

The Lord's Supper

(1 Cor. 11: 20)

The subject on which I have to speak to you to-night is one that concerns not you only, but the Lord: and this emphatically so. I shall have to treat, on another occasion D.V., of another theme, which no less concerns the Lord, and the Lord primarily, not merely Christians. Indeed it is remarkable that these are the only two applications of a special word that the Spirit of God has employed in the New Testament. It is not every scholar has taken note of, or given just importance to, the fact that the breaking of bread and the first day of the week are each called, κυριακός, and these only. The Lord's "table" even has not the same form of expression; and I have no doubt there is divine wisdom in thus making a difference, however slight it may seem. The Lord's Supper has for its central truth His death, the Lord's day His resurrection. In both cases, the grand point is that each is sacred to the Lord, belonging to Him in a special way -- not merely in a general one, but so strictly that the Spirit of God employs for them a term He uses nowhere else. One might show a reason for this change of word. It is not unimportant for us to observe it; for it is our wisdom to learn of Him through His word. I dare say many may think this trivial enough; but there is a power in the actual words used by the Spirit of God that will be found to abide when all mere feelings on the one hand, and reasonings on the other, melt away, so that nothing but what is divine may govern the believer's heart and mind.

The Lord's Supper differs from the other standing institution of Christianity in this, that while baptism is essentially individual, the breaking of bread is distinctively congregational. Individuality of enjoyment is not at all the thought in the Supper, but rather communion. There is in Christianity the utmost moment and scope given to that which is individual; and we need this, for it is the first thing for both God and man, and should take precedence of all else. That soul is never right which loses itself in a crowd. The first thing needed is that the soul should be set right with the Lord by His grace.

Baptism being an individual thing, in it each soul is said to put on Christ as the sign of His death; for "as many as were baptized unto Jesus Christ were baptized unto His death." Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism unto death." Burial unto His death -- that is the thought; but it is individual,

even if ever so many were baptized at the same time. There is no such thing as fellowship with one another in baptism. Baptism by proxy is a simple absurdity, if not worse. Christian baptism is the confession of Christ's death. There the soul is brought under solemn responsibility, though immense privilege too, because he that is so baptized is bound to walk as one alive from the dead; but this has nothing to do with others -- it is one's own responsibility, and is entirely independent of association with them.

In the Lord's Supper it is another thing altogether. 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 continually pressed as a doctrine. There is no such thing in Scripture, or in the sense 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 whole force and blessedness of the Lord's Supper consists in this, not only that it is essentially an act in common, but that it is based on the truth of the one body of Christ. Being the expression of our common worship of Christ, anything that does not leave full room for every member of His body, walking as such, destroys (as far as it goes) the aim and character of the Lord's Supper. Not, of course, that even in each city all could eat together in one spot; but, let them eat in ever so many, it was to be on the same ground, and in real intercommunion. The very principle of it embraces the saints walking as such in the whole world: whatever does not is not the Lord's Supper.

There is another remark I have to make. Not only was Christian baptism liable to be perverted (and every Christian will allow that this has been the case far and wide in Christendom), but the Lord's Supper was even more liable to misuse. Whether Christian baptism was or was not perverted in apostolic times, I do not now take up: but it is certain that the Lord's Supper was almost immediately. It was the more exposed to have its character forgotten and misrepresented, because it is a matter of spiritual fellowship. The First Epistle to the Corinthians testifies to this. Even in apostolic times the Spirit of God has recorded it plainly, full of shame and sorrow though it be. How great the humiliation, and how deep the grief, for the apostle to expose it! for what was their fault but the common shame and sorrow of all? "Whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. "It is not merely that they ought to suffer, but it is supposed they do. But though to write the eleventh chapter of 1st Corinthians was to spread and even perpetuate the bad tidings, the Spirit of God felt it necessary for their good and the welfare of all the assembly.

This sad failure must be fairly laid before them, and now left on the pages of divine inspiration for our admonition and the instruction of all afterwards who value the mind and will of God

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 see their brethren together, and then partook together 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 it not so at the last passover?

I dare say 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 much higher sense of it than many who love to speak of their faults. Nevertheless their low spiritual state exposed them to evil and error; and this very effect not being corrected in the Spirit brought out their fleshly state. There was levity among them, a low moral condition. At these love-feasts they each brought their fare as at the convivial feast (or *ἑρᾶνος*) 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 to bring! Thus the effect of their coming together to have these feasts was that selfishness, not love, characterized them. Those who had plenty soon proved how easy it is to have too much; those who were poor were made to feel it on these occasions. Thus the whole scene became a reflection, not of God and His grace, but of the world, to the confusion of all who loved the Lord and His church; and the holiest feast on earth -- the Lord's Supper for the church of God was dragged down into the disgrace that covered all. In fact, their state at this very time was such as to bring down His hand in judgment on His people. This and more is what we have before us here.

Many wonder how this could be in "the church of God," and some go so far as to make comparisons and to draw conclusions favorable to themselves and their own times. The Spirit of God would never lead to such a thought. Whenever you read the word of God so as to think highly of yourselves and disparagingly of those who lived before, it is a plain proof that you do not read it aright, or understand the object of the

Holy Spirit in what He records. "The word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword"; and those only read it to their profit who judge themselves by it rather than their brethren, and still less those of primitive times. Let me inquire of each, With whom are you comparing yourselves? Do you compare your ways with those of the Corinthians when beguiled of the enemy? How much wiser to judge yourselves, not by what the Corinthians slipped into, but by what the apostle wrote, by 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 license? Is she not, on the contrary, called to submit herself to the Lord as a virgin espoused to Him? Who would think highly of the character of one who set herself up against her husband? But this is but a small part of what Christendom has done taking advantage of His name to speak proudly and act independently, not to say wickedly, and most especially that Church which claims for herself to have altered nothing, whereas scarce a shred remains to her of Christ in truth, love and holiness.

But let us look at Scripture, not to condemn Rome, but to judge 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 Christ? The word of the Lord 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, in 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 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 baptize but to preach the gospel: I doubt if the other apostles could have said so. They were given by Himself a commission to baptize. "Go ye therefore, and disciple all nations, baptizing them unto the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." But the apostle Paul was not charged in the same way, being called from heaven. From his very conversion he learns the union of the assembly with Christ. Of this the Lord's Supper, not baptism, was the suited sign, and that was revealed to him, though of course he was baptized and did baptize like another.

Baptism is the confession of Christ, emphatically of Christ's death and resurrection. The Lord's Supper is the expression of union 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 of the Lord's Supper, 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. So he says, "For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread. "Now, nothing strikes one more than the extreme simplicity of the materials the Lord was pleased to use for His supper. He took bread. There is nothing more common than bread. He blessed, and brake, 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, when nobody, I suppose, would say that they were consecrated or changed. It is a mere delusion to conceive that there was any change in the elements. Scripture intimates nothing of the sort, but rather indeed, and very expressly, the contrary. The disciples ate bread and drank wine; and the whole point of the blessing is the power of faith coming in and investing what it had before it, though the very simplest materials, with the deepest associations of God's grace in the death of His beloved Son.

Every scheme which would exalt the elements or aggrandize those who "administer" to the communicants is taking away from Christ. All accessories of sight or sound accompanying it are purely human additions, and 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 belongs to Him and to Him 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 which reveals it.

He says to all His own, "Take, eat." Not take thou, because the "thou" would bring in individuality; and this is never the thought of the Lord's Supper, but the body. The whole point of the Supper is communion in the remembrance of Christ, but of Christ in death. Christ is everything, and the common blessing of all is in and with Christ.

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 than their supper. In it, therefore, so far from a person eating or drinking for himself alone, it is intended to embrace the whole body of Christ, save those who

may be through discipline put outside. Whatever narrows this holy circle, either in principle or in practice, infringes on the Lord's intention in His Supper. Hence the moment you bring in any peculiar doctrine, only admitting to the Supper 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.

Nothing 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 thus ruling; as, again, others who might rule well, having great moral weight, who could not teach. Some again have the gift of preaching to the unconverted who need teaching themselves, and are not at all fit to lead on, clear, and establish, the church of God. Nor does a gift for ministry in itself suppose moral weight for rule; and so we see in the facts of every day.

Christian ministry was founded by the Lord who died for us, but the spring of it was when He went up to heaven. He gave gifts to men, but He gave them after He went 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. But there has been no change for Christ, but only alas! amongst Christians since He went up to heaven.

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 testimony? 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 died, rose, and went to heaven, then from His ascension glory He gave gifts to men. It was a new source of supply from above. What He did when on earth was to send a testimony to Israel. The disciples were even forbidden to preach to the Samaritans or to the Gentiles: this therefore could not be Christian ministry. No doubt eleven of the disciples 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 -- the harlot who rises up in insubjection to the Lord of all. Babylon -- the false lady, the would-be-queen -- was not content to be subject, and she is therefore looked upon as an enemy going to be judged by God. Take care that you do not fall into the same error of disowning the Headship of Christ in another form.

So far from questioning Christian ministry, I hold it to be a divine institution and a permanent one. If others plead for change, I hold that, if divine, it is the same now as when Christ first ascended. Christ, and Christ alone, through the Holy Ghost, has authority in His hands. He gives gifts, and appoints ministers. I feel it to be a part of my work in His name to recall the saints to what they have forgotten by making the church regulate ministers, instead of bowing to Christ in this matter. Christ alone has the title as Head of His church; and the Holy Ghost is come down as alone competent to carry out His mind on earth in accordance with the written word of God.

But I want you to see that, while we would hold up the place of Christian ministry, and slight none who are Christ's ministers --owning all who are really His, and disowning all who are not-- while we maintain this to the full, still there is one occasion where all distinctions disappear, where only One is or ought to be prominent, even Christ and 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. It is precious to merge all else and have nothing before the soul but Himself who died for us in infinite love. This it is the Lord (the night before He was betrayed) commended to the saints. This it is He would have us to do in remembrance of Him till He comes. It is well even for the most richly gifted not always to be in the position of giving out; and it is well for the poorest saints not to be ever taking in. An evangelist 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, that all should have for Christ the Lord 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. It is blessed and wholesome for the soul to have seasons when it is 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 called to be 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 a doubtful thing, or an uncertain sound. On the contrary, He would have our joy to be full; but if you do not value this feast, because of its own nature and His love who invites you, no wonder you do not enjoy it. If you join in a rite which bears His name but with its character altered, how can you expect it to be 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 have put His supper nowhere, save as a gloomy appendix to the sermon and that once or twice a year.

The early disciples came together not once a month, nor once a quarter, nor once a year, but the first day of the week to break bread. And I assure you it is not myself or others who have put this into God's word. It is no strange Bible, but your own from which I am reading to you. It is no new theory or notion of moderns or ancients, but what God has written. Does it not concern you as much as me? I am speaking of Christ's feast for His disciples, for 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 thing of awe and dread, lest one might fall into the condemnation that is written here eat and drink "damnation," being guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. No wonder a person with so fearful a danger before him could not enjoy the Lord's Supper; and being a believer, with no one to shew me any better, it was so much the more a tremendous burden to me. It was no feast, but a fast of the most solemn description. Was it not a perverting of the Lord's Supper to produce such a result? Of course it was. Nor was mine at all a singular case. Think me not wandering away from what is of importance for souls in giving you this bit of personal experience. Somewhat similar alas! is the condition of many a soul now.

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. He, the Son of God, having gone down under it in love, and risen again without it in righteousness, from His ascension glory gave these words to Paul for us. They come, in the infinite grace of God from the Lord and Savior who bears witness to judgment borne for us, from resurrection accomplished, from the ascension revealed to us in all its

glory: 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, by faith: "Do this in remembrance of Me!" It is not for those who, slighting His love, love Him not.

For whom it is, need I argue more? The only persons who have the smallest title to the Lord's Supper are those who are resting on Him and His redemption. You might even be converted, and not be in a fit state to partake of this feast. For the Christian state is more than being converted (that is, 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 is not waiting for righteousness, but made the righteousness of God in Christ. He is therefore waiting for the hope of righteousness, that is, for glory. We do not get righteousness when we go to heaven. It is here by grace we have is the object being to glorify Christ when we are in the presence of His enemies and now called to serve Him. It is here we are to confess by faith in His cross and glory, how truly all the evil is already judged, all the good is already given in Christ by our God and Father.

What does a person come to the table of the Lord for? Is it to pour out his doubts? If he has them, he will; but this would be to make it a fast, and not a feast. You would scarcely like this even at your own festivities. You would not like to have at a marriage feast one with a gloomy heart and face: this would slight the bridegroom and the bride, and might spoil it for everyone else. You would say such a person was best away; and the more you loved the person, the less you could desire his presence thus, because his sadness would be the more a burden to all concerned. It would be a poor proof of love to be indifferent to his troubles, and to be just as joyful in presence of such a breach of fellowship, not to speak of propriety.

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 the holiest feast on earth; but whatever does not consist with His presence in peace and liberty and love is not fit for it.

Ministry is not meant to furnish, adorn, or guard the table; even an apostle comes there merely as a saint. Ministry has to deal with souls, to preach the gospel, to give meat in due season, to guide, instruct, correct and rebuke. But in the Lord's Supper we rightly come only as members of Christ's body as once sinners but now saints, justified, made happy

because of Christ's love, full of peace and joy in believing. We are walking in the light: such is the place of a Christian; but the next point is that we should walk in accordance with the light in which we are. This is the object of ministry, in dealing with saints to fit them for and keep them in their place at the Lord's table. Thus the Lord's Supper is the present practical end, we may say, of ministry. and the end is greater than the means.

I should scruple to call it the Lord's Supper when it is not taken according to the Lord's own 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 ch. 11: "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?" In this passage it is not the Lord's Supper viewed from within, i.e. not the state of those partaking it. Neither their right state nor their wrong state is the point here discussed, but communion with Christ compared with what was outside. It is an external view. The apostle is comparing it with what the Jew or the Gentile had. It is not the internal view of eating worthily or not; but, contradicting the Jew and the Gentile in their worship, he proceeds to shew what the nature of the church's communion 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 in accordance with the Lord's own institution. This is certainly not the meaning of the apostle's words, but to my mind a grave error on the part of those who have so applied it. The apostle is contrasting what the Christian has with what the Jew had on the one hand, and what the Gentile had 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; and it is a dangerous as well as a wicked thing to have to do with demons. But if you go to these idol-feasts, you are tampering, you have fellowship, with demons.

Israel, again, had their peace offerings. They were their symbol of communion with Jehovah's altar; while 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 which Christians have. But in ch. 11 he is dealing with the state of soul of those who regularly partake of the Lord's Supper. It is a question of Christians rightly or wrongly partaking. If you know the joy of remembering the Lord's

death, do not you satisfy yourself with the fact that you are a Christian. You are made worthy by the blood of the Lamb to partake of that Supper; but put yourself to the proof whether you are partaking of it in a worthy manner.

How can a Christian partake of it in an unworthy manner? If the day comes and you merely go to it as a religious habit, it seems very like an unworthy partaking of it. Familiarity breeds contempt where the soul is unexercised; where self-judgment is kept up, the spirit of worship is strengthened and enlarged. Do you go to the Lord's Supper in the morning and to your supper in the evening in much the same spirit? Surely this is not a worthy manner. Not that you should go to any meeting or even meal lightly, but seriously. Still 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.

As for the notion that you may have the Lord's Supper without the Lord's table, it is beneath sober Christians. We may distinguish, where we must not 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.

To you who have no doubts I speak now. 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 is a Christian, as some say. But, if assured of salvation as we should be, the Lord intends that there should be a solemn searching of heart, and challenging of the soul every time, with a view to our seeing in what spirit and state we are coming to the Lord's Supper. He that eateth and drinketh unworthily is guilty with respect to the body and blood of the Lord; for he falls into no small offence as to Christ who treats His Supper irreverently. Consequently the Lord does not fail to come in and vindicate the honor of His name thus set at naught, and to judge, as we see He did at Corinth.

He does not suppose that, when a man 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 the Lord and please God. To partake unworthily then means, not that the communicant is not a Christian, but that the Christian partakes without due self-examination and self judgment.

But again, "damnation" here is quite wrong. The word κρίμα should be rendered "judgment." The only possible

meaning of the word here is very simply judgment in this world. The context is decisive and plain in giving this sense, 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 comes in to maintain gravity and holiness among those who partake, on the peril of His judgment now.

When a soul begins to be care less, 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 meet as the church are in a bad state and fail, the Lord never fails to come in and judge them here by sickness or even by death. Such is the meaning of "sin unto death." It is death in this world. So Ananias and Sapphira sinned unto death. The time and circumstances made their sin the more heinous, and brought down on them the Lord's unsparing judgment in a peculiarly solemn form; but the principle is the same.

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