, and not “loving saints,” is God’s Divine center for rallying His saints. Hence, if He be not implicitly submitted to, such a gathering has no claims on me, though there were never so much love.

True love must be “in the Spirit,” not in the flesh. However, at love I am not to look, nor must I be discouraged if I do not find it. This I believe, that those who love most are least loved (2 Cor. 12:15).

Lastly, beautiful teaching is obtained “at a third gathering.” Granted. But I repeat that CHRIST and not doctrines is the center of gathering.

Better be in fellowship with a “feeble folk,” who are gathered on Divine principles, than be where there is “much teaching” with much human will. Alas! that not a few are merely attached by teaching.

Supposing I find some who are gathered in the unity of the Spirit, refusing in every way association with moral and doctrinal evil: then let us thank God for such; and follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them (2 Tim. 2). With such I would break bread by all means. Indeed I would claim my place at the Lord’s Table with them; and if the saints are godly they would not refuse me—if my confession and walk be for Christ.

Judging from the case of Paul, already referred to, it would seem to be the more godly way that two or more at the table, who know any godly believer desiring to have communion with them at the Lord’s Supper, and in whose judgment their brethren had confidence; I say that it seems a happy way for such to commend the believer to the gathering. No test seems Scriptural but the one confession of the Christ of God. The gathering, on such recommendation of two or three witnesses, should “receive him to the glory of God.”8

If he be ignorant, the Holy Ghost can instruct him, and hence his ignorance should be no barrier to his reception; on the contrary, those who commend him should feel a special care for him, helping him on in divine things in the name of the Lord. In fact, I am not aware of anything, but immoral walk, or a tenacious adherence to heretical doctrines, that should exclude any believer from the Lord’s table;9 do you? Then why are you all not at it? If He graciously invite you is it humility to refuse? The contrary is the fact. Let us take care that pride, or selfishness, or a shrinking from the cross, is not the hindrance.

THE LORD’S TABLE, THEN, IS LARGE ENOUGH FOR ALL HIS SAINTS, AND IS AN EXPRESSION OF THE ONE BODY; BUT AT ITS NARROW ENTRANCE IS WRITTEN IN LARGE LETTERS, “HOLINESS BECOMETH THINE HOUSE, O LORD, FOREVER” (Psa. 93:5).

May our spiritual condition correspond daily with our ecclesiastical position.

It may be asked, why be so very particular? The reason is on the surface—IT IS THE TABLE OF THE LORD. “Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I” (Matt. 18:20). Of course I see no occasion with Rome for deducing transubstantiation, nor with Luther for consubstantiation, from this. I argue not on the statement. It is enough for faith that the Lord is to be owned, as present with His gathered saints, according to His word. And by the power of the Holy Ghost, too, sweet communion—“a blessed antepast of heaven” is enjoyed by the soul in His presence in a very special way. May we know still more of this; and may large numbers of our dear brethren, who deny themselves the privilege, be drawn to share the joy of such as revel in “fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.”

4. How Often and Until What Event?

Having endeavored to show who are the partakers of the Lord’s Supper, and who are excluded, and what is the design of the feast—let us notice, and very briefly, how often, and till what event, the feast should be commemorated.

Consistently with the principle of law, Jehovah enjoined on Israel the keeping of the Passover once a year. In keeping with the dealings of God in grace with us now, the Lord fixes no definite periods by an enactment in so many words. But let me say, once for all, that a distinct intimation of His mind is, or ought to be, quite enough for a child of grace; and respecting the Supper such intimation is not lacking.

There were “yet many things” which the Lord would have said to His disciples, if they could bear them (John 16:12). Howbeit the Spirit of truth, given after His ascension, was to guide them into all truth.

It is our wisdom, therefore, to see His will where it is expressed in the Gospels; then to look in the Acts of the Apostles for the way it was carried out, as in the Epistles for the interpretation of the Acts.

(A) How Often?

(1) Before the Lord’s crucifixion, He said to His disciples, “Do this as often ... in remembrance of Me.” The point there, I judge, is, not the time but the object of the Supper is contemplated.

Yet it would appear, that those who are willing to think of HIM in His death would, from this Scripture, see their privilege of celebrating the Supper frequently. I say privilege, and a blessed privilege it is. And doubtless we would see this the more were we less engaged with ourselves. To be looking in at self, enshrouded with doubts as to our acceptance “in the Beloved,” is a fruitful source of legality respecting the Lord’s Supper. So, again, when we habitually permit worldliness, bad tempers, evil thoughts, etc., it becomes us to own them to God. In such case it is occupation with our doubts, or with our failures; and hence we are not free to be engaged with Christ. I repeat, therefore, that were we less engaged with self, we would be freer to eat the Lord’s Supper more often.

The Lord, then, before His death did not say how often, but intimated freedom to eat the Supper as frequently as the disciples could have communion in spirit with Himself.

(2) Consistently with this, we find the disciples, after the Lord’s ascension, and after the descent of the Holy Ghost, “continuing daily (or every day) with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house” (or rather in the house, at home, not in the temple), etc.

It appears, from this Scripture, that the disciples soon after Pentecost broke bread DAILY.

(3) The Lord ‘s Day, or first day of the week (our Sunday) seems to have been specially honored by the Lord Jesus as His resurrection-day. It is called (Rev. 1) “the Lord’s Day (κυριακή ήμερα) The same word, κυριακον, 1 Corinthians 11:20, is used for the Lord’s supper. It is not a common day in the one case, nor a common meal in the other, but the Lord’s Day and the Lord’s Supper, a very distinct and different day from the seventh or the Sabbath (our Saturday), observed by the Jews. Now it was on this day, the first day of the week, the Lord’s Day (our Sunday) that the Lord appeared to the assembled disciples, spoke peace to them, and showed them His hands and His side (John 20). More than this. The day was not only thus honored as the Lord’s, and therefore full of privilege for His saints, but He positively “broke bread” with two of His disciples (Luke 24:30) on the “first day of the week.”

Lastly, we find the special vessel of the church’s testimony—I mean the Apostle Paul—in the midst with the disciples, who “came together to break bread” upon the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).

I conclude, therefore, that the proper time for celebrating the Lord’s Supper is every first day of the week—not once a month nor once a year, but once a week, and that on the Lord’s Day.

I should like to add a remark or two in this place.

(1) The chief aim of saints, when assembled on the Lord’s Day, should be to break bread. If this be lost sight of, then many will go away disappointed if no word of edification or exhortation be spoken.

I believe that when the object of the meeting is held prominently before the soul there will not be the delaying to break the bread; it will be done at an early portion of the meeting. Of course the laying down of plans might reduce this blessed feast to the merest routine, and quench the action of the Spirit of God. On the other hand, if the mind be not correctly instructed, the merest superstition will be interpreted as the guidance of the Holy Ghost. Spiritual walk and much self-abnegation are needed for recognizing what is of the Holy Ghost and what is of nature.

(2) There may be, however, if there be present any whom the Holy Ghost can use, a word of edification or exhortation, etc., spoken, as in the case referred to. Paul, a servant of God, present with the disciples, discoursed to them. But the disciples, remember, did not assemble to hear Paul preach. The word is distinct enough—“Came together to break (or with the object of breaking) bread.” It seems also, from this passage cited, that the discourse was subsequent to the Supper.

Sometimes we have to regret that some intrude their speeches upon us, whom a little more modesty might suggest to be silent; and many are silent whom a little fear hinders from being used; and we ourselves are prejudiced for or against, and thus may be losers. But such are our failures, and do not touch the Divine principles which we have been seeking to enunciate.

Let them cast us upon Him, who values the motives of honest and sincere hearts, even when our actions are truly humbling. Better go on, however, in the most abject weakness, ay, even with failures, than resort to human expediency, which would be rebellion (read Ex. 32:1; 1 Sam. 8:5).

(B) Till What Event?

How cheering to the loving heart it is to be reminded at the Supper that another first day of the week may find all the saints of God together in glory with the Lord! Do you not observe that, in 1 Corinthians 11:26, not a shadow is allowed to obstruct our proper and proximate hope?

Shall we make plans for carrying on our cause? No; the Lord is coming. Shall we remain away from the Table on the slightest pretenses for another week? No; for “the Lord is at hand.” Need we allow the present ruinous appearance (to us) of the church, to cause faint-heartedness, and thus relax our testimony to His grace? Certainly not; for the same Lord who permits us to look back at the cross, while we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, bids us look forward to His coming—“Behold, I come quickly.”

Here saints are shy of each other; here they misunderstand one another; here they are so divided that very few indeed in any one place are gathered together at the Supper. Frequently the godly mourn over it, knowing that they will never in the earth meet in any place all the saints. But is there no cheering beam of comfort? Shall we all never meet together? Oh yes! we shall. And not only we of this generation, but all the saints from Adam. And we shall see, too, the holy apostles, prophets, martyrs, and others who ate of the same Supper 1800 years ago, of which we now partake. Paul will be there, and “the woman of the city.” and the Samaritan woman, and John, and all whom now we know, and yet so little love. Oh, what a meeting will that be!

But, beloved brethren, we shall see in brightest glory the One who condescends to invite you and me to show His death, “till He come.” “The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout ... the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain (till the coming) shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we be ever with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.”

How vast is the field for contemplation, as we, from God’s Divine stand-point, gaze upon the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s Table!

I trust it will be borne in mind that it is a search for truth from the Scriptures which has been engaging us, and not a review of men’s thoughts nor of men’s acts. I have been endeavoring not to deduce a system of thoughts from the practice of saints, but, on the contrary , to see that our conduct should be according to the Divine standard.

I trust the Lord will graciously help us to reject whatever I have said that is not of Himself; supply to us all which in this inquiry is deficient; and grant special grace to all of us to live out practically, at all costs to ourselves, whatever we discover to be His mind, for His own glory. Amen.

Synopsis

1. The Lord’s Supper is for all His saints. Every believer, spiritual in walk10 and doctrine, is constituted a worthy partaker by the LORD HIMSELF:

2. That is not the Lord’s Table which admits persons who are not of the family; known and recognized as such by the godly; nor has that any claim on the Spiritual which is in fellowship, directly or indirectly, with anything derogatory to the spotless person of Christ; or which, as an independent meeting, disowns the “one body”:

3. Where there is the Table of the Lord in any place, there all the godly should be assembled to eat the Lord’s Supper; each should claim his place at the Table:

4. The design of the Supper is for the saints—

(a) To celebrate the Lord’s death,

(b) To remember Himself,

(c) To worship (as priests),

(d) To manifest the “one body”:

5. The Scriptural warrant respecting the frequency of the meeting for breaking bread is ONCE A WEEK at least, and that on the Lord ’s Day—the resurrection day:

6. It being a fact that the Holy Ghost is now in the assembly to conduct its meeting at the Lord’s Supper, saints should, in subjection to Him, and in much self-judgment, assemble for the Supper, however feeble they may be, without any reference whatever to human presidency or carnal arrangements.

7. The Assembly is to eat the Supper, as waiting for the return of the Lord—“till He come.”

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