

In this chapter we will consider the matter of the Lord's table or the Lord's supper.

The Supper Instituted by the Lord

Let us first see how the Lord instituted the supper. This is one supper which all the children of God in the church must attend. It was set up by the Lord Jesus on the night before His death. Since He was crucified the next day, this was His last night on earth and also His last supper with His disciples. Although He still ate after His resurrection, this nevertheless was His last supper, for a resurrected man can either eat or not, as he chooses.

How did this last supper come about? The Jews keep a festival called the Passover which commemorates their deliverance by God from slavery in Egypt. God commanded them to prepare a lamb for each house and in the evening of the fourteenth day of the first month they were to kill the lamb and put its blood on the two side-posts and on the lintel. They should eat the flesh on that night with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. After they came out of Egypt, they were ordered to keep the feast each year as a remembrance. So, to the Jews the paschal lamb is something retrospective. Because of God's great deliverance, they recall that great event every year.

It so happened that the night before the death of the Lord Jesus coincided with the eating of the paschal lamb. There was nothing special in His taking the paschal lamb with the disciples, for it was simply keeping the feast of the Passover. But immediately afterwards, the Lord established His own supper, thus implying that He desires us to partake of His supper even as the Jews eat the paschal lamb.

As we compare these two, we see that the Israelites keep the Passover because they were delivered out of Egypt, and that God's children today partake of the Lord's table because they too have been

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delivered. The Israelites had a lamb; we too have the Lamb whom God appointed. We have today been saved from the world, delivered from the power of Satan, and become wholly God's. We keep this feast as the Jews kept the Passover.

1. SUPPER IS A FAMILY MEAL

What does supper signify? Why do we call it the Lord's supper? It is a worldwide custom that supper is especially considered a family meal. At lunch, the members of the family often cannot assemble together. In the land of Judea at noontime, some of the family would be shepherding, some fishing, and some tilling. Most of them would eat their lunch outside, for it would be impossible to go home. So lunch is not a family meal. Neither is breakfast a family meal for at that time people are thinking of the day's work instead of the rest afterward. Other than those who are sick, people usually take their breakfast hastily. Supper, however, is the most special of the three daily meals, for at that meal the whole family, young and old, gathers together to eat.

2. SUPPER EXCLUDES THE THOUGHT OF WORK

Having finished a day's work, people no longer think of the work before them; rather, they are occupied with the thought of rest. Supper is the time when the whole family gathers together and eats at leisure after the day's work is done. In instituting His own supper, our Lord desired His people throughout the earth to see that this is, indeed, a family meal in God's house. It does not include any idea of work. It just sets forth the thought of rest. During breakfast and lunch, one's mind is always occupied with work; but by supper, everything has been done. One is prepared to retire after eating. God's children should gather and partake of the Lord's supper with a similar inward sentiment. 121 122 Assembling Together

Dual Meaning of the Lord's Supper

1. REMEMBER THE LORD

The basic thought of the Lord's supper is to remember the Lord. The Lord Himself says, "This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24b). He knows how very forgetful we are. Do not think that because we have received such an abundance of grace and experienced such a wonderful redemption that we will never be able to forget. Let me warn you that men such as we, are most forgetful. For this reason, the Lord especially desires us both to remember Him and to remember what He has done for us.

The Lord wants us to remember Him not only because we are so forgetful, but also because He needs our memory. In other words, He does not want us to forget Him. The Lord is so great and so transcendent that He could let us forget Him and not be bothered by it. Yet He says, "This do in remembrance of me," thus revealing how condescending He is in desiring our remembrance.

That the Lord wants us to remember Him fully is an expression of His love. It is the demand of love, not of greatness. So far as His greatness is concerned, He can afford to be forgotten by us. But His love insists that we remember Him. If we do not remember Him, we will suffer great loss. If we do not remember Him often and keep the redemption of the Lord always before us, we will easily be conformed to the world and become contentious toward the children of God. Thus we not only need to remember Him, but are profited by so doing. It is a means by which we may receive the grace of the Lord.

In connection with the Lord's desire for us to remember Him, there is another point worth noticing: as the Lord formerly humbled Himself in order to be our Savior, so today He humbles Himself in asking for our remembrance. As once He condescended to save us,

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so today He condescends to ask for our hearts. He wishes us to remember Him as long as we live on earth. He wants us to live before Him and remember Him week after week. Thus we derive much spiritual benefit.

DISASSOCIATES YOU FROM THE WORLD

One cardinal value in remembering the Lord lies in the fact that the world will not be able to exert its influence continuously upon you. If every few days you remember how the Lord died for you and received you, let me tell you, the world will have no place in you. Since my Lord suffered death here in the world, what have I to say? If they had not killed my Lord, there might still be some ground for them to talk with me. But now that they have already killed my Lord and His death is exhibited before me, I have nothing more to say and no way to communicate with the world. I cannot have any fellowship with it. This is one of the prime benefits of the breaking of bread.

DISPELS DIVISION

Remembering the Lord has another spiritual value: it makes strife and contention and division impossible among God's children. When you are reminded of how you have been saved by grace and you find another person with you who is likewise reminded, you are both one before the Lord. When you contemplate how the Lord Jesus forgave the myriads of your sins and you see another brother coming to the supper who has also been bought and redeemed by the precious blood, how can you bring in anything to separate you from him? How can you divide God's children? For the past nearly two thousand years, many controversies among God's children have been settled at the Lord's supper. Many unforgiven things, even things unforgivable, and many lifelong hatreds have disappeared at the Lord's table, for it is impossible not to forgive when, in remembering the Lord, you are reminded of how you have been saved and forgiven. Can you be forgiven your debt of ten thousand talents 123 124 Assembling Together

(\$10,000,000) by the Lord and yet grab another servant by the throat demanding payment for a hundred shillings (\$18) (see Matt. 18:4-35)?

ENLARGES YOUR HEART

Another advantage in remembering the Lord is that each one who remembers Him will quite naturally have his heart enlarged to embrace all children of God. It is but natural to see that all who are redeemed by the Lord's blood are the beloved of the Lord; therefore they are also the delight of my heart. If we are all in the Lord, can there be jealousy, reviling and unforgiveness? How can you continue in strife with the brother or sister who sits next to you at the Lord's supper? What right do you have to demand anything of your brother when you recall how many of your sins have been forgiven? If you insist on strife, jealousy, and an unforgiving spirit, you will not be able to remember the Lord.

Every time we gather to remember the Lord, we are bidden to review His love once more. We should re-examine the corruption of the world and the judgment upon it. We should renew the conviction that all the redeemed are beloved of the Lord. Every time we remember the Lord, we review His love, how He loved us and gave Himself for us. In love, He descended to hades for us. The world has already been judged, for it crucified our Lord. But all of God's children are our delight, because they have all been bought by the Lord's blood. How can we hate them? How can we harbor any thought of hate?

All that we have mentioned above is included in the meaning of remembering the Lord. The first and foremost significance of the Lord's supper is, "This do in remembrance of me." Let us further point out that it is absolutely impossible for us to remember one whom we do not know or of whom we have no experience. For us to remember a person or an event presumes that we have a personal

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knowledge of him or of it. So, when the Lord commands us to remember Him, He is merely reminding those of us who have already met Him at Calvary and have received grace from Him. We come to remember all that He has done for us. Like the Jews remembering the Passover, we consider in retrospect. Because we have come out of Egypt, therefore we come together to remember this fact. To remember is to look back.

2. PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH

The Lord's supper has a second meaning. This is found in 1 Corinthians 11:26: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come." We need to proclaim or exhibit the Lord's death that all may see.

What causes people to be idle or unfruitful? It is that they have forgotten the cleansing of their former sins (see 2 Pet. 1:8-9). For this reason the Lord calls us to remember Him, saying, "So long as you live on earth, you must love Me and constantly remember Me. Remember that the cup is My shed blood and the bread My broken body." This refers to our experience, and this must come first. Afterward we have the teaching that the cup and the bread exhibit the death of the Lord.

Why do the cup and the bread represent the Lord's death? Because the blood is in the flesh. So when blood and flesh are separated, it means death. Today the blood and the flesh are separated, for the blood is in the cup while the flesh is in the bread. When one looks at the wine in the cup, he sees the blood. Likewise, when he looks at the bread, he sees the flesh. Thus he does not need to be told that His Lord has died for him. As he notices that the blood is no longer in the flesh, he realizes that death has come. Must the Lord tell you that He has died for you? No, He only needs to say, "Drink the cup and eat the bread," for these proclaim His death. Blood here and flesh there—this speaks of death. 125 126 Assembling Together

What do the eating of the bread and the drinking of the cup signify? The Old Testament informs us clearly that the bread was made of grain. The same word was used when the Lord told the Israelites that after they entered into Canaan they would eat the old grain of the land. In looking at the bread, you see that the grain has been crushed. In looking at the cup, you see that the grape has been pressed. In this crushed grain and this pressed grape, you see death. Hence the Lord says, eat the bread and drink the cup.

Except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it is but one grain. Likewise, unless a grain of wheat is crushed, it remains a grain and cannot be made into bread. Unless a cluster of grapes is pressed, there will be no wine. The Lord, speaking through Paul, says that as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are proclaiming His death. If the grain wanted to preserve itself whole, there would not be any bread; if the grape insisted on keeping itself intact, there would not be any wine. It is only as you eat the crushed grain and the pressed grape that you proclaim the Lord's death.

From a human standpoint, God has left nothing on the earth other than the cross. The work of the cross is finished but the sign of the cross remains. Indeed, many today have forgotten the cross, but not the believers. To them, the cross is something forever remembered. Every Lord's day we see in the Lord's supper the cross of the Son of God exhibited in the church. This suggests that though we may forget everything else, we must remember the fact of our Lord's death for us.

Suppose you bring your parents, children, or relatives who do not know the Lord to the gathering for the breaking of bread. Seeing such a meeting for the first time, they invariably will ask, "What is the meaning of the breaking of bread and the drinking of the cup?" You answer, "The cup represents the blood and the bread the flesh. Since the blood and the flesh are separated, this is death." To those

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the Lord's body. Hence you cannot take it lightly. You must receive it in a manner worthy of the Lord's body. Since the Lord gives His blood and His flesh to you, you need to receive them respectfully. No one but a fool would despise what God has given to him.