

A. H. Lochman

The Lord's Supper Practically Considered



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The Lord's Supper Practically Considered

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The Lord's Supper Practically Considered

By Rev. A. H. Lochman, A.M.

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The Lord's Supper Practically Considered.

By Rev. A. H. Lochman, A. M., York, Pa.

The duty of members of the church regularly to partake of the Lord's Supper. — "Do this in remembrance of me."

THE SACRAMENT of the Lord's Supper, is one of the most solemn, impressive, and important ordinances of our holy religion, instituted by Christ himself. It is intimately interwoven with the very existence and life of the church, and with the spiritual life of the individual Christian.

It is, in the church, what the fire and hearth-stone is in the hallowed associations of the family circle — the center of attraction. There is an invisible power there, which creates a trembling anxiety, an ardent longing, a real home-sickness, which cannot be satisfied and healed, until the weary wanderer arises, returns to his Father's house, and sitting around the domestic fireside, beholds its cheerful light, and feels its genial warmth. There heart responsively beats to heart, and the loved ones are drawn together in holiest bonds. There hallowed feelings, tempered with sadness, are awakened, and affectionate remembrances of those who loved us, and have done so much for us, are revived. There we are cherished, warmed, and invigorated with new life, to carry out the holiest resolutions in our daily walk. There we are fed with food, such as love and affection only can prepare, of which strangers can have no conception.

Who! who! would not hasten to this hearth-stone, this fireside in our Father's house, in the family of God's children, to have the ardent longings, the holier aspirations of the soul, hushed in peace by him, who can as easily calm the troubled spirit, as he stilled the raging tempest of Genesereth's waters.

Who would not hasten to the place, where holier ties than those of nature, bind heart to heart. Where the liveliest remembrances chastened with a mellow sadness, of him who died for us, are brought to mind so vividly, that our hearts begin to kindle, and glow, and burn with love to him to whom we owe our all. Where we are fed with food prepared on that hearth-stone, such as Jesus Christ alone can prepare and give. Who would not hasten thither as often as the sacred table is set, and as often as the Master affectionately invites:

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Lord’s Supper is not a mere human, but a divine institution, for it was instituted by Christ himself. The apostle Paul informs us, that though he was not among the apostles at the original institution of the Lord’s Supper, he had received what he knew of it, and what he was about to communicate to them by a special revelation from Jesus Christ. 1 Cor. 11:23:

“For I have 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, 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 as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Viewed then merely as an institution of the Savior, independent of its symbolic significance and its hallowed influences, the Lord’s Supper is worthy of our highest regard and our due observance.

The time and circumstances under which it was instituted, however, stamp upon it additional value, and impress it with a peculiar sacredness. It was in the night in which he was betrayed. The last and most memorable act in the circle of his disciples. The betrayer is in consultation to deliver him into the hands of his enemies. The bloody sweat and the fearful death by crucifixion are in full view — ere another sun shall set, he must bear the weight of the guilt of countless millions — yet with the consciousness of all this, he loses sight of himself, and all the agonies which he is about to endure. Wholly absorbed with the one great master passion of his soul, the happiness and welfare of his disciples and of the world, he institutes this royal feast in commemoration of his infinite love, a love stronger than that of life, and superior to the fear of the most ignominious and cruel death, in order that the great cardinal doctrine of his religion, salvation through his

atonement, might not only be kept constantly in view, but also really offered to the children of men.

And can we esteem this ordinance, instituted under such solemn and affecting circumstances, lightly? Can we transgress this dying command of our blessed Savior, without self-reproach, and without incurring guilt? How fondly do our affections cling to the dying expressions of our friends, and how sacredly do we attend to their last requests; bold must be that heart, dead to all these tender sympathies of our nature, that can view with indifference the command:—

“Do this in remembrance of me.”

The Lord’s Supper was not, however, designed to be only a commemorating, but also a communicating ordinance. If, in this ordinance, external symbols are merely placed before us, to aid the mind, to quicken the memory, and to affect the heart through the medium of the sense, then it would serve the purpose equally as well to have them placed before us, merely to look at them.

When a dying friend leaves me something to keep him in remembrance, my remembrance of him becomes vivid, when I take these precious tokens from their casket, and behold them. But when Jesus Christ places these appropriate and significant emblems before us, he says, take and eat, take and drink, evidently implying that we are to receive and partake of something.

This idea is suggested and supported by the name with which this ordinance is designated. It is called a supper, and with emphasis, “the Lord’s Supper.” — 1 Cor. 11:20. Now at a special supper, to which guests are invited, great preparations are made, not only to excite expectations, to create a longing appetite, and then to mock the guests by withholding from them the provisions placed before them. No, they are to eat and drink, to partake of the preparations made. So also in the Lord’s Supper, Christ crucified is not only set forth, but imparted and received.

The preparations made are generally in accordance with the rank, wealth and liberality of the person who gives the supper. When a prince or king, it will be a princely or royal feast. But here Jesus Christ makes a supper for his friends, and he does nothing mean. He gives as he alone can give, he gives like a king, yet like a God, not according to what we are worthy to receive, but what is worthy of him to give.

Here then is a royal feast. Simple are the emblems, but mysterious the hidden efficacy which lies, not indeed in the bread and wine, but which is connected with the participation of the ordinance, and is derived from its divine author. And should professors of religion lightly esteem this ordinance, in which Christ offers and imparts himself, with all the blessings of his salvation? Should they refuse to accept his kind and gracious invitation, and either neglect it altogether, or partake of it but seldom? Have we no wants to be supplied? no hunger to satisfy? no thirst to assuage? no sorrow to be alleviated? no sin to be forgiven? no faith to be strengthened? no love to be inflamed? no hope to be animated?

O! we stand in need of so much. We have so many wants — and yet how many neglect the table so richly laden with all that is needful for us. Again and again has the invitation been extended to us: “Come, for all things are now ready,” and shall we grieve the Savior, “and rob our souls of all the offered mercies, with the reply,” “I pray thee have me excused.” Why do we find so many weak and sickly among us, and many that sleep? — 1 Cor. 11:30.

One reason, no doubt, is, because many neglect this holy ordinance, and consequently receive not its strengthening and healthful influence, so necessary to the maintenance and strengthening of spiritual life in the soul.

Another reason is, because some approach the table of the Lord in a careless, thoughtless, irreverent manner, without the necessary, self-examination, and consequently without a feeling sense of their sinfulness, or of their wants, and without an ardent desire after the blessings Christ designs to bestow.

And finally, because they view it merely as a historical representation and acknowledgment of a fact, and not as a sacramental representation and offer of the body and blood of Christ as an atonement (sin offering) for our guilt. Of such the apostle says, “they eat and drink unworthily, not discerning (because they do not discern) the Lord’s body.”

If I therefore approach the Lord’s table, without a feeling sense of my need, without desiring anything of the Lord, without an upright and ardent desire after that grace and mercy which he has purchased for me, and which he desires to impart and to renew at his table. Without a desire to delight and feast my soul in him, it will be of but little advantage to me. I rob this sacred ordinance of its intrinsic worth and great importance for my soul.

No! no! my friends, at his holy table Jesus reveals himself to his own, in a special, most intimate manner. He gives himself with all he is and all he has.

Who then, would deprive himself of all these blessings set forth and offered, either through an entire neglect of this sacred ordinance, or by venturing to approach without a careful self-examination. With a cold and unfeeling heart, without a sense of his wants, without being penetrated with the believing consciousness that Jesus can and will give him all his soul needs? Who would approach thus, and render himself guilty of the body and blood of Christ?

There is a sacred and hallowed influence thrown around every communion season, which cannot be accounted for, unless upon the ground of a special presence of the Lord.

Whence is it, that whenever the table of the Lord is spread, and the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is administered, a peculiar solemnity, an almost fearful stillness pervades the whole assembly? The feelings of all seem to be chastened and hallowed as by some invisible, divine influence, and the hearts of all penetrated with a reverential awe, which the presence of God only can inspire.

Even those who do not partake of the ordinance, if their hearts are not entirely dead to every virtuous and holy sensibility, if they are not past feeling, feel as they never do at an ordinary service of God's house. A kind of fear lays hold of them, as though they felt the place was consecrated anew, and baptized with a holy baptism.

And with what feelings are those who cluster around the table, penetrated? How unworthy do they feel themselves! What a reverential awe lays hold of them. Behold! a holy tremor seizes them, as though the Almighty, concealed in some burning bush, were about to reveal himself as he did to Moses. There tears of penitence flow. There winged sighs fly to the throne of all grace.

Whence all this? How can we account for it? There is nothing new, nothing unusual about to take place. They have, from their earliest years, witnessed communion seasons. For upwards of eighteen centuries it has been a standing ordinance in the church of Jesus. It is not surrounded with dark, mystic, fear and awe-inspiring ceremonies. Everything is plain and simple. The emblems employed are not strange and unusual, we behold them in every day life. In the consecration of these elements, no enchanting incanta-

tions are employed. Whence then this awe and reverence, these hallowed feelings, those sighs, those tears? Must there not be more in this ordinance, than many are willing to admit? Can we account for all this, without admitting a special, incomprehensible nearness and manifestation of the Deity? And if the celebration of this ordinance exerts such an influence upon those who are only witnesses, and upon the communicants ere they approach the table, what a hallowed influence must not the participation have, and what blessings must not the true disciples of the Lord receive!

There they are often constrained to exclaim, “surely the Lord is in this place: and I knew it not.” “How dreadful is this, place: this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” — Gen. 28:16, 17.

There we, as it were, touch the hem of his garment, and feel the efficacy of the virtue that flows out of him.

But how can those who profess to be the followers of Jesus, absent themselves so frequently, and refuse to meet him who presents himself to them, clothed in all the richness and freeness of his grace, and thus grieve and insult the Savior, rob themselves of its blessings, give the world occasion to mock, and be a stumbling-block to sincere but weak Christians.

That it is the duty of professing Christians to partake of the Lord’s Supper, is apparent from what has already been advanced. But we have the express command of the Savior himself: “This do in remembrance of me.” Can any command be more clear, more positive, more reasonable than this? It is not a matter which is left to our choice, whether we esteem it right and necessary or not. “Do this” is his express injunction. It is as authoritative as any other command the Savior ever gave.

And this we are to do, not once or twice in our whole life, nor yet once a year, but often, as often, at least, as the table of the Lord is set before us, in the congregation of which we are members. The command is, “Do this as oft as ye do 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.”

It was designed to be a standing ordinance of the church to the end of time. Not merely for the apostles and their times, but for the church in all future ages, and shall and will be celebrated until the Lord shall come.

But why do so many professing Christians commune so seldom? What reasons can they assign? Some do not pretend to assign any reason whatever. They are careless and indifferent, not only in regard to the Lord’s Supper, but in regard to the high and momentous interests of their immortal

souls. They care nought for Jesus and for what he has suffered for them, nor for what he is willing to bestow. They have united themselves with the church by the most solemn vows, and yet possess not one trait of Christian character. Such either were vile hypocrites, or have since stifled the convictions, and counteracted and banished the serious impressions then made upon their hearts.

Some have never, or but once or twice partaken of the Lord's Supper since they attached themselves to the church.

O, what a burning shame! What a reproach they bring upon the church! What a daring insult to the Savior! How shall such abide the judgment of the great day? How answer for their awful guilt? O! ye careless, thoughtless, dead formal Christians, reflect seriously upon your conduct, and your perilous condition. O, be concerned about the things that make for your peace. Seek forgiveness and mercy; then you will no longer slight the table of the Lord. It will be a place dear to your soul. With an ardent desire will you long after its rich, glorious, and soul-satisfying provisions, and hail with gladness the gracious invitation, "Do this in remembrance of me."

If the inquiry be made of some members of the church, why they absent themselves from the table of the Lord, they reply, I cannot go as long as so many go, whose lives correspond not with their profession. We admit and lament that this is the case. But, we ask, will the conduct of others exculpate you for your neglect of it? You might as well say, I will not go to the house of God, because so many ungodly persons go. See to it that your heart is right in the sight of God — that you have the appropriate dispositions, feelings and desires, and the attendance of others will not harm you.

Another replies, my neighbor and I are at variance, therefore I cannot go. To such an one the Savior gives the necessary direction: "Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way: first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift." — Matt. 5:23, 24

The excuse of another is, "I am not prepared to approach and partake of so holy an ordinance." This is the language of two entirely different classes of persons. With the one class it serves merely as a convenient plausible excuse, to satisfy their own consciences, and to palliate their conduct before others. They are careless and indifferent about the salvation of their souls. This excuse they have made for years, and yet with this professed convic-

tion, they continue in their sins, estranged from God. They resist all the influences of the truth and Spirit of God, sin against light and knowledge, and perhaps live in the direct violation of the moral precepts of the gospel, in the indulgence of gross improprieties. That such are not prepared to partake of the Lord's Supper, admits of no doubt whatever. They would be guilty of the body and blood of Christ, do themselves, the church, and the world, great injury. But whose fault is it, that they are not prepared, but their own? Their excuse proclaims their guilt. They make one sin the occasion for committing another. Such an excuse will not justify their conduct before men, much less before the righteous Judge of the universe.

If such persons go to the Lord's table they sin, and if they do not go they commit sin, for they transgress a positive command of the Lord. Some one may inquire, what am I to do? according to your view of the case, I may do as I may, if I go I sin, and if I stay away I sin. It is even so, and you cannot gainsay it. There is but one course which can help you out of this dilemma; and that is, to learn to know and feel your guilt, penitently to confess and resolutely to forsake your sin, and to turn to the Lord, who will have mercy, and to our God, who will abundantly pardon. Seek to become a new creature in Christ Jesus. Then you can approach the table of the Lord without committing sin, and then you will not incur the guilt of transgressing a positive injunction of the Savior, by staying away; for you will be constrained, by a sense of your need, by the ardent longings of your heart, and by the love of Jesus, to partake of the rich provision of the master's table, not only now and then, but whenever an opportunity is presented.

The other class, from whom we hear the excuse, "I am not prepared, not worthy to appear at the Lord's table consists partly of awakened, penitent, seeking souls, and partly of weak, fearful, and desponding Christians. They have such a thorough, self-pervading sense of their own nothingness, of the sacredness of the ordinance, and the richness of its provisions, that they fear lest it might be presumption in them to venture to approach.

But for such it is specially designed, and peculiarly appropriate. To such the Savior specially draws nigh. For such it is written, "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word."— Isa. 66:2, Such are most affectionately invited to come to Jesus: "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest; take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my

burden is light. — Matt. 11:28, 30. And again, "He giveth grace to the humble." — 1 Pet. 5:5.

If our approach to the Lord's table depended upon any merit or worthiness in us, none would dare to come. And if any presume to come, decked in his own fancied righteousness, the Savior will address to him the cutting reproof:

"Friend, how earnest thou art hither, not having a wedding garment?"—Matt. 22:12.

We are to come, not with a feeling of worthiness, but under the conviction of our utter unworthiness of so great a privilege, so great an honor, so great goodness.

Hence we are to examine ourselves, that we may learn to know and feel our need, and come deeply humbled and penitent? on account of our sins and unfaithfulness; and yet with an ardent desire after mercy, and a filial confidence in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ. Thus we may come, and though unworthy, we shall not be unwelcome at the Savior's table.

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How Can You Find Peace With God?

The most important thing to grasp is that no one is made right with God by the good things he or she might do. Justification is by faith only, and that faith resting on what Jesus Christ did. It is by believing and trusting in His one-time *substitutionary* death for your sins.

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Benediction

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen. (Jude 1:24-25)

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