

# THE LORD'S SUPPER

AND

## MINISTRY.

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THE word "*Church*" simply means, in the original, "*assembly*," and has, in Scripture, various applications. The nature of the assembly must be determined and understood by its context: for example, I refer to different applications of the word.

1 Cor. i. 2.—The apostle addresses the assembly or church here as the church of God at Corinth, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints. Thus, *all* the sanctified ones in a place, meeting together in one body, would be *the church of God there*. See also 1 Cor. xiv. 23. There might be many assemblies, but none else could take that designation.

Eph. v. 25,—*All* the mystical members of Christ's body are here referred to, without relation to time or place.

Acts xix. 32, 39, 41, "*assembly*" here is the same word elsewhere translated church, and refers to a *mixed and undefined mass*. The church of God is supposed to consist of none but saved and sanctified persons in Christ Jesus.

The seven churches in Asia were called Candlesticks; all the saints in the place being together as one body, God's light and testimony were seen and unfolded. This testimony is now departed, and is, I fear, no where to be found; so ruined is the

Candlestick and whole condition of the church in every place. The painful idea is, that the saints do not see this, and seem content to sit at ease under their shame and confusion, as though the xvii. of John was entirely forgotten, and as if the Lord had prayed for division rather than union among his dear children ; so sedulously are they employed in making and perpetuating division in every possible way. Accordingly we now find that which approaches more to the confusion of Babel, than to the order and union of the church of the living God.

Those who mourn over such a state, are thrown upon the Lord's faithful promise in Matt. xviii., " For where two or three meet together in my name, there am I in the midst," as their present and only relief, seeing that the Candlestick is no where to be found, and that tradition and human arrangement have more to do with churches so called, than the word and the Spirit of God. Such brethren feel bound to separate, to take no part in such matters, and to meet together according to Scripture mode ; to trust to the Lord's presence and blessing in the body of the saints, in the unity of the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven, even as disciples did at the first, though still feeling that they can only take the place of a feeble remnant, while they seek to use and enjoy whatever measure of gift or grace the Lord is pleased to impart to his church. For blessed be God, his gifts and callings are without repentance, and he is above our ruin and shame, he abideth faithful. He withdraws not his Spirit from his people, for he withdraws not his love—they still need building up, pastoral care, and edifying ; to their need he still attends, and will supply the required servants and endowments. He ever acts by suited and definite instrumentality, even as we see in the arrangement of the human body, as I shall hereafter notice.

The Corinthians, in their carnal state, called themselves by the names Paul, Apollos, Cephas, and Christ, making even Christ the head of the *whole* body, to designate a section or portion of it. These sectarian Christians at Corinth did not deny Christ ; while, at the same time, they appended human names and designations to themselves to be called by, which the Apostle loudly condemns as *division* and carnality ; for such

innovations tended to place lines of demarcation within that body of which Christ was the head, and for which He prayed that it might be one. The sectarian spirit that thus arose in the Apostle's day has continued ever since. The present time presents a regular stereotyped form and climax of this portentous evil; so much so, that to say one is without a human name, doctrinal designation, or other party badge, seems extraordinary and unaccountable to many. I often answer, when asked to what sect I belong,—To what sect, party, or denomination did Paul belong?

The meaning of such adoptions, at first sight, seems simple and called for; but when closely inquired into, it will be found that underneath and around them, a large mass of human tradition and arrangement is connected with such headship-terms, and so interwoven into the system, and entwined around all its parts and ramifications, that it could no longer live, but would fall to pieces and crumble into dust, were such incrustations to be dislodged.

A minister of one of these sectaries plainly told me, that in all disputed points, the rules and prescriptions of the society, founded in trust deeds, &c. &c., were taken as their rule and guide, and that their appeal would not be, in such cases, to the word of God. Thus is tradition preferred to Scripture, and the party so straitly shut up, that the light and air of heaven can neither enter freely nor circulate within the body. I understand meeting in Jesu's name to be, to possess a spirit free from partyism, and sectarianism, and thus to occupy a position where the Word of God alone can be appealed to, and every other name, voice, and authority, silenced before the dignity and majesty of the Holy Scriptures, and where the spirit can have free and unrestrained liberty. It is true that godly men may have framed excellent standards, but, I answer, in defence of Christ and His Word, that no man, be he ever so godly, and no standard, be it ever so carefully framed, should be allowed to interfere with the sole authority of the Scriptures. Moreover, such credentials, to say the least, must be imperfect; the very idea of such a code of reference is an unhallowed interference with, and denial of, the all-sufficiency

of the Holy Word, and the living Spirit, the continual and abiding expositor of all its divine institutes and commandments.

We read in Acts xx. 7, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," &c. This Scripture shows the *habitual* weekly keeping of this ordinance, and the primary object of the disciples' gathering together in the name of the Lord, being to show His death on the first day.

There were other meetings for personal ministry which I do not here refer to, and which were not, strictly speaking, the meeting of the body to edify itself; we must keep distinct the meeting of the body as such to worship, under the guidance of the Spirit, and the independent actings of the Spirit in an individual, fulfilling his ministry upon other occasions, as the Lord may open the way before him.

Here again, I have to remark upon a violation of the plain text of Scripture in the various sects and denominations. The Lord's Supper is made a secondary matter. Preaching is set up as the first thing to please and uphold a congregation; therefore profane singers, and high-sounding organs, &c., with preachers of enticing words, are selected and adjusted, to fascinate the people and to support the cause. The disciples came together on the first day of the week to break bread; but now it is to hear a preacher, or do any thing except the primary object of keeping the feast of the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week.

It is true that there are occasions on which the Supper is observed, but then it comes after the close of a long service, and dismissal of the congregation, at quarterly or monthly periods. This is another unhallowed interference with divine appointment. It is also understood that none but the minister should preside at, bless, and sanction the feast by his presence and ministry; whereas all God's people are priests. There were no ordained persons at Corinth, yet they kept the feast. Thus we have Judaism or Popery over again in the requirement of a presiding priest or minister, at the table of the Lord.

I read, the disciples came together; and so I believe they may now in any place, though no gifted preacher be present; all that is needed is to bless or give thanks.

I read in 1 Cor. xi. 20, "When ye come together therefore into one place." The Apostle, in the following verses, directs how they should keep the feast, thus agreeing with Acts xx., fixing the same definite object upon them when they thus came together into one place.

Now it is plain that none but *saved* souls, walking in the truth, can keep this feast; for any other partaking of it would, in so doing, eat and drink judgment to himself instead of receiving blessing: yet some would complain as though a means of grace were withheld.

What does this feast set forth?

- 1.—Communion of the body and blood of Christ.
- 2.—Communion with Christ's mystical body,—the Church.
- 3.—Ye do show the Lord's death till He come.
- 4.—But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.

Here we have four distinct principles stated at this feast table. The receivers profess communion with Christ's blood as their ground of acceptance and forgiveness, as being in the enjoyment of the blessedness and sweetness of the finished work of Jesus.

2ndly.—Fellowship with the body of Christ, having a full and true heart for all Christians. "For we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread."

3rdly.—We show Christ's death till He come. The feast, in our estimation, gives a character to this period. We see nothing before us but a rejected Christ until our Lord come, and here we avow to stand in His rejection and humiliation, in total separation from the world, until His second coming, when this feast shall be changed from the passover to the Tabernacle Feast, and we shall appear in glory, and our days of mourning terminate.

Lastly.—We avow a good conscience, that we have judged ourselves, and have that godly and healthful condition of soul that enables us to be worthy partakers. Thus do we approach and partake of this solemn, holy, and happy feast.

This "one place" to which they came together to break bread, is connected with the xiv. ch. 23 v. "If, therefore, the whole

church be come together into one place." The Apostle, in this chapter, as fully directs how the worship and ministry of the body are to be conducted, as he had done in reference to the breaking of bread; thus definitely setting before the church the two objects for which they assembled.

He says nothing about the Holy Ghost in the 11th chap.; his point there is the keeping of the feast; here it is as to the operations of the Spirit in the assembled body or gathering at that time. I do not see why, in contending for the primary object, the keeping of the feast; the ministry of the Spirit, concerning which such precise and detailed directions are given in the 12th and 14th chapters, should be neglected or slighted. It is plain that the Apostle recognizes the presence and power of the Holy Ghost in the ministry and worship at that feast, as well as the use of the bread and wine. He asserts that the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. Here we are taught that any operation of the Spirit in a member of the body, is for the profit of all. Accordingly we are told in 1 Thess. v. 19, 20, "Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings." I assuredly believe, that to hinder any movement of the Spirit when the saints come together into the one place, or to tie down that movement to any defined system in our own thoughts, is to quench the Spirit, to despise prophesyings, and to reject that profit which the Holy Ghost provides for the need, comfort, and instruction of the saints, through his manifestation and teaching in the assembled body. If the Scripture directs how to keep the feast and edify the saints, at the one place, why should we separate what the Word links together, or prefer a different mode?

Some may say that the 12th and 14th chapters of 1 Cor. refer to what is called miraculous gifts. It is true that such are noticed by the Apostle; but it is I think, plain that he refers also to what is termed the ordinary ones, such as wisdom, knowledge, teachers, prophets, helps, governments, ear, eye, hands, feet, and other ordinary members of the body. These chapters, at any rate, teach *principles* which must refer and apply to the ministry and edifying of the saints, not only when the body abounded in gift, but also to any given portion or residue that may remain.

I am not aware that any other revelation of the Divine mind is given on the subject ; until I meet with such, I must obey and abide by the principles and directions here laid down. I judge it to be highly dangerous to tamper with Scripture. Admit at once the idea into the mind, that another rule and disposition may be observed and practised : on the same ground we may alter and substitute as our theory or fancy shall dictate, and thus make Scripture speak what we please.

The Apostle evidently prefers prophesying to tongues, or to what some call miraculous gifts. He explains what prophesying means, and herein differs, I judge, from the ordinary use and acceptance of the term. "He that prophesieth, speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort." xiv. 3. "I thank my God, I can speak with tongues more than you all : yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." v. 18. "For ye may all prophesy, one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted." v. 31.—Acts xv. 32, explains in like manner what the ministry of the prophet was. "And Judas and Silas being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words and confirmed them."

Such then is the scriptural meaning of the office and work of a prophet in the church, and seems to have a very simple and ordinary aspect. It is true that a prophet may have a revelation as well, though that does not appear to have been the general nature of his ministry in the church. The Apostle permits that three prophets may speak at such meetings :—at the most by three, that all may *learn*, and all may be comforted. Such, then, is the object of ministry ; to hinder or set aside which, is to reject Scripture, and to prefer one's own theory.

Further, the Apostle also values ministry in reference to the world, when the church assembles in the one place, and desires to have it so conducted that a word might fall on the sinner's conscience. "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all : and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest ; and

so falling down on his face, he will worship God, *and report that God is in you of a truth.*" v. 24, 25.

Thus the learning and comfort of the church require ministry ; and the word being heard by unbelievers, though addressed to saints, serves for a testimony in the conscience of the heathen man as to his own state, and that God is present of a truth. Thus prophesying, in the sense used in v. 3, serves for the edifying of the saints, for a testimony in the conscience of the unconverted, and to the fact of God being present in the church of a truth.

The edifying and order of the body are thus plainly before the Apostle's mind. There seemed to be confusion at Corinth, in relation to worship and ministry. In v. 26, "Every one of you hath," &c.,—all were coming forward to do something, irrespective of the order and guidance of the Spirit, which practice was opposed to decency and order, and the character of God ; for he is a God of order and not of confusion.

It is plain from Rom. xii. that all have not the same office or gift, for the Apostle adds, "Having then gifts *differing* according to the grace that is given to us," &c. *Here the Apostle shows distinct and abiding gifts in the Church, to be waited upon and observed by them who possess them,—such as teaching, exhortation, ruling, &c.* Also in 1 Cor. xii. 28, "And God hath set some in the church, first Apostles," &c.; and then he enumerates or classifies eight different and distinct departments of gift. He puts the question, moreover, "Are all apostles? are all prophets?" &c. Some evidently were for equalizing the gifts ; he meets the statement by the inquiry, "*Are all?*" &c. No such thing ; but he gives to each his separate definite place and aspect. All members in the body of Christ are useful, but only so long as they hold and fill up their distinct spheres and capabilities, without interfering the one with the other. Where no distinction is admitted, and all are made equal, endless confusion is produced ; no particular leading of the Spirit is submitted to, and the Scripture is denied, for it asserts, "To one is given the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge," &c. 1 Cor. xii. 8. Here, also, we find



eight distinct and separate operations of the Spirit, widely apart from one another as to their peculiar character. It is true that all are one in Christ; but it is not true to say, that within the body there lies no difference, or that all are equal as regards gift.

I read, "Let your women keep silence." I suppose, a woman entering an assembly would not consider herself to be as the man. Again, "Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder." "Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father." I suppose bishops or deacons would not, in an assembly of saints, forget their distinctive place in the body, or the saints the position that God had set them in.

Without pursuing this further, I believe the word of God, while it teaches that all are brethren, and only one Master, teaches most distinctly and decidedly that there are differences and varieties among saints, made and formed according to the will of the Lord. I do not think that either pride or assumption is fairly chargeable upon a servant of Christ, when he asserts the peculiar ministry to which he is called, and seeks to fill up the same in subjection to the Spirit. And further, I believe that those who, under such circumstances, slightly use such words as clericalism, one man ministry, and the like, have much to answer for before the Lord for casting contempt upon his servant and hindering his work. In objecting to what is termed one man ministry, it is by no means intended to refuse ministry in any form in which it may be presented, according to God; on the contrary, when the eyes of many were opened to the evil and hinderance of the one man system, they sought to occupy a position in which they might enjoy "10,000 instructors." 1 Cor. iv. 14. What is understood by the term one man ministry is, when the nominee of a system takes an exclusive place, to the hinderance and rejection of the other gifts, when the church assembles for worship. It may often happen that only one stately ministers in the Word, when other like gifts have not manifested themselves; or, it may be, where those who have them fail to use them. It is plain that, whether one or more, they should stir up and use the talents the Lord has given for the edification of the body, or stand chargeable with unfaithfulness to the Lord.

I do not find the Apostle any where taking the minds of the saints away from ministry, quite the contrary. He labours to send ministering brethren to the churches, and holds out to them every expectation of his coming. He writes, "Esteem them very highly in love for their works' sake." "Receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such in reputation." "That ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that laboureth." Surely here are persons known, estimated, and received, as having particular gifts, services, and qualifications. "Let the elders that rule well—especially they who labour in the word and doctrine," &c. Here are two distinct ministries; ruling, and habitual ministry in the word and doctrine.

The importance of viewing brethren in the light of their peculiar services, is clearly seen from the following Scriptures:—2 Cor. i. 11. Phil. i. iv.; To be prayed for. Gal. vi. 6.; The taught to communicate to the teacher. iii. John; Those are called helpers who receive labouring brethren as such. 1 Cor. xvi. 15, 16; Labouring brethren to be submitted to. If such relations as teacher and taught, labouring and not labouring, are set aside, then the Apostle's directions are rendered useless.

The spirit of insubjection and denial of the Lord's servants, is frequently referred to in the New Testament, and is in fact, a leaven of former times. For example, I refer to the following Scriptures:—Numb. xiv. 4, A captain and to return to Egypt, are here preferred by the people to Moses, whom God had given to guide them to the land. Numb. xii. 2, Jealous feelings are entertained by Aaron and Miriam toward Moses; they said, "Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath he not also spoken *by us*?" Their envy and self-importance are dealt with by the Lord in judgment. Numb. xvi., Korah and his company are also jealous, and refuse to Moses and Aaron the distinctive places to which they were called by the Lord. They said, "Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy every one of them, and the Lord is among them." They use the Lord's name and presence to support their jealousy, and to place the whole congregation upon an equal footing with these servants of the Lord,

The Lord also here interposes in judgment in a remarkable way. Ps. cvi. 16, Their sin is here noticed, "They envied Moses in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the Lord." Jude places their sin in his list of the present apostacy, "And perished in the gainsaying of Core." Deut. xxiv. 9, The envy of Miriam, Moses would ever keep before the people as a safeguard, "Remember what the Lord thy God did unto Miriam by the way."

It is possible that ministering brethren may be thought too much of: yet Paul speaks well of the Galatians when they would have plucked out their eyes and given them to him, and have received him as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus. And he inquires, when they got into the flesh, "Where is then the blessedness ye spake of?"—for they had ceased to estimate him in the same way,—see Cor. xii. Some say,—Do not ask for, or send out a brother to labour,—this is also unscriptural, as Acts xi. xv., and other scriptures, plainly testify. Some also affirm, that we do not come to *hear*, only to break bread: this I also believe to be unscriptural. It is true we come to break bread, but to affirm that we come for no other purpose, seems to me to be a sentiment as uncalled for as it is unscriptural. It is improper, I judge, to say, I am not coming to do so and so, if we profess to have no will or purpose of our own, but to wait on the Spirit for direction.

If the Apostle permits that three prophets may speak at one meeting, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. I inquire,—Why should we be deprived of this profit, because some may not have ears to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches? I say, on the authority of God's Word, that He has provided for the ministry of the saints by teaching servants, and that we should expect such: I do not say but that disciples may meet without ministry and find blessing. The xii. and xiv. of Cor. would be scarcely needed in such case, nor would the Spirit be present in the way of gift.

Some affirm, breaking of bread should be first. I see no such system in the Word of God.

Thus have human system and sectarianism defaced the headship of Christ in the full sense of the word, by the adoption of sectarian

names and traditions. The ordinance of Christ is displaced to make way for another and more popular line of things; and the Holy Ghost, in His sovereign and independent actings in the assembled body, as the spring and power of worship there, is set aside. Until the church sees how, in these matters, it has grievously sinned, revival is hopeless. While division, formal profession, and tradition, triumph at the expense of the rules and ordinances of Christ's house, the church must be crippled and in confusion, and the name of Christ dishonoured.

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