

# The Lord's Supper

## Lesson 6: Some Excellent Helps to Self-Examination

### 1Cor 11.28 & WSC 97 & WLC 171

- I. Helps to self examination (**Edward Bickersteth**, *Treatise on the Lord's Supper*)
  - A. Set aside a fixed time for it
    1. It's a duty that cannot be discharged incidentally or in a moment, nor without some self-denial and resolution.
    2. \**Owen*: "Take care that the time to be spent in preparation, neither entrenches on the occasions of the outward man, nor on the weakness of the inward man. If it does, it will be too hard for us. There is a double direction in Scripture. One is, *God will have mercy and not sacrifice*. When the observance of sacrifices sensibly entrenches upon duties of mercy, God does not require it. The other is, *bodily exercise profits little*. When we assign so long a time as wearies our spirits, and observe the time, because of the time, it is bodily exercise, and when the vigor of our spirits is gone, it is not a sacrifice in which God delights. Prudence is required here." "Yet, let not the time allotted be so short as to be unmeet for going through the duty effectually."
    3. It's impossible to give any rule as to the length of time that should be given. The obligation of persons varies with their situations and circumstances. But even those with the most limited amount of time should be able to give at least an hour to this important work. In either case, give what time you can spare and let the time be so used as to be a blessing and not a burden, a privilege and advantage and not a requirement. And know that the more attentive, faithful, and diligent you are in self-examination, the more comfort and benefit you'll receive at the Table.
    4. Are we never to receive the Supper without a minute and particular self-examination? When first coming to the Table as a professing member, a careful and thorough self-examination is vital. But for more advanced Christians, who know and love Jesus and who are in the habit of walking in daily communion with Christ, there is a sense in which he enjoys *an habitual preparedness*. Should he unexpectedly find the Supper to be administered, he would no doubt receive it with much advantage without anything more than this habitual preparedness of mind and heart. But of course it would greatly benefit him if he could give some time to examine himself.
  - B. Consider the Scriptures as the great test by which you are to judge yourself
    1. The Word of God is the only true standard of self-examination. One way to use so large a volume is to follow a plan similar to this:
      - a) To see if you have repented of your sin, read and pray through Ps 51 and compare your views and feelings about your sins with David's.
      - b) To see if you have a lively faith, read and pray through Heb 11 and ask how your faith in Christ influences your life in terms of your decisions, denials, and desires.
      - c) To see if you have a spiritual sense of the mercies of God to you, read and pray through Ps 103 and compare your affections for spiritual things with the psalmist's.
      - d) To see if your soul desires God, read Ps 63 or 84 and see if your heart echoes its cries after God, His house, His worship, His Word, and His presence.
      - e) To see if you love as Christ calls you to, read 1Cor 13 and look at your relationships, especially in your family.
      - f) To see your real estate before God read and pray through the Ten Commandments, Pss 15, 24, 26, 119, Sermon on the Mount, and 1John and compare yourself with the description of those who belong to the Lord, who love God, who are children of the kingdom of heaven, and who are the redeemed of the Lord who walk as He walked.

2. \*By thus comparing yourself with the most practical and spiritual parts of the Word, and varying those from time to time, you test yourself by a perfect and infallible standard.
  - C. It's also been found helpful to read practical books of trusted authors, viz. the Puritans.
  - D. The sermons you hear every Sunday furnish another test by which to try yourself.
  - E. Judge your faithfulness to discharge your Christianity in your home and family. What are the difficulties, temptations, and dangers of your particular station? How do you fulfill your duties in your home, work, and friendships?
- II. Conduct this examination in the spirit of prayer.
- A. If you neglect prayer, self-examination will only prove to be a means of delusion and danger to your immortal soul. We're all prone to think well of and to justify ourselves: *the heart is deceitful above all things*, Jer 17.9. We're prone to think little of the evil of sin and to refer to the false standard of what others are doing rather than to what the Bible requires. Sometimes we're also tempted to write hard and bitter things against ourselves, which only tends to deceive us, harden us, and sink us into despair. *Fervent prayer is the true remedy for this*. God, who searches the heart, reveals its true character to those who pray to Him to show them to themselves, Pss 26.2; 139.23-24
  - B. *A short prayer before self-examination*: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, who searches the heart and tries the innermost thoughts of every man, I ask you now to assist me in looking into my own heart and life. Feeling and acknowledging that my heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, I ask you to show me to myself. Enable me to try myself by the standard of your holy Word, and reveal to me the true state of my soul. Give me repentance for all my past sins, lively faith in Jesus Christ, the only Saviour from sin, deep humility before you, and such tempers and dispositions as are suitable for those who assemble around the Table of our gracious Redeemer. These things I ask for in His name. Amen."
- I. *How must we examine ourselves?* (**Matthew Henry**, *The Communicant's Companion*)
- A. We must examine ourselves *as a metal is examined by the touchstone* whether it be real or counterfeit. We have a show of religion; but are we what we appear to be? Or are we a whitewashed tomb? \*The Word of God is the touchstone by which we must test ourselves.\* "Can I through grace answer the characters which the Scriptures give of those whom Christ will own and save?" Every Christian still has the remnants of sin within him, which will be seen in the failures of his life; but the question is, what are the predominant marks of his character? Is love for God the predominant principle? Is he in the pursuit of Christ and holiness? Does he hate his sin and beg God, not only for forgiveness for it, but for deliverance from it?
  - B. We must examine ourselves *as a criminal is examined by a judge* to find out what he's done wrong. Calling ourselves sinners in general is not enough. We must dig into our own hearts and own the particular sins we've committed.
  - C. We must examine ourselves *as a copy is examined by the original* to see the errors that need correcting. We are the epistles of Christ, having His law and love written on our hearts and lives. But how well do we match His life? Are our affections and conversations and conduct conformable to His? What's missing? What's there that shouldn't be? *Let faith* read the original and let *conscience* read the copy so we can seek forgiveness for what's *been* wrong and repentance for what *is* wrong.
  - D. We must examine ourselves *as a candidate that stands for examination*. We stand at the wedding feast of the bridegroom, do we have a wedding garment on? Are we fit to receive the

inheritance? What knowledge do we have? What grace do we have? What improvement have we made in the school of Christ? What testimonials can we produce?

- E. We must examine ourselves *as a wife is examined for her consent*. A covenant is being ratified between God and our souls in the Lord's Supper. Do we freely and cheerfully consent to the covenant? Are we willing to make this surrender of ourselves unto the Lord? Are we freely willing, not because we cannot help it, but because we know we can't do better for ourselves?
- F. We must examine ourselves *as a traveler is examined concerning his business*. What's the purpose of our coming to the Table? What brings us there? Is it tradition, habit, duty, or a spiritual appetite for Christ and His benefits? What are we doing here?

II. *More particularly*, there are **6 questions** that are very good to put to ourselves in our self-examination for the Supper, both for the first time we approach it upon our membership vows, and for every time we come to it afterwards.

A. What am I? *Here we make sure we know our spiritual state by the fruits of it.*

- 1. Am I still in Adam or have I graciously been brought over and united to Christ? Am I under the favor of God or under His wrath and curse? Am I a servant to God or a slave to the world and my flesh? Am I going to heaven or to hell? Am I in the narrow way or the broad way? The Lord's Supper is bread for the children of God; am I His child? I'm called a Christian, but am I a Christian indeed? Do I have a new nature answerable to my name? The Lord's Supper seals our covenant with God, but have I ever made the covenant in the first place?
- 2. There can be no deceiving here. We must be impartial and honest with ourselves. For if we are not truly saints on earth, we shall never be saints in heaven.
  - a) What choice have I made? Have I chosen God for my portion. My parents chose Him for me in my baptism, but now that I've come of age, have I chosen Him for myself? Have I chosen Christ for my Master, the Scriptures for my rule, holiness for my way, and heaven for my home?
  - b) What change have I experienced? I was born a slave of sin. Does my life reveal that I'm not so anymore? Though I still sin, am I more like Christ than before? Do I love to be with God in the means of His grace?
  - c) What is the bent of my affections? How do I feel about sin, my sin? Do I dread it as most hateful or do I make light of it and excuse it? What do I think of Christ? Do I love Him, prize Him above all others? Do I love His ordinances? Do I love His people, His house, His Word? What do I think of the world? What do I think of holiness? What do I think of Satan?
  - d) What is the course and savor of my conversations? Do I allow myself in any known sin or in the neglect of any known duty? Do I live for God's glory or for my own pleasure?

B. What have I done? *Here we search out and own all our sins before God.*

- 1. The Lord requires us to confess our sin. If we do, He will forgive it. But if we do not, and instead cover it, it will not go well with us.
- 2. What sins have we committed? We must search ourselves and call them out by name, Josh 7.19-21; Ps 139.23-24. It's better to own our sins now, when there's a door of hope open in the gospel, than to own them in hell, where the only door open is to an endless despair and unspeakable sorrow. Ask yourselves:
  - a) How have I employed my thoughts?
  - b) How have I governed my passions?
  - c) How have I preserved my purity?
  - d) How have I used my tongue?
  - e) How have I spent my time?

- f) How have I managed my calling?
  - g) How have I received my daily food?
  - h) How have I done the duty of my particular relations?
  - i) How have I performed my private worship?
  - j) How have I stewarded and managed what God has given me in the world?
  - k) How have I improved the Lord's Day and the means of grace?
  - l) How have I borne my afflictions?
- C. What am I doing? *Here we ponder the paths of our feet.*
1. What am I doing in the general course of my conversation? Am I doing anything for God, for my soul, for eternity, for my generation? or am I standing idle all the day long?
  2. What am I doing in this approach to the Lord's Supper? Am I repenting of all known sin? Am I sincerely renewing my covenant with God? Am I resolving to walk all the more faithfully in the ways of new obedience? or am I thinking of something else and coming slothfully?
- D. What proof do I have? *Here we look for our growth in grace.*
1. Do I find my practical judgment more settled and confirmed in its choice of holiness and heaven? If so, it's a sign I'm maturing in Christ. Our affections are not the best evidence because they may blaze in the beginning and then be more steady over time. But are we more convinced than before that it is good and right and wise to follow after Christ?
  2. Do I find my corrupt appetites and passions more manageable? or are they still as violent and headstrong as ever? Though the Canaanites still live in the land, does the house of David grow stronger and stronger? Am I better able to bear disappointments, injuries, and provocations than before?
  3. Do I find the duties of religion more easy and pleasant to me? or do I go awkwardly about them as one untrained and unskilled in them? There's no better evidence of sincerity and growth in grace than an even, constant, and steady course of lively devotion, which, by daily use, becomes familiar and easy, and by the new nature, natural to us.
  4. Do I find my heart more weaned from this present life and more willing to exchange it for a better? or am I still unwilling to leave it?
  5. If upon search, we find that we make no progress in grace and holiness, let the Supper be used for our growth and for the removal of what hinders it.
- E. What do I want? *Here we strive to get a true sense of our spiritual necessities.*
1. When we come to the Table, Christ says to us, "What would you have me do for you?"
    - a) What grace do we need most? Where do we see ourselves to be most weak? What sin do we see most at work in ourselves (it's the opposite grace that we most need)? What are most of our temptations? What are the greatest dangers to our spirituality?
    - b) What comfort do we most need? What is the burden that lies most heavy on us? What is the grief that is most grieving? There is in the covenant of grace a salve for every sore, a remedy for every malady, comforts suited to every distress and sorrow; but in order that we might enjoy them, it's required that we know our own sore and grief and *spread* it before the Lord and *apply* ourselves to that relief in Christ which suits it.
- F. What shall I resolve to do? *Here we seek what the Lord would have us do.*
1. What is that sin against which we should particularly covenant? What is that duty to which we should most expressly oblige ourselves? It is good to be particular in our resolutions, for though a general promise is enough to bind conscience, a particular promise is necessary to mind conscience.
    - a) What is that sin which has most easily beset me? What is the duty which I have most neglected or been backwards to or been careless of?
    - b) What can I do in my station to honor God? What is the talent entrusted to me and how can I use it for His glory? What is expected of me in my station?

**Joseph Alleine's** helps for *daily* self-examination:

- I. Regarding your duties:
  - A. Did God not find me in my bed when He looked for me on my knees?
  - B. Have I not prayed to no purpose, or let wandering thoughts eat out my duty?
  - C. Have I not neglected, or been very careless in, the reading of God's Word?
  - D. Have I digested the sermon I heard last? Have I prayed over it and repeated it to my heart?
  - E. Was there not more of custom and fashion in my family duties than there was of conscience?
  - F. Where have I denied myself today for God?
  - G. Have I redeemed my time from overly long and needless visits, idle imaginations, fruitless conversations, unnecessary sleep, and a preoccupation with the needs of this world?
  - H. Have I done anything more than ordinary for the church of God when she was in need?
  - I. Have I been careful about my company?
  - J. Have I not neglected some relative duty today (as husband, wife, parent, child, employer, employee, or citizen, etc.)?
- II. Regarding your sins:
  - A. Does not sin sit light on my conscience?
  - B. Am I a mourner for the sins of my nation, community, generation, and culture?
  - C. Do I not live in something that I know or fear to be a sin?
- III. Regarding your heart:
  - A. Have I been much and often in holy prayer?
  - B. Has not God been out of mind and heaven out of sight?
  - C. Have I been often looking into my heart and made conscience even of my vain thoughts?
  - D. Have not I given way to the working of pride or passion today?
- IV. Regarding your tongue:
  - A. Have I bridled my tongue and kept it in?
  - B. Have I spoken evil of any man?
  - C. Has the law of God been in my mouth as I sat in my house and went by the way, lying down and rising up?
  - D. Have I come into no company but I have left something of God there and left some good favor behind?
- V. Regarding your table:
  - A. Did I not sit down with no higher end than a beast, merely to please my appetite?
  - B. Did I not rise from my table without leaving something of God there?
  - C. Did not my appetite overcome me?
  - D. Did I not mock God when I pretended to crave a blessing and return thanks?
- VI. Regarding your calling:
  - A. Have I been diligent in the duties of my calling?
  - B. Have I defrauded any man?
  - C. Have I ever lied in my shop or trade?
  - D. Did I not rashly make or falsely break some promise?

**Now...** the real business here is that you resolve to make *a right use* of these questions. Will you content yourself with only the *approval* of these rules, or will you *apply* them to yourself in practice?

\*To stir you up to apply them, consider that there's not a better means in all the world for you to get a thorough victory over your sins than to regularly and sincerely use some means of self-examination and self-judgment before God, *to whom you confess* your sins and *from whom you receive* strength and grace to both mortify sin and practice righteousness.

\*"You must watch your sins as a cat does her prey; either it must stay in the hole, or else she has it."  
"We must daily be in pursuit of our sins; never give over the chase, not for one prayer or one day, for only then are we likely to get the victory."

**Thomas Doolittle's** nine questions to excite us to greater diligence in preparing for the Lord's Table. "Because our hearts are too apt to do that work with slightness where there should be the greatest care and diligence, I shall add a few considerations to your mind, wherewith you would do well to urge your heart, whenever you are to go unto this ordinance.

- I. What if you were to die this day, what preparations would you have made then? You are to make the same preparations when you prepare for the Supper.
    - A. Two things especially concern a man before he dies: 1) get the truth of grace; 2) get some evidences of that grace. These are the same things that concern a man before he comes to the Lord's Table. You should go to the Lord's Table as carefully as if you were passing into another world.
      1. What *sin* would most disturb the peace of my conscience if I were to die today? Mourn most for that sin at the Lord's Table.
      2. What *mercy* would you beg from God if you were dying today? Beg that mercy from God when you are at the Table.
      3. What *mercy* would you especially bless God for if you were dying today? Bless God and give Him thanks at the Table for that mercy.
  - II. What if Christ were personally present and were to administer the Sacrament to you with His own hands, what preparation would you make for it then?
    - A. How would you have prayed beforehand if Christ were with you in your prayer closet? But He was with you.
    - B. How would you have spent your time preparing last night if Christ were with you? But He was with you.
  - III. What if you should see God strike every unworthy receiver dead with the bread in his mouth, or the cup in his hand, what preparation would you make for the Supper then?
  - IV. What if men could look into your heart and see the frame of mind and spirit you bring to the Table, what preparation would you make then?
  - V. What if this were the last opportunity you should ever have to be at the Lord's Table, how would you prepare for it then?
  - VI. What if you were to go from the Lord's Table to the Lord's Tribunal—if God should say to you from heaven, "The day you receive the Supper is the day I will judge you"—what preparation would you make for it then?
  - VII. What if you had been that day under the cross of Christ and had seen His wounds, heard His groans, and were then to come and commemorate His death in the Supper, what preparation would you make for it then?
  - VIII. What if a hypocrite who had abused the Supper were to come from hell and tell you what a grievous sin it was to feed on Christ in name only, what preparation would you make for it then?
  - IX. What if Christ should call from heaven and single you out in the congregation for abusing His Table, saying to you in the hearing of all, "Sinner, sinner, why do you profane my Table?"—what preparation would you make for it then?
- "I would desire you with the greatest seriousness to put these questions to yourself before you come to the Lord's Table, lest your heart be careless and backward to the weightiness of the work."