

The Nature and Meaning of the Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament, a symbolic action; not God's way of saving men, but a true picture of that way, exhibited that it may be known among all nations. It is a holy ordinance instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ, and its proper observance explicitly commanded by Him, therefore, one of the most important duties of the Christian. That it may be attended to intelligently and acceptably, its nature and meaning are plainly told in the words of Christ. It is:

1. A **Communing** of believers together with Christ and one another. For, "Jesus took bread (a loaf), and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body'." "And he took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink all ye of it, for this is my blood of the covenant'." "Take this and divide it among yourselves'."

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a **communion** (joint participation) of the blood of Christ? The bread which we brake, is it not a **communion** (joint participation) of the body of Christ? Since there is one bread (loaf), we, the many, are one body, for all we are partakers of that one bread." (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). In other words, "Believers form one body by virtue of their **joint participation** of Christ." All that believers can and do have in **common with Christ** is that which they receive from Him. The essential unity of the church, as the body of which Christ is Head, is to be realized and exhibited in this sacrament.

A believer may at any time, have communion with Christ in the Word and in prayer,—alone, or in company with others. But a sacrament is not for him alone; not of private administration. Of the Lord's Supper, we acknowledge that "receiving this sacrament by a priest, or any other alone . . . is contrary to the nature of this sacrament, and to the institution of Christ." (Conf. Faith, xxix, 4).

From Heb. 3:14, we know that "We really have become partakers of Christ, if **indeed** we hold fast, firm unto the end, the beginning of our confidence ('hypostasis', the substantial foundation of our faith)." The **if** here is momentous. It reminds us of the condition necessary to our having anything in common with Christ, and that the **purpose** of the sacrament is to be:

2. A **Commemorating** of Christ by those who know Him. "This do in remembrance of me." Literally, "This do ye with a view to mine own proper recall to mind", i.e., This do ye with the purpose of bringing **Me as I am** to remembrance, by your concerted action.

The Greek word Christ used, translated "remembrance", is an unusual word. Plato defined it as "a flood-tide of thought that had ebbed." Olympio-

porus, as "the rebirth of knowledge." (Trench, Synonyms). The action, accordingly, which Christ commands is to be within the minds of the disciples, who have met with Christ before, have learned of Him, have some knowledge of Him received as the substantial foundation of their faith. But even Christians are prone to leave Christ unthought of. Now they are to bring up from memory, from the subconscious into full consciousness, **what they know of Christ.**

Hence, the Lord's Supper is not merely a "memorial," a thing that acts on the mind from without. When Christ meant "memorial" He used the right word for it, a word different from the one used here, as when He said that Mary's loving tribute would be "told for a memorial of her." If the sacrament were merely a memorial, it would be for all alike, as the Word is for all. If it were merely a memorial, there would be no necessity for "self-examination", which is not prerequisite to sharing the Word.

But since in this sacrament Christ asks of me what I know of Him, self-examination becomes imperative. Do I possess within me the knowledge to discern the Lord's body?—the knowledge revealed by His Word and Spirit—a knowledge increased by the exercise of faith, repentance, love, and new obedience? In effect, Christ repeats His question, "What think ye of Christ?" What others may say of Him is set aside from this Table. The important thing here is: What do you Reformed Presbyterians, you Covenanters, know of Christ? Who is He? What did He do? Why did He do what He did? What is He about to do? What have you held fast as the substantial foundation of your faith, and intend to hold firm unto the end?

Our answer is ready. Here is what we know, plainly stated in our Confession of Faith, our Declaration and Testimony, our Books of Government, Discipline, and Worship. This is what we have learned of Christ, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit, from His own Word. This, by the help of Him who Christ said "shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you", is what we now recall of Christ **as He is**,—not only as **Priest** who offered Himself a sacrifice for our sins, and continues to make intercession for us with His blood; but also as **Prophet** by whom God speaks His truth to us; and as **King** whose commands we obey, by whose grace, and under whose protection we live.

The oneness of the assembled body of believers is further realized and exhibited in the Lord's Supper as:

3. A **Covenanting** of believers with God through Jesus Christ, and with one another. "And He took a cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink all ye of it, for this is My blood of the covenant which is poured out for many unto remission of sins'." "This cup is the new covenant in My blood which is poured out for you."

This "new covenant" is God's sovereign offer to men of eternal life, which is **knowing** the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent, written, in the light of God's providence in history and experience. It presents God's promises for man's faith, and God's commandments for man's obedience, the only infallible rule of faith and conduct.

The believer signifies his acceptance by taking and drinking the cup that symbolizes the ratification of the covenant by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. This act, being performed by each individual present, becomes the **joint action** of the Church present in its accepted faith, government, and worship.

Then the solidarity of the Church, and the membership of the individual in the body of Christ are confirmed in this sacrament as:

4. A **Confirming, or Sealing** ordinance. **On God's part:** it is "made effectual to the elect for salvation." (SC 88). "Christ and the benefits of the

new covenant" are not only represented, but also "sealed and applied to believers." (SC 92); but this "only by the blessing of Christ and the working of His Spirit in them that by faith receive them." (SC 91). The covenant was sealed once for all by the blood of Jesus Christ, but God in His loving kindness adds many comforting assurances. Having believed in Christ, "ye were sealed by the Holy Spirit of the promise, who is an earnest of our inheritance." (Eph. 1:13, 14). "He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life" as an immediate possession." (Jn. 3:36).

On the believer's part: "He that hath received His (Christ's) testimony hath set to his seal that God is true." (Jn. 3:33).

But the knowledge of Christ brought forth in remembrance of Him is not only for the communion and covenanting of believers, but now that it has been confirmed in the new life of believers, it is to be offered to all men. It was called up for **acknowledgment**, and now **acknowledgment** is to be made public. And this by the Lord's appointment of His supper to be:

5. A **Public Proclaiming, Witnessing, Confessing** Action. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do proclaim the Lord's death till He come." (1 Cor. 11:26). The word rendered "proclaim" is a compound word, which by form and usage defines the proclamation as public, authoritative, complete and definite (to be understood). It is a confession-in-unison of faith in the whole Word and Covenant of God as centered in and confirmed by the death of Jesus Christ, proclaimed from the platform of the Church, "the pillar and ground of the truth." This is more than any individual can do alone. He can give his personal witness at other times, but here he is contributing to the more powerful witness of the Church.

But certainly, if there is to be real communion, not confusion; if there is to be a clear understandable testimony, not Babel, there must be **agreement beforehand** by all the participants as to what is the truth of Christ and what is to be proclaimed concerning Him.

Thus the Lord's Supper, in its every aspect, **COMmuning, COMmemorating, COvenanting, CONfirming, CONFessing**, appears as a joint, concerted action of one united body,—the Church administering it to its members. The individual partaking has the privilege of acting **only as a member** of that Church. There is nothing else he can do in this sacrament. The necessary and sufficient condition for partaking is exactly the same as for membership in the Church. **The significance and force of the Lord's Supper are in its being the action of the Church, not of an individual.**

Here let us remind ourselves that the sacrament is a **symbolic** action. The first thing required of any symbolism is that it truthfully express its meaning. By his act of partaking each individual declares that the creed and profession of this Church is his own creed and profession. As a member, he has been instructed, and knows what he is doing.

With the proclamation of the Lord's Supper there goes an insistent invitation to all people. "The Spirit and the bride say, Come!" Everyone, therefore, should know,—if he does not know he should be informed,—as to what the Lord's Supper is, what it means. Then if he does not agree with the profession of the Church administering it, he will not want to act as if he did. He is an honest person. If he does agree he will accept the invitation declaring his agreement, and he will be cordially welcomed.

The church has always had formal Confessions of Faith, not only as summaries of Bible truth for teaching and testimony, but as defense against opposing doctrines and practices. The faithful church has kept its testimony equal to the need. Among the earliest of these Confessions that have been preserved, is what is known as the Apostles' Creed. We have some records of its growth from smaller beginnings. But there is in it no testimony for the Covenant of Grace; none for the Scriptural worship and government of the

church; not because these things were not regarded as essentials, but simply because they were not at issue at that time. The Christian church grew up within the synagogue, which was bound in the Covenant of Grace, and therefore, the Scriptures so far as written were its standards of doctrine, of worship and of government. Its government was Presbyterian, the laws of God administered by courts of elders. The Scriptures were read and explained. The Psalms were sung. There were no other songs to sing in the worship of God. There were no instruments of music, for these belonged to the altar in the temple.

In process of time, the Word of God was neglected, then the church, especially in its larger and wealthier congregations, became corrupt in government and worship and doctrine. It had to be reformed to save its witness for Christ. The Reformed Confessions restated the great truths that had been denied and thrown away.

Again apostasy has become so generally "advanced", away from the foundation which is Christ, that a new reformation is urgently called for. The same old errors and opposition continue, albeit with other names and faces. If we should attempt to compromise the testimony of the Lord's Table that has been entrusted to our administration, by so much would we lower the testimony of the church as a whole for Jesus Christ. The Covenanter Church has been preserved for a purpose. Today it faces a great responsibility and a great opportunity for a new fidelity to Him for whom we have professed a superior loyalty. It is our business to hold fast the foundation of faith, and "whereunto we have attained, by that same rule to walk." (Phil. 3:16).

The writer in closing, adds a word of personal testimony. I was born and grew up in the United Presbyterian Church. I have witnessed its sad decline,—not in numbers or wealth—but from an exceptionally high and clear Scriptural testimony to the depths of modern liberalism and the confusion of the "ecumenical movement." I speak in general, for there are still some coming out of her. Her first official step in this decline was to leave the matter of Sacramental Communion to the autonomy of the local Session. Within less than 25 years all the distinctive principles of the United Presbyterian Church were commonly being violated, and some of them officially repealed. And the United Presbyterian Church is not an isolated case.

Many other Churches now in spiritual decline, began to slip when the testimony of the Lord's Table was compromised in the interest of "brotherly love," or something. It is easier and more successful to attack the church from the inside, rather than the outside. The specious argument is always put forth that lifting the terms of Church membership from the Lord's Table will benefit and not harm the Church. But if our terms of Church membership are Christ's terms, as we declare, then they belong to His Table, which is an integral part of our witness for Christ, and our obligation to Him. **Administration of the Lord's Supper according to Christ's institution is a primary test of the fidelity of the Church.**

The division of the church is a great evil, but the root of that evil lies in man's hatred of the truth and refusal to let matters of faith and conduct be determined by the Word of God. They are not chargeable with that evil who hold fast the unbreakable Scripture as the only infallible rule of faith and life.

—FRANK D. FRAZER.