

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (28-3-1999 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

1 Corinthians 11:23-29
Additional reading: Luke 19:30-38; 22:7-23

The Lord's Supper (part 2)

Introduction

There was a problem at Corinth with unseemly behaviour at the Lord's Supper. So Paul gives teaching about the Lord's Supper, the importance of what it signifies, and why it must be approached in the proper manner.

We are going to develop the theme further. Firstly, going to consider that the Lord's Supper is an ordinance, or means of grace. Then, the frame of mind at the Table, and the benefits we can expect to receive

Meaning of ordinance (or sacrament)

The Lord has given two ordinances to His church – baptism and the Lord's Supper. Two visible signs, which set forth the truth of the Gospel to those who partake, and help and strengthen their faith. They have a teaching function – they preach the Word of God in a dramatic action. They are visual aids, God clothing His promises of the Word in signs you can see and touch and taste. C.f. we also use signs to convey more forcefully our promises, e.g. the handshake for friendship, kiss for affection, salute for loyalty.

So the Gospel has given us two signs to illustrate and make clear the truth of the Gospel. A sermon is the audible word; an ordinance is the visible word. Baptism uses water, the Lord's Supper uses bread and wine. These elements remain the same; there is no magical change. Those who administer them do not have a special mystical quality. Yet they are means of rich spiritual blessing when approached in the right way. Both offer the means for us to identify ourselves with the Gospel truth, and show it is ours.

These ordinances are an essential part of the Christian message. Like the Word of God preached in the Gospel, they make an appeal to the soul. According to our response of faith, the blessing of the Lord is on us. These are not private ordinances between an individual and one other. They are linked with the doctrine of the church. Baptism is the door into the visible church. We meet around the Lord's Table as members of the family of Christ. We baptise only once because we are born again and justified only once. But we take the Lord's Supper often because we regularly need to be assured of forgiveness and have our spiritual life nourished.

Baptism proclaims the Lord's death as the source of spiritual life. The Lord's Supper demonstrates the Lord's death strengthening the new life which has begun in us. Many can testify that they are not bare signs, but that, at baptism, and at times around the Lord's Table, there is a vivid sense of the Lord's presence and fellowship with Him. This results when we approach in the right frame of mind and in faith. So it becomes a means of grace to the soul. Like service generally, if we come in an empty

thoughtless way, treating it as more of a habit or outward action, it has no benefit at all – apart from quietening our conscience. But if our approach is right and spiritual, the blessing can be enormous. **According to you faith be it unto you** (Matthew 9:29).

Approaching the Lord's Table

When we meet around the Lord's Table, the Word of God is read, usually a passage bearing on Christ and salvation, the institution of the Lord's Supper, or a reading about the meaning of the Cross. Our ears hear the truth, and our eyes see the visible symbols of the truth – the bread and the wine representing the Lord's body and blood.

If it is not going to be an empty ritual, our attitude and approach must be right in order to be blessed as we hear and see the Truth. We come penitentially, sorry for our sins, which necessitated the death of Christ. Sorry for the sins of the past week in which we crucified Christ afresh. If we are truly repentant, and there is no unconfessed sin on our heart, and nothing between us and another, we experience the love and fellowship with our neighbours in Christ.

We contemplate the bread and the wine, Christ's body and blood. Supposing He had not come, if His body had not been broken, and His blood had not been shed. We would be lost forever. We would have to face God with our sins, and be damned to Hell. As it is, we have forgiveness; we will be welcomed home, given new life by our loving heavenly Father. We are secure now and in eternity. We do not know what the future holds, but it is secure. We are in the covenant people of God. We have safety, certainty and enjoyment. All because of one thing – He died in my place.

Commune with Him. Thank Him for what He did. Thank Him for all the blessings to which His death has opened the door. His death is our only hope. We are reminded of that through His Word and through the bread and the wine. We offer two sacrifices. **Let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise** (Hebrews 13:15). **Offer your bodies as living sacrifices** (Romans 12:1). We thank Him with our lips and with our lives.

I am not my own, I have been bought with a price. He gave His life. I must give Him my heart, body, lips, ears, faculties, talents and possessions. I ask for His strength to live for Him, because He has done so much for me. He has given me His people. I thank Him for them, and ask Him to make me a blessing to them, and to help me love them.

So we commune with the Lord. We can do it many ways, but the communion is more vivid because here the bread and the wine are such visible and unmistakable reminders of His love to us. The truth becomes more real. The Lord is spiritually present at His table. We feed on Him by faith in our hearts with thanksgiving. We are especially aware of Him at the Table.

*“Here, o my Lord, I see Thee face to face.
Here would I touch and handle things unseen.
Here grasp with firmer hand the eternal grace
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.”*

Benefits of coming to the Table

Inevitably, it is not just about the mechanical eating and drinking, and a “thank you for dying for me”. It is meant to be a time of fellowship with Christ, which must lead to blessing to our souls. We receive clearer views of Christ, His atonement, and the work of redemption. Facts about the truths at the heart of Gospel are more deeply pressed on the soul. Each time we find fresh reasons for deeper repentance for sins, humbling of selves before the Lord, and living faith in Him. How sinful our sin must be if nothing less than the death of God’s own Son could make satisfaction for it. **Clothe yourselves with humility towards one another** (1 Peter 5:5) – of all places, at the Table.

Also cheering effect. The sight of the bread and wine is a reminder of how full and complete our salvation is. The mighty truth is we have nothing to fear. His sufficient payment was made for our debt. He answered every charge against us.

Also sanctifying effect. We are reminded of how great our debt to the Lord is. How thoroughly we are bound to live to the Lord. No option but to rededicate our lives to the Lord. Bound to live for Him. Is anything so great to do for Him?

Restraining effect. Reminded at the Lord’s Table what a serious thing it is to be a Christian. How great an obligation to lead a consistent life. Christ to be glorified in spirit and body because it was bought at such a price. If we go regularly and intelligently to the Lord’s Table, we will find it increasingly hard to yield to sin and be conformed to the world. Thus at the Table our repentance is deepened, faith increased, our love is enlarged, and we are drawn nearer to Christ. We see more clearly what Christ is to mean to us, and what we mean to Him. So a work of grace in our hearts is established and I we are built up.

No wonder the true and earnest Christian finds the Lord’s Supper is a means of grace and great blessing to the soul. Not all Christians have the same blessing every time, nor does the same believer benefit all the time. And yet we rarely find an earnest believer who will not say the Lord’s Supper is one of his best helps and highest privileges. To neglect the Table is to despise the Lord who ordained it, and it also leads to our own impoverishment.

Conclusion

Summary of the case. Spurgeon’s catechism poses the question “What is the Lord’s Supper?” The answer is, “It is an ordinance of the New Testament, instituted by Jesus Christ wherein by giving and receiving of bread and wine according to his appointment, His death is shown forth and worthy receivers are, not after a corporal and carnal manner (i.e. crude physical way) but by faith made partakers of His body and blood, with all His benefits to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace.”

How significant the Lord’s Table can be. What enormous potential for spiritual growth and awareness of the Lord and benefits of His salvation. No wonder in parts of the Highlands where it is taken very seriously, observance of the Lord’s Supper,

though only twice a year, extends over a five-day period including a service of preparation at the beginning and a service of thanksgiving at the end.

What does the Table mean to us? How much have we entered into its true significance? What spiritual benefits do we really desire when we meet each Sunday? And what should we do that the Lord's Supper may have the significance for us that it has in mind of the Lord? Can we do it all in ten minutes? Do we prepare ourselves? Do we enter into full meaning of redemption? Do we rededicate ourselves? Do we find it a real means of grace?