

THE LORD'S SUPPER CONTINUED

IV. Where Is The Lord's Supper To Be Observed?

Christ Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. He certainly gave it to somebody. To whom did He give it? He gave it to the same body to which He committed baptism. Both of these divine ordinances were entrusted to a divine institution. They were too sacred and important to be left in the hands of anyone except His organized churches. His churches are charged with the responsibility for the proper and perpetual observance of the Lord's Supper. It is a church ordinance, so anything which goes beyond or comes short of this fails for want of scriptural example or command.

The Lord's Supper is to show forth His death by the united act of one of His congregations. It is for nothing else. It is to be observed by His followers only in a church capacity. In every case the Scriptures designate the church as being the one and only place for its observance. Because it is a church ordinance, it can be observed only when a church is assembled. It cannot be administered in the absence of a church any more than baptism can be administered in the absence of water. So far as the Scriptures are concerned, there is not a single example where the Lord's Supper was ever observed except by a church. The assembling of a church is necessary to the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper. It takes a church organization with the authority of Christ behind it to set the Lord's table. Any table set without His authority is not the Lord's.

Obviously, the Lord's table is inside the church and never outside. The view that the Lord's Supper can be peddled around promiscuously by an officiating clergy to individuals, whether well, sick or dying, is wholly without scriptural warrant. Nowhere in the New Testament is there even an intimation that the Lord's Supper might be observed individually. Such an attempted observance, which is only a relic of Roman Catholicism, is a perversion of the divinely intended purpose, and it springs from a superstitious regard for the emblems or an undue reliance upon their effects on the soul. Administering the Supper in the rooms of the sick and dying is not only contrary to scriptural teaching and practice as to the place of its observance, but it also is to teach that there is some saving merit in it. Such practices as administering the emblems to individuals apart from the church are nowhere warranted in the Holy Scriptures and are generally the result of sentiment rather than the study of the Word of God.

V. How Often Is The Lord's Supper To Be Observed?

It is to be observed by and in each New Testament church at stated intervals as determined by each church, inasmuch as the Scriptures do not specify how often it is to be done. On this point the Bible is silent.

VI. Who Should Observe The Lord's Supper?

For the answer to this question we shall not appeal to the bar of public opinion, but to the Word of God. The New Testament is our all-sufficient guide in this important matter. We must not permit ourselves to be guided by feelings, opinions or sentiments. Firmly believing the teachings of the Scriptures, it is our sincere conviction that when God commands a thing men ought to obey Him.

The growth and prosperity of Baptists through these centuries has been due to their adherence to the Word of God. Whenever we turn aside from this well-trodden path for mere sentimentality or transient popularity, the day of our power and usefulness is gone. In the face of all the clamor, we have adhered to God's Word, and He has wonderfully blessed and greatly honored us. What He has done in the past He will do in the future.

The New Testament lists certain well-defined qualifications for those who observe the Lord's Supper. Since it is His Supper, He certainly has the right to prescribe these qualifications. God's Word stipulates certain definite terms of qualification for observing the Lord's Supper. Since no man has any right to change a single one of these qualifications, it is the duty of every Christian to recognize the restrictions which Christ has placed around His table and to be governed accordingly. What, then, are the conditions which our Lord Himself threw about His Supper?

1. Regeneration.

The first prerequisite in coming to the Lord's table is that one must have been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Regeneration is the first and inexorable prerequisite to observing the Lord's Supper. By its very constitution and character, this Supper is intended only for those who have been washed in Christ's precious blood.

What is regeneration or the new birth? When viewed from a negative viewpoint, one can readily see that it is not certain things. It is not the natural birth. It is not the education of the natural man. Education is a wonderful thing. It dispels ignorance and eliminates crude practices. But, education cannot produce the new birth or serve as a substitute for regeneration. Regeneration is not the reformation of the outward man. Reformation is a good thing as far as it goes, but it cannot go far enough. Regeneration is not merely living a moral life. It is not a profession of religion. It is not just having a change of feeling. Feelings are often changed by the weather, by the condition of the health, or by the circumstances of life. Neither is regeneration joining a church. Church membership was never intended for any except the regenerated.

Positively, regeneration is the impartation of the divine nature to human beings. Peter said, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature; having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust." II Peter 1:4. As in the first, or physical, birth we become partakers of human nature, so in the second, or spiritual, birth we become partakers of the divine nature. We received the nature of our parents when we were born physically, and we received the nature of God when we were born spiritually.

2. Baptism.

God's Word teaches very plainly that baptism is a prerequisite to the Lord's Supper. The Scriptures teach that only the baptized have the right to come to the Lord's table. There is not a single instance in the Bible where anyone ever observed the Lord's Supper before being baptized. At Pentecost about three thousand were baptized, and then they observed the Lord's Supper. In all other scriptural examples baptism precedes the Lord's Supper. As far as I know, every one of the well-known denominations, with the exception of the Quakers, teaches that only the baptized should partake of the Supper.

What, then, is baptism? Baptism is the immersion in water of a believer in Christ upon his profession of Him as Saviour and Lord, upon the authority of a New Testament church, and in obedience to the command of our Lord. Baptism was submitted to by Christ, commanded by Him, practiced by the apostles, and intended for all believers. Christ's baptism was intended to be the example for all who might come into the membership of one of his churches. His baptism had four characteristics:

(1) He was baptized as God's child.

"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased."

(2) He was baptized by God's man.

"There was a man sent from God."

(3) He was baptized in God's way.

"And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water."

(4) He was baptized for God's purpose.

"Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness." "Thus" means in this manner. If we love Christ as we should, we will want to obey Him.

Certain things are necessary to scriptural baptism:

(1) A proper subject--a believer in Christ.

(2) A proper authority--a New Testament church.

Baptism is not worth any more than the authority behind it.

(3) A proper administrator--one authorized by a New Testament church.

Baptism is not scriptural unless it is administered by one who is properly authorized to baptize.

(4) A proper motive--obedience to Christ and never with any idea that it has any saving efficacy.

(5) A proper form--burial in water and rising from the watery grave.

(6) A proper formula--"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."

3. Church membership.

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." Acts 2:41-42.

4. An orderly walk.

One matter which has been of considerable concern to many people is that of eating and drinking "unworthily." Paul wrote, "For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." I Corinthians 11:29.

This scripture does not say or even imply that we ourselves must be worthy to partake of the Lord's Supper. If so, no one could ever partake, for none are worthy. Many have abstained from observing the ordinance through false exegesis here.

"Unworthily" is an old adverb, which is used here only in the New Testament. Note that it is an adverb and not an adjective, pointing not to human character and conduct but to manner of observing the Supper. So important is this Memorial Supper that the Scriptures warn us against any perversion. Communing with relatives and friends is a perversion of it. It is partaking unworthily.