

# THE LORD'S SUPPER,

—OR—

## WHAT IS CLOSE COMMUNION?

BY T. T. EATON, D. D.

23. For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed took bread;

24. And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, This is my body, which is for you: this do in remembrance of me.

25. In like manner also the cup, after supper, saying. This cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.

26. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come.

27. Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

28. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup.

29. For he that eateth and drinketh, eateth and drinketh judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body.—*I. Corinthians xi, 23-29.*

For the last time the band is unbroken. To-morrow's sun shall look down on the crucified Jesus; while Judas shall hang himself in bitter remorse, and the band of disciples, shall be scattered. Gathered in an upper chamber, our Lord institutes a memorial of himself and establishes an ordinance by which he would have his people remember him, till the end come. He takes the bread, blesses it and gives it to the disciples, saying, "Take, eat, this is my body." "This do in remembrance of me." Then he took the cup and gave thanks, telling them to drink of it, "for this is my blood of the new

covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins." And he added, "for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come."

Statesmen, philosophers, artists, poets and warriors, in all ages have sought to be remembered by the generations to come after. Horace boasted that he had by his writings erected a monument more lasting than brass and loftier than the pyramids. The great pyramids themselves were built to commemorate Egyptian kings. Arches of triumph have been erected to tell succeeding ages of the deeds of conquerors, and lofty mausoleums have been built to commemorate the name and fame of heroes. Jesus erects no structure of masonry, writes no book, lifts no marble shaft to tell of his feeding the multitude, his raising the dead or his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. These are not the things Christ would be remembered by, but rather by his death of shame and suffering. One would think that this would be the event in the life of their Lord, the disciples would be most anxious to have forgotten; but this Jesus differs from all others and bids his followers commemorate his death till he come. And they went forth among the nations preaching a crucified Savior and glorying in nothing, save in the cross of Christ.

#### PERVERSIONS OF THE ORDINANCE.

"This do in remembrance of me." Two things are here commanded: 1st. The act, eating the bread, and drinking the cup. "This do" and 2nd. The purpose, "in remembrance of me." The perversions of the Lord's Supper, though many and serious, have not been of the act so much as of the purpose. Nothing else has been substituted for the thing commanded, as in the case of baptism. For though Roman Catholics refuse the cup to all except the priests, giving the people only the bread, yet they have not substituted anything else in place of the cup. All who profess to observe the ordinance at all, believe and practice this eating the bread and drinking the fruit of the vine.

But when we consider the purpose of the Lord's Supper, we see it has been sadly perverted in the world.

Some have made it an actual embodiment of God and worship it as divine. This is transubstantiation. Others regard the elements as in some mysterious way linked to Christ, so that he resides in them and the participant really partakes of the divine nature. This is consubstantiation. Akin to this last is the idea that the bread and wine are in a peculiar sense holy and are a means of special grace. Those who believe this require that any bread or wine left over, shall be consumed by the preacher and others, he may ask to help him, before they leave the house. These views, I hardly need say, are not warranted by any thing in the Bible. We have in Scripture no hint of any holiness in the elements used. Holiness, in the New Testament, is a thing of the heart; and the bread and wine left over are no more sacred than any other bread and wine would be.

#### NOT A MEANS OF GRACE.

The Lord's Supper is not a means of grace. It is not a channel of holiness, by which the believer receives spiritual strength and nourishment. It has no magical efficacy to take away sin or to give spiritual life. It is a simple and solemn ordinance, like baptism, to be observed because it is commanded and it teaches most important lessons. It tells us of our Savior's love, and brings vividly before our minds the great central fact of our religion, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

#### NOT COMMUNING TOGETHER.

Another perversion of the Lord's Supper which has prevailed widely and done incalculable harm, is the making it a symbol of Christian fellowship. Thus we can often hear such expressions as, "All Christians ought to commune together at the Lord's Table." "We will all commune together in Heaven and why not on earth?" "We are all children of one Heavenly Father, and every child should be welcome at the family table." And to refuse to admit this plea is regarded as narrow, selfish and bigoted. Baptists are often condemned for what is called "close communion." We are reminded

that Christians of other denominations are as good as we are, and they tell us it is unchristian and wicked in us not to invite all Christians to commune with us at the Lord's Table. You have all heard such talk many a time.

People who speak and think thus, act as if Christ had said, "This do in remembrance of each other," and, "For as often ye eat this bread and drink this cup, you do proclaim your fellowship for Christians." But our Lord did not give the command that way, and to make the ordinance mean any such thing is a sad perversion. "This do in remembrance of me." "For as oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." It is the *Lord's* Supper and not a *Christian* supper. By it we are to remember Christ and not each other. The bread and the wine do not mean Christian fellowship at all, they mean Jesus' broken body and shed blood. Just that, and nothing else; and we can not be too careful in observing this ordinance, just as our Savior commanded us with the solemn tenderness of that last meeting before the crucifixion, and with the shadows of Gethsemane and Calvary already resting upon him. The apostle has added a solemn warning, that unless we discern the Lord's body, we are eating and drinking unworthily, and so bring condemnation upon our souls. However amiable the motive (and Christian fellowship is a beautiful and lovely thing), it is none the less a perversion of the ordinance, if we observe it for any other purpose than in remembrance of Christ and to show forth his death. We are not at liberty to do this even in remembrance of angels, still less in remembrance of Christians.

#### THE BELIEVER COMMUNES WITH CHRIST.

It is not true that "all Christians ought to commune together at the Lord's Supper." That is to do in remembrance of each other what Christ commanded us to do in remembrance of him. It is rather true that no two Christians ought to commune together there. Each one is to commune with Christ in remembering his dying love, and it should be a *close* communion, so close that nothing can come between the believer and his Lord.

O, brethren, let our communion be as close as possible! So far from being bigoted and selfish, it is a blessed thing to hold close communion with our Savior, and to "do this in remembrance of him."

At the Lord's Table, Jesus and Jesus only should be in our thoughts. It is a mistake, many people make to think that Baptists commune with each other at the Lord's Supper while we refuse to commune with other denominations. We do not commune with each other; we simply strive to obey the command, "This do in remembrance of me," and we seek faithfully to show forth the Lord's death. We can not consent to be a party to a perversion of this solemn and beautiful ordinance, and to do in remembrance of others what Christ has told us to do in remembrance of him alone. We can neither give nor accept an invitation for all Christians to commune together at the Lord's Supper. As for all Christians communing together in the hereafter, we know there will be no Lord's Supper in heaven at all. This ordinance is for this world and to be observed till Christ comes, and no longer. The bread and the cup are symbols of an absent Savior; what need of them, when Jesus is resent with us? "I go to prepare a place for you," he tells us, "that where I am there ye may be also."

Whatever he may have in store for us after we reach heaven, our present duty is to obey faithfully the commands he has given us, in his Word.

#### FELLOWSHIP,

I allow no man to go beyond me in fellowship with Christians. And there are many ways for that fellowship to express itself; but the Lord's Supper is not one of them. Other things we can do for each other, but the sadly impressive words of Christ in reference to the Lord's Supper, are, "This do in remembrance of me." Who then would rob Jesus of the only thing he has told us to do in remembrance of him? Who would change this solemn memorial of the suffering and dying Redeemer into a symbol of Christian fellowship? Whatever else we may do or fail to do, O, let us "do this in remembrance of Christ."

Let me say a word about this matter of fellowship. I have Christian fellowship for all Christians. I have denominational fellowship for those who belong to the same denomination with me; and I have church-fellowship for the members of the same church. The sort of fellowship depends entirely on the facts in the case. Is a man a Christian? Then he is my brother in Christ, and as such I have fellowship for him. Is he a Baptist? Then he is my brother in a common faith, and I have denominational fellowship for him. Does he belong to Walnut-Street church? Then he is a member of the same household of faith, I and have a church fellowship for him. Even in secular life the same principle holds good. I have citizen's fellowship for all law abiding people of the city. They are my fellow-citizens. I have national fellowship for all who belong to this country; they are my fellow-countrymen. And so in all other directions. Are you a Mason? Then you have Masonic fellowship for all members of the order who are in good standing. The sort of fellowship is always to be determined by the sort of relations which exist between parties.

Now, while Christian fellowship is a right thing and a beautiful thing, it is an entirely different thing from the Lord's Supper. There is every bit as much reason in saying "All Christians ought to commune in baptism," as in saying "All Christians ought to commune together at the Lord's Table." Let us cultivate Christian fellowship, and seek to promote it in all proper ways, but let us not pervert the Lord's Supper, by making it a Christian supper, and a symbol of fellowship. Let no one demand that I remember him, when I come to partake of the emblems of my Savior's dying love.

You see, then, how unreasonable it is for one member of a church to refuse to partake of the Lord's Supper because there is some other member, he or she, does not like. "I am not willing to commune with him or her," you can some times hear; as if the Lord's Supper was a method of expressing our likes and dislikes. Let all such thoughts be far from our minds; and when we partake of the bread and the cup, let us not think

of any human being, but only of him who loved us and died to save us. So only can we obey the command, "This do in remembrance of me." So much for the *what*; next comes the *who*.

#### PREREQUISITES.

Bearing in mind what the Lord's Supper is—that it is a memorial of Christ—a communion with him, not a mark of fellowship or communion with Christians; we next consider what are Bible prerequisites. Who are the proper subjects for this ordinance? What qualifications should a person have before partaking of the Lord's Supper? In the first place he should have faith in Christ. About the time infant baptism began, infant communion also arose, and for the same reason, viz., that the ordinance was thought to be a means of grace and salvation, and since infants were liable to die in infancy, the Lord's Supper was given them in order that they might receive the benefit supposed to be conferred. Infant communion has, however, disappeared, except in the Greek church, where it is still practiced. There is every whit as much reason for it, as there is for infant baptism. They arose together and they should pass away together; for they are equally without foundation either in Scripture or in reason. Without faith in Christ it is impossible to "discern the Lord's body;" in partaking of the Supper; and without this the person "eats and drinks condemnation to his own soul."

Infants, who are incapable of faith, and unbelievers, who reject Christ's salvation, have no right to partake of the Lord's Supper. There is no hint in Scripture that any one ever received this ordinance until he had believed.

The second qualification is baptism. No one should come to the Lord's Supper until he has been baptized. Our Savior was baptized at the beginning of his ministry and he did not institute the Supper till "the night on which he was betrayed." So we have his example for putting baptism before the Lord's Supper. Again, the great commission puts baptism first; "Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in-

to the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you."—*Matt. xxviii: 19 and 20.* These are our marching orders, and they clearly declare that we must first make disciples, then baptize them, and then teach them to observe the Lord's Supper and the other things required. Still again, the uniform practice of the apostles and early Christians was to put baptism first. On the day of Pentecost we read that "they that received the word were baptized" and afterward they were "breaking bread." "Repent and be baptized." Peter told them, not "repent and come to the Lord's Table," Cornelius, Lydia, the jailer, the eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, Crispus, yes, all the cases mentioned, without exception, were baptized immediately after their profession of faith; and there is no hint given that any person partook of the Lord's Supper till after being baptized, Here then we have the example of Christ, the command of Christ and the practice of the apostles all in favor of putting baptism before the Lord's Supper.

And such was the uniform practice of antiquity.

Justin Martyr, (A. D. 150) wrote of the Lord's Supper. "It is not lawful for any to partake, but such as believe the things that are taught by us to be true and have been baptized." Similarly Jerome, "Catechumens cannot communicate at the Lord's Table being unbaptized."

The great Augustine speaking of the Lord's Supper says, "Of which certainly they can not partake unless they are baptized." Gibben, in his "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," (Vol. II. p. 271) tells us that with the early Christians the Lord's Supper followed baptism. Neander, the greatest of church historians, says of the observance of the Lord's Supper in the first centuries, "No person could be present who was not a member of the Christian church and incorporated into it by the rite of baptism." (Hist. Chn. Rel. 1, p. 327.) I could weary you with quotations to the same effect, but will add only one more. Dr. Adam Clark, (Eucharist p. 46.) says, "As no person could partake of the paschal lamb before he was circumcised, so among the early



followers of Christ, no person was permitted to come to the Eucharist till he had been baptized."

Well does the distinguished Episcopalian, Dr. Wall say, "Among all the absurdities that ever were held, none ever maintained that any person should partake of the communion before they were baptized."

In the face of this evidence, will any one say that I ought to invite a person to partake of the Lord's Supper who I do not believe has been baptized? It is no answer to say, "He believes he has been baptized, having been christened in infancy and recognizing that as baptism." I can not act on his belief but on my own. If I were in his place, I could not conscientiously partake of the Lord's Supper till I had been baptized (i. e. immersed). No honest man will ask another man to do what he could not conscientiously do if he were in his place.

We have, then, the example of Christ, the command of Christ and the practice of the apostles, and early Christians in favor of putting baptism before the Lord's Supper. While on the other side there is nothing but a perverted sentiment and a mistaken notion, that the Lord's Supper is a symbol of fellowship, by means of which "all Christians ought to commune together," without regard to whether they are baptized or not. The simple question is, shall we maintain this ordinance as Christ established it, doing this "in remembrance" of him, showing forth his death, or shall we yield to a hue and cry, raised against us, and change the meaning Christ has put into his memorial feast?

#### AN ORDERLY CHURCH MEMBERSHIP.

The third qualification for the Lord's Supper is an orderly church membership. We read Acts II. 41 & 42. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and the prayers." Here fellowship is mentioned before the "breaking of bread."

The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance and does not belong to the preachers. A missionary can go into

a destitute field and preach. When converts make profession he can baptize them, but he must not administer the Lord's Supper till a church has been organized, and he can do so by church authority. Philip baptized the eunuch on the highway, but did not give him the Lord's Supper. Preachers have no right to administer the Lord's Supper privately, as for example to sick people. If ever the ordinance is to be administered away from the usual place of worship, it must be done by special appointment of the church. The apostles, and all preachers after them, were commanded to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing those who became disciples and then "teaching them to observe" all things commanded. Note the language, "teaching them to observe." We are to preach and to baptize the converts, but beyond that we must teach them to observe the Lord's Supper, and other things.

Paul, in writing to "the church of God which is at Corinth," said, "I received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you; how the Lord Jesus in the night on which he was betrayed, took bread" etc. Here the apostle declares that he delivered the Lord's Supper to the church at Corinth. It will scarcely be claimed that the Corinthian church had authority beyond that possessed by all the other churches. Every church of Christ has the same rights and privileges, and so to each church is the Lord's Supper delivered, to be observed as Christ hath commanded, till he come.

#### CONCLUSION.

These are the principles that govern our observance of the Lord's Supper, and our practice is but the illustration of these principles. We do not invite all Christians to commune with us, because that is a perversion of the ordinance and a violation of the command, "This do in remembrance of me." And of course we can not accept an invitation, such as we can not give. We do not ask those who we do not believe have been converted and baptized, and who have not an orderly church membership, to come to the Lord's Table, because that is to reverse the order plainly laid down in the Scriptures. Our preachers do not carry the elements with them to

the bedside of the dying, because that is to make of the ordinance a means of grace, and to help the dying one to rely upon external-observances instead of upon Christ and him alone. Our associations and conventions never observe the Lord's Supper; because, though these bodies are composed of messengers from churches; they are not churches, and so have no right to administer a church ordinance. The church is to celebrate this feast and to do it in remembrance of Christ and to show forth his death till he come.

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."—*John xv. 14.*

"He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."—*John xiv. 21.*

"Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"—*Luke vi. 46.*

"Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar and the truth is not in him."—*1st Epistle of John, ii. 3 and 4.*

Thus does the church show to the world her unshaken faith in her crucified Lord, her belief in his power to save, and her hope that he will come again in glory "without sin unto salvation." She tells the unconverted the great story of the cross, and points to the narrow way, hewn out by the Redeemer's suffering and death, that men may pass from an earth of sin and misery to a Heaven of holiness and glory. Let us be faithful to this trust committed to us. Let no pressure, no appeal, no anything prevent our doing this in remembrance of Christ, and showing forth his death till the glad time when all earthly symbols of an absent Savior shall fade away in the radiance of his presence, as we go to be with him, and enter upon the fullness of joy at his right hand forevermore.

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NOTE.

Many persons who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, have been baptized and have an orderly church membership, still refrain from observing the Lord's Supper, because they feel unworthy. They are deterred by the passage, "whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of

the body and the blood of the Lord." Let such persons remember that to partake unworthily is to do so for some other purpose than to remember Christ. "Not discerning the Lord's body," is "unworthily." It is no profession of great sanctity to obey this command. We ought to feel humble and unworthy when we partake of the Lord's Supper. "Let a man examine himself" and see what are his motives. If he really desires to obey his Lord, and to remember his suffering and dying Saviour, let him not hesitate. Let it be borne in mind also, that this is a positive command of Christ, which cannot be disregarded without guilt. It is not a privilege, simply, of which we can avail ourselves or not as we chose. "This *do* in remembrance of me," is the command, and we are under the highest obligation to obey. All who have believed, been baptized and have an orderly church membership, are positively commanded to observe the Lord's Supper, and they cannot innocently neglect it.

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