

The Lord's Supper

Lesson 2: The Nature of this Ordinance

Intro

The question asked by the Jewish children in Ex 12.26 regarding the passover may well be asked of the Supper, "*What do you mean by this service?*"

It was appointed by Christ as a *commemorating* ordinance, a *confessing* ordinance, a *communing* ordinance, and a *covenanting* ordinance, so these things should govern our intentions as we participate in it.

****Note:** In the sacraments God has *sacramentally joined* the thing signified (Christ and all His benefits) with the sign (bread and wine/the waters of baptism) that to receive the sign *with the exercise of faith upon the thing signified* by it is to receive the thing signified itself, 1Cor 10.16; Acts 2.38, WSC 91-92, 96

A Commemorating Ordinance

- I. The Lord gave it this purpose when He said, *do this in remembrance of me*, Lk 22.19.
 - A. It's done in remembrance of *Christ's person* as an absent Friend. It's a ceremony of friendship, done for His sake, in His absence, in remembrance of Him. We do it in token of the fact that though our blessed Friend is out of sight, He is not out of mind. In the institution of this ordinance, He put this motto upon it, *Remember me!*
 - B. It's done in remembrance of *Christ's death*. We're to observe it knowing nothing but Christ and Him crucified, 1Cor 2.2. This ordinance sets Christ's death before us, Gal 3.1
 1. We endeavor to receive and excite the remembrance of it in our hearts, 2Tim 2.8. The images instituted in this ordinance are very strong and lively and proper to make deep impressions of His grace and love upon our minds, *to the engaging of our hearts*. And this contemplation must then make such an impression upon our souls as to work it *into fellowship with* and *into conformity unto* Him *in His sufferings for our sins*.
- II. Thus we partake of this ordinance *effectually, in remembrance of Him*, when we experience 1) the death of Christ killing sin in us, and 2) the power of Christ's cross, as the spring of special grace, crucifying us to the world and the world to us, Gal 6.14. *We rightly do this in remembrance of Him **when**, in touching the hem of His garment in this ordinance, we find virtue coming out of Him to heal our souls (Mk 5.27).

See here that participation in the Lord's Supper is no mere mental exercise. It's an act of faith in which we lay hold upon and receive the *Christ* commemorated by the meal.

A Confessing Ordinance

- I. The Lord's Supper is one the peculiarities of our religion by which believers are distinguished from the world. In it we confess our resolution to belong to Christ, to be His followers, and to live for Him, according to our baptismal vows.
 - A. We hereby profess our value and esteem for Christ crucified, 1Cor 11.26; Gal 6.14. *When we receive the Lord's Supper we solemnly declare that we're not ashamed of the the cross of Christ, but rejoice in it as the instrument of God's glory and of our salvation.
 - B. We hereby profess our dependence upon and confidence in Christ crucified. As we're not ashamed to own Him, so we're not ashamed to venture our souls and eternal salvation upon Him, believing He is able to save us to the uttermost.
 - C. The concerns that lay between us and God are of vast consequence. Our eternal weal or woe depends upon the right management of them. *By resorting to this ordinance, we declare that we've chosen to put all these matters into the hands of our Redeemer.

A Communing Ordinance

- I. Not only are gospel truths *represented* and *confessed* in this ordinance, but gospel benefits are *offered* to us and *accepted* by us. His body *being broken for us* and His blood *being shed for us* is, by the blessing of Christ and Spirit of Christ, and through an exercised faith, *made effectual to us as food* for our souls, 1Cor 10.16, WSC 91.
 - A. In this ordinance we're made *partakers* of Christ's merit and righteousness for our justification and of His Spirit and grace for our sanctification. All the riches of the gospel are virtually in this sacrament, because to receive Christ is to receive all His benefits, Eph 1.3
 1. Christ and all His benefits are hereby *communicated to us*. He is bread and wine not only set before us, but given to us; and not only made known to us by representation, but made over to us by presentation. God hereby not only assures us of the truth of His promises, but according to our capacity conveys to us by His Spirit the very things promised. *The well of salvation is deep, but this ordinance is a bucket by which faith can draw water.
 2. Christ and all His benefits are hereby *received by us*. When we look to Christ by faith in this ordinance and by faith look to His atoning work for us, we interest ourselves in that work and receive the benefit of it. We commune with Him and we receive His life for our own, Gal 2.20
 - B. *Thomas Haweis*: "In general, Jesus Christ gives the entirety of Himself to every believer and, consequently, every blessing of grace and glory that He, by His obedience unto death, purchased for us." The most remarkable are:
 1. The pardon of sin. In the Lord's Supper, for the confirmation of our faith, God condescends to put His seal to the covenant of grace, ratifying the purchased pardon and assuring us that He will be merciful and will remember our sins no more, Heb 8.12.
 2. The adoption as children. We're not welcome as a prodigal son among servants, but as sons in and with the Son Himself.
 3. Consolation and joy. In this sacrament we often get mountaintop views of the Promised Land. This meal dries our tears and dons us with the garments of praise in the place of a spirit of heaviness.
 4. The distribution of strength and power for the Christian life. We grow stronger in faith. We find grace to mortify our sins. We grow in humility and heavenly-mindedness. Our smoking flax is fanned into flame.
 5. This ordinance is designed to strengthen us so that we might go from strength to strength, grace to grace, until we arrive at the blessed place where we will go from glory to glory.

A Covenanting Ordinance

- I. It's the seal of the NT administration of the covenant of God's grace to us in Christ our Mediator.
 - A. God hereby seals to us that He is our God. All that He is in Himself He is to us and for our good. He will be to us a Father, a Husband, a Shepherd, a Portion, a God.
 - B. We hereby seal to God that we are His people. We accept the relation God has established with us and hereby bind ourselves to be His, forever. We hereby resign, surrender, and give up our whole selves, body and soul, to God. *Claiming the blessings and promises of the covenant, we put ourselves under the bonds and obligations of the covenant in this meal.

Thus we see how this meal is a memorial, and yet so much more; how it is a representation, and yet so much more; how it is a proclamation, and yet so much more. And we thereby see that this meal cannot be properly received without an prepared, engaging, and prayerful faith in the Christ who appointed it and in the Spirit who alone can make it effective, WSC 91

Edward Bickersteth: “Here we may have the nearest approaches to the divine presence that our state in this world admits.”

Daniel Wilson: “There takes place at the Lord’s Table that union with Christ which no other means of grace is designed to convey.”

Howell Harris: “It is the [soul’s] place of meeting [with God].”

Thomas Robinson: “It is the appointed method, in which God is pleased to strengthen, quicken, and comfort His people; and as our wants return upon us, so by a frequent attendance upon this ordinance, we should seek fresh communications of grace.”

Henry Venn’s prayer before communion: “O let it not be a memorial, a mere ceremony; but while I receive the outward and visible sign, let my soul delightfully feel the inward and spiritual grace thereby signified; while my hand receives the bread and wine dispensed by the minister, let me by a true and lively faith eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood.”

Thomas Adam: “As the bread broken and wine poured out is a speaking picture of his body broken and blood shed for us, and as these emblems are taken into our mouths and converted into nourishment for our bodies, so it is a speaking picture of the spiritual nourishment we draw from Christ himself. And as, in the Lord’s Supper, we more especially and in the most solemn manner profess our faith in and dependance upon him for all his benefits, we therefore believe with good reason, that the *constant and devout use* of this Sacrament is not only necessary, in virtue of the command, *Do this in remembrance of me*, but also that it has an extraordinary blessing attending it. It brings us to a nearer union with Christ, it increases our graces, and in a more special manner strengthens and refreshes our souls, just as our bodies are refreshed by the bread and wine.”