

The Lord's Supper

Lesson 3: The Obligation to Receive the Lord's Supper

Intro

Given the purpose of the Lord's Supper to represent, seal, and apply Christ and the benefits of His mediation to believers (WSC 92), we're under the most weighty obligation to receive it as an appointed means of our growth in grace. But let's consider several reasons why we *should* faithfully attend this ordinance and not *unwarrantably* neglect it.

Reasons enforcing our obligation

- I. The express command of our Saviour: *do this in remembrance of me*, Lk 22.19; 1Cor 11.24-25
 - A. This is a plain and positive command. Our attendance upon this sacrament is a direct acknowledgment of the authority of Christ, just as the unwarranted neglect of it is a direct disregard of His command.
 - B. Owen: "Faith and obedience here give special honor to Christ as Sovereign. It is, in fact, the most direct profession of the subjugation of our souls and consciences to the authority of Christ in all our religion. Our reason for the faithful observance of this ordinance is simply because Christ commands it." Jn 14.15
 - C. *Bickersteth*: "Since it's a direct command, the matter of neglecting it comes down to this: either Christ is not your Lord or you are not His disciple; for a Lord without obedience and a disciple without obligation is absurd."
- II. The motive assigned for the obedience: *in remembrance of Christ*. In fulfilling this precept you're also giving evidence of your affectionate recollection of your Saviour and His sacrifice for you. You're indebted to none more than to Christ and therefore have more reasons to show your gratitude and affection to Him than to any other.
- III. The statement of the Apostle that this obligation is still binding on believers.
 - A. Paul's statement to the Corinthians (1Cor 11.26) makes clear that this obligation rests on the church of Christ *until* He comes again in glory.

Frequency of observation

- I. The whole scope of Paul's reasoning with the Corinthians in 1Cor 11 shows that the early church was in the habit of frequently observing the Supper. In fact, from Acts 2.42; 20.7 and 1Cor 11.20, 33 there's sufficient ground to argue that the early church received the Lord's Supper everytime they assembled for public worship.¹
- II. In the early 18th century the Supper had come to be greatly neglected, so that it was usually observed 3-4 times a year and in many places with only a few communicants. But then the great Evangelical Revival in Britain in the mid 18th to 19th centuries was marked by a revival of the importance of the Lord's Supper.
 - A. Many ministers began to serve communion monthly; and others weekly, with hundreds and thousands coming regularly to the Table, fueling great revivals of serious Christianity.
 - B. *Daniel Wilson*: "The oftener they go, the better it will be with them, if they go with a sincere desire to be made better."
 - C. It was the desire of the ministers of that time to "prepare the ignorant to become devout communicants, to celebrate with reverence, understanding, and sincerity the most excellent and highest ordinance that ever was ordained in the Church of Christ upon earth."²

¹ Also, Justin Martyr's description of Christian worship on Sundays (as early as the 2d century) includes the observance of the Lord's Supper as a part of weekly worship.

² Griffith Jones of South Wales.

- D. When asked how we can be sure that pardon and salvation are ours as a free gift of Jesus Christ, *Rev. Joseph Milner* said we have six evidences given to us by the Apostle, “three are in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Spirit...and the other three are with us on earth: “the Spirit, the water, and the blood,” (1Jn 5.8) which, in my judgment, mean the written Word of God, and the two Sacraments.”

The great guilt of unwarranted neglect

- I. It's a willful disobedience to the Saviour. We're not only *invited*, but *commanded*, to frequent His Table. Ministers are appointed by Christ to say to you, “Come, for all things are now ready” (Lk 14.17). *Bickersteth*: “If you live in the neglect of this ordinance, you greatly resemble those who first rejected the gospel.” Let us remember that it was said, “none of them will taste my banquet” (v.24). Cf. Num 9.7-11.
- II. It's a separating of yourself from your Christian brethren. To neglect the meal which testifies to your communion with your brethren, you're saying you don't want to be numbered with them and would rather your name be joined with those outside the church.
- III. It's an undervaluing of your baptism. Your baptism was the sign of your *admission into* the church; and the Supper is the sign of your *continuance within it*. To neglect it is to say that your baptism is a privilege not worth maintaining. Indeed, to walk away from the church when you come of age is the same as saying that if you had your way, you would not have been baptized.
- IV. It's treating your Saviour's death lightly. The Supper is a memorial of His sacrifice for you. To refuse to come is to say, in effect, that you'd prefer to remember other things instead; and that you have no desire to honor His love or to declare your hope in His cross.

Answers to excuses for not coming to the Lord's Table

- I. *I'm unworthy.*
- A. There's a big difference between *being unworthy* and *partaking unworthily*. No one is worthy. After all, it's the guilty and sinful whom Christ invites. In fact, a sense of our sinfulness is a prerequisite and needful part of our preparation, WSC 97.
1. We come to the Lord's Table, not because we're worthy, but because we see that we need the blessings available there and that we'll perish without them. Besides, Jesus invites us to come on the basis of our need, and not on the basis of any merit.
- B. Moreover, if the Lord's invited us to come, it's not presumption to accept that invitation; and if He's commanded us to come, it's not presumptuous to obey it. In fact, it's presumptuous to refuse to come. Neglecting the Table is not a testimony of humility, but it is often a testimony of unbelief, ignorance, or rebellion.
- II. *The sacrament is holy, and I'm not.*
- A. Some say they neglect the table out of reverence for it—especially in light of our own sinfulness. But the reverence which Christ expects us to have for this sacrament is a reverence of obedience. Our reverence for it is why we *shouldn't* neglect it.
- B. And if you're still afraid to come... remember that the Lord's Supper does not arise from *Mount Sinai*, but from *Mount Zion*, and from Jesus (Heb 12), who said, “Come to me.”
- III. *I don't have the time to prepare for it.*
- A. Though the sacrament requires due preparation of mind and heart and life, it would be worth considering if the true meaning of this excuse might not be, “I'm leading a life inconsistent with my Christian profession and am in no condition to come.” If we're so engrossed in this world's business that it leaves no time for our most important soul-duties, then we need to let some things go, Mt 6.33
- IV. *I haven't found any benefit from receiving the Supper.*

- A. Perhaps you've expected the wrong kind of benefit. The Lord's Supper isn't designed for sensible and momentary comfort. It's designed for steady and solid growth in grace.
 - 1. Ask yourself: "after you've deliberately prepared yourself for this ordinance and received it with seriousness, can you really say that no resolution against sin received fresh confirmation and that no obligation to obedience was strengthened?" And isn't it presumptuous, when Christ says it's beneficial to your walk, to say that it's ineffective merely because you didn't get from it what you expected?
 - 2. We need to remember that the Lord remains sovereign over His ordinances. He's not tied to work by them, but may work as He wills. In fact, as a testimony to His sovereignty and a test of our faith, He often does not work (as to our senses) at the moment of our obedience. *However*, although God is not tied to the ordinances for His work, He's tied us to them as means through and by which we're to seek His grace.
- V. *I'm so weak I'm afraid I'll break my promises and only incur greater guilt.*
 - A. You forget that the sacrament is designed to strengthen your resolutions for obedience. You forget the greater guilt of neglecting a divine ordinance.
 - B. But ask yourself, "Do I purpose to give myself up to the unrestrained enjoyment of sin, or do I purpose to be the disciple of Christ and follow after Him?" If you purpose to live in sin, then you have greater problems than neglecting the Table. But if you purpose to live for Jesus, and are afraid of failure, then that's all the more reason to come more frequently so that you can receive more strength in support of that resolution and against that failure.
- VI. *My conscience is burdened by the guilt of a particular sin.*
 - A. One purpose of receiving the Supper is to obtain the very blessings of pardon and peace of conscience.
 - B. If we've committed a grievous sin and the Supper is upon us, then it may be wise to abstain from it. But that abstinence must be with the express intention of more humbly confessing our sin to God and repenting of it in preparation for approaching the Table next time, and not because we feel our sinfulness prevents us from coming. Let us repent and come to the Table.

In summary

- I. In sum, we need to understand that there's *nothing* to discourage the penitent believer from a frequent and regular attendance upon the Lord's Table. The duty is clear and the spiritual advantage is great.
- II. On the other hand, those living *in the love and practice of sin* are not welcome to the Table. But rather than keep away altogether, let them see that they repent of their sins, believe in Christ, devote themselves to Him, and then come!

Matthew Henry: "Let no man plead this or that excuse; but let him instead resolve carefully to perform so necessary a duty. Let the sinner quit his state of sin and death and so come and eat of the bread of life. Let the ignorant come to the school of Christ and proceed until they come to the Upper Room. Let those that are at enmity with their neighbors also come—only let them first go and be reconciled to their brethren. Let those that have a multitude of worldly employments come—only let them leave them, as Abraham did, at the foot of the mount, and then ascend to the worship of God. Let the weak come, that they may grow in strength. Let the strong come, that they may not grow weak. Let them who have fears come, that their hearts may be settled by the acts of a more lively faith. And let those who have hopes come, that they may rise to greater degrees of humble confidence. Let those with leisure accept this invitation, because they have no excuse; and let those who have but little leisure accept it also, that they may the more sanctify their businesses and their employments. Let the sad and sorrowful approach, that their hearts may be filled with the joys of the Lord; and let those that rejoice in the Lord always approach, that their joy may be full."

In every case, may our experience always be such that we can say with Jeremy Taylor, "Happy is that soul who comes to these springs of salvation, as the deer to the flowing streams, panting and thirsting, weary of sin, hating vanity, and reaching out the heart and hands to Christ."