



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

The Lord's Supper; 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

Paul and the Lord's Supper, part II

TRANSCRIPT

We are studying in these morning sessions the Lord's Supper, and we are looking this morning in a few moments at Paul and the Lord's Supper, the second section of our study of the Pauline contribution to that subject, and I'm going to read again the portion of 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 in which the apostle sets forth his most significant words concerning the Lord's table.

Remember in the context the apostle mentions that there had been some disorders in connection with the Lord's table and its observance in the church at Corinth, and he introduces this account of the Lord's Supper which he received from the Lord, whether he received it through some other individuals from the Lord, or whether directly, the text does not state, but at any rate he introduces it in order to show that disorders at the Lord's table are out of harmony with the Spirit and the order manifested by our Lord when the supper was first given. That's the explanation of the opening "for" for 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and verse 23.

He continues,

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he

broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me (that word testament is probably better rendered “covenant” and we should bear that in mind I think as we think about the Lord’s Supper. Verse 26,) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show (or proclaim) the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body (probably we are to understand that term as inclusive of the body and the blood. It is surely not a reference in the light of the context to the church, though the church may be called “the body of Christ.” Not discerning the Lord’s body and blood, we might add. That is the consensus interpretation of this passage; I think it is probably correct). For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep (of course this is the sleep of death, physical death, not the sleep of slumber in which we are still alive. This is not the sleep of snoring; it is the sleep of death). For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world (this is one of those incidental statements by Paul that indicates that he believes that the world is lost, the heathen are lost, the world is lost. So, he states here, we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, in the family we are chastened that we should not be condemned with the world). Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto judgment. And the rest will I set in order when I come.”

Now I wonder what things as I mentioned last Sunday, what things the apostle said in addition to these things. But evidently the Holy Spirit did not think they were necessary for us, they are not included in holy Scripture.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and we bow now together in a moment of prayer.

[Message] We are continuing our studies in the Lord’s Supper, and today we are looking at the latter part of Paul’s contribution in 1 Corinthians chapter 11.

The simplicity of the early church in its ministry provides a marked contrast with the complexity of the modern church and its machinery. The apostles we read in Acts chapter 2 formed a church in which as the believers met together they observed the Lord’s Supper. They prayed, and they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine. In fact, Luke the Historian puts it simply this way. He says, “They continued together in the apostle’s doctrine and in fellowship.” And he explains the fellowship as the fellowship of the breaking of bread and prayers. So those three things characterize the early church. They observed and listened to the word of God, the apostle’s doctrine. They broke bread, and they prayed. This is the simple activity of the early church.

They did not have a liturgy that was very complex. They did not have extensive programs. They did not have church suppers and bazaars. They did not play bingo. That seems to be a fairly well-established fact. As far as the very early church was concerned, they did not even have a Sunday School. Sunday School itself can be a questionable activity if the responsibility of parents to train their children in the word of God is softened by turning over to a church that responsibility. No church can ever possibly teach the children the word of God as father and mother can. The greatest Bible teachers you will ever have, as Mr. Prier has so often said to us – the greatest Bible teacher is our own Father. The greatest Bible teachers are our father and our mother.

The early church concentrated on the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship -- which they defined not as church bazaars, church fellowships, church meetings, get-togethers, fellowship suppers. They defined that in the words that follow: of breaking of bread and prayers. These are the things that characterize them, and these are the things that made them great.

The highlight, it seems, from the study of the New Testament and also the early church fathers, the highlight of their meeting was the observance of the Lord’s Supper. Now we read in Acts chapter 20 and verse 7 of an incidental comment that Luke makes concerning Paul’s stay in Troas, “On the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them.” Preached formed a part of the service, but according to Luke’s expression, the purpose of the meeting was to break bread.

Now we know that preaching was important, prayers were important, having a doctrine, having a hymn, these were important things. But the highlight of the observance of the church meeting was the Lord’s Supper. In fact, two features characterize the early church meetings. In the first place, they had a Spirit-led flexible meeting. One only has to read passages like 1 Corinthians 12:13 and 14, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, studying also the history of the growth of the early church and its background in the synagogue where they had just a kind of meeting to realize that characteristic of the early church was freedom for men who had spiritual gifts to stand on their feet.

In fact, if there were not freedom, we would not have the great sermon Paul preached in Acts chapter 13, for when he and his friends came in the meeting of the synagogue, the rulers of the synagogue who had charge of the meetings, they saw Paul come in and the others and they spoke to him saying, “If you have a word of exhortation for us, say on.” And the apostle, having that freedom, rose on his feet and gave them the message that he gave them. The Lord Jesus Christ participated in the synagogue meetings in Nazareth. He stood up to read the word. He sat down to teach. He was not an

accredited rabbi, but any Jewish man gifted with the gift of utterance in spiritual things was free to exercise his gift.

The early church had a spirit-led flexible meeting. That meeting was important, for it enabled the early church to develop its priesthood, that priesthood of the men were the ones who exercised utterance in the meeting, so the church developed by the exercise by the priests of their spiritual office. Their spiritual gifts were exercised that enabled to grow also by exercise.

And one other thing that characterized the early church was the prominence of the men in the ministry. Now we are living in days in which that is not emphasized. But fortunately, we have to follow the word of God. In spite of what we read in the newspapers, in spite of what we read elsewhere, we must follow the word of God. And in the New Testament, the men were prominent in the ministry. I have a friend who likes to say the church today is full of strong women and weak men. I think that’s a good, perceptive comment. I believe that is true. Now I don’t object to having strong women; I just want to have strong men, too. And I think that in the New Testament, the men are given the responsibility of utterance in the meetings.

Bruce Waltke, who was here just a few Sundays ago said to me, “One of the things that I’ve always appreciated about Believers Chapel is the fact that there are so many men who take part in the ministry here.” I was glad to hear him say that. I think that, too. I think that’s characteristic of a healthy, New Testament church. I hope we are a healthy New Testament church. In that respect I think we are. We have the men taking the responsibility that they should take. I would like to see the men take the responsibility that they should take in their homes as well, for it is their responsibility to teach their children.

The Lord’s table was the other thing that characterized the early church. They had a Spirit-led flexible meeting, and they observed the Lord’s table every Sunday. In the *didache*, an ancient document which contains two parts: it has a first section in which the

authors discussed the two ways, and the first few chapters of it have to do with the Christian life; but the latter part of the *didache* has to do with instructions that were given to the local church for various things. How to treat prophets when they come to town. One of the most amusing things about it is that they say that it’s a good thing for a prophet to stay only a certain number of days. As I remember, about three days. They ought to get on. And we have some modern statements that are parallel with that, too, for our visitors that stay too long.

But in the latter part of the *didache*, the date of which may even be as early as 100 A.D. – in other words, just about the time of John the Apostle’s death. It is said, in the 14th chapter and the first statement of the 14th chapter of the *didache*, “On the Lord’s day of the Lord, come together, break bread, and hold eucharist” – observe the Lord’s Supper.” So characteristic of the early church, and regarded by the *didache* – that word, incidentally, means “teaching” – regarded by the *didache* or the authors of it as prominent is the Lord’s Supper.

The most recent book on the Lord’s Supper of significance is written by Professor I. Howard Marshall who is the Professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen. And Professor Marshall in his book entitled *The Last Supper and the Lord’s Supper* says, “In line with what appears to have been the practice of the early church in the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently in the early church, and there is good reason for doing so on each Lord’s Day.” Professor Marshall comes from the Methodist tradition, but being a student of the New Testament and the early church, that is his conclusion.

John Calvin, the great Swiss Reformer, and one we think of as the father of Presbyterian doctrine, said the supper should be observed, and I’m quoting now from the *Institutes*, “Very frequently and at least once in every week.” That’s the close of the quotation from Book IV, Chapter 17 of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

The Methodist John Wesley who led the early societies in their observances every Sunday also had as his practice the observance of the Lord’s Supper in those meetings, so that the Methodists have a tradition that goes back to Wesley and the observance of the supper every Sunday.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon, the famous Baptist preacher, wrote in his *Treasury of the Old Testament* in one of his sermons, “Shame on the Christian church that she should put it off to once a month. They who once know the sweetness of the Lord’s day, celebrating his supper will not be content I am sure to put it off to less frequent seasons.” Now he was an optimist, because the church is content to put it off to less frequent seasons. Most of our evangelical churches observe the Lord’s supper either quarterly or monthly, but even these great leaders admit that the New Testament suggests otherwise.

Now I think it is important for us to pay attention to what the New Testament and the early church said about this. And I feel not simply that we may legalistically obey our Lord’s words, but it’s good for us – it’s spiritually edifying for us – we will be stronger for it. We don’t do it legalistically. We do it out of appreciation and gratitude for what we have received through the ministry of the Lord.

I have the feeling – this is just a feeling – I have the feeling that if the Lord Jesus were here, then we would observe the Lord’s Supper very frequently. We would make it a point to. Well, I remind you, he is here with us. He is with us in the observance of the Lord’s Suppers here in the Chapel.

Well, the first part of Paul’s account has emphasized participation in the ministry of the Lord. The second part emphasizes the necessity of preparation for the Lord’s Supper. But let me review the past instruction that the apostle had given to them.

In verse 23 and verse 24, he set forth for them the ceremony of the bread. Essentially what he was saying to them was this: the Lord Jesus, when he was here, took the bread, and he gave it to the apostles, and he said, “Take, eat, this is my body which is for you; this do in remembrance of me,” and he was simply telling them, if I may put it

broadly, he was telling them that this is a new Christian-kind of Passover service, and it is a service in which a sacrifice is remembered, one that corresponds in reality to that which the Old Testament Passover pointed forward to by symbolism, and in fact, I am the Passover lamb. And the deliverance that Israel experienced in the Old Testament of a physical kind from the thralldom, the bondage of Egypt and Pharaoh is an illustration of the bondage of sin, and we celebrate the deliverance from sin and Satan in the Lord’s Supper.

In the Passover *bagadah* – now, the Passover *bagadah* is the narration of the significance of the Passover that accompanied the observance of the Passover among Jewish people. We don’t know how far the *bagadah* goes back. We have some records of it going back as far as the 8th Century A.D., but chances are it goes back a good deal earlier than that. But in this particular ceremonial ritual it is stated, “In the Passover *bagadah*, which when the Passover ritual is observed among Jewish people is recited, he brought us out from slavery to liberty, from sorrow to joy, from mourning to holiday, from darkness to great light, from servitude to redemption.” And in the observance of the Passover supper, they remembered the physical deliverance and the significance of it that had taken place when the original Passover lamb was sacrificed and they were delivered from the bondage of Egypt.

We of course remember the reality now, for the reality has come in Jesus Christ. One of the striking things, I think, about the Lord’s Supper and its stress upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is that even though we may not really understand everything about that, the fact that the cross is there in the center of it means something that is very significant.

James Denny was one of the greatest of the New Testament professors of the earlier part of the 20th Century. He was the Professor of New Testament and New Testament Theology at the University of Glasgow. And Professor Denny was the author of a number of very striking comments. He was once teaching concerning the sacraments or the ordinances of the church to his Scottish theological students, and he came to that

part of the course in which he described the accretions to the ordinances which he thought the Roman Catholic Church had brought in.

And he talked about the things that they had added to the sacraments which he thought were not really scriptural ultimately. I’m sure that he was speaking about things like transubstantiation and other matters; the addition of five more sacraments instead of the two that the Protestants had recognized, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. And finally, he was trying to make the point that even in spite of all of these accretions, still, the virtue and the power of the cross came through. He said, “Gentlemen, the cross is such a thing that even when you bury it, you bury it alive.” So the force of the cross is so great that even when we misunderstand it, its true force is not completely lost.

I think that’s true. I think the individual who talks about the cross of Jesus Christ is getting over a message even when he tries to present it in such a way that it is not quite like that presented in the New Testament.

Well, the simple ceremony of the bread we discussed last week. I won’t repeat those things. We come however to the ceremony of the cup which we didn’t have a chance to deal with completely. In the 25th and 26th verses of chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, the apostle speaks of the cup. “After the same manner also he took the cup when he had supped, saying, ‘This cup is the new testament (or covenant) in my blood, this do ye as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me.’” The bread was normally broken, wine was normally poured out. These two acts: breaking bread, the pouring out of the wine, were designed to symbolically picture the death of Christ. The broken bread, for bread was ordinarily broken, suggested the cross. The pouring out of the wine suggested the outpoured blood of the sacrifices of the Old Testament.

Now the reason the Lord chose these metaphors is very plain to us, because bread is the staff of life. He had said that he was the bread of life, so we’re not surprised when he uses the figure of the bread to suggest the body that given for us, which conjures up

all of the thoughts of the incarnation, the second person of the Trinity assuming a body, human nature, and coming to carry out his ministry.

In the Old Testament, wine is called “the blood of grapes” because of the similarity between the red wine and red blood. So the figure of the blood was also ready to hand, and the Lord Jesus used them both. This is the New Covenant by means of my blood. The Greek preposition that is used there is a preposition of means, most likely. This is the new covenant by means of my blood. Or, as some have translated it, this is the new covenant and it is consummated at the cost of my blood. This is the new covenant in my blood by means of my blood; this do as often as ye drink it in remembrance of me.

So, the two-fold picture then of the bread and the wine are designed simply to say, “I am the Passover lamb and the fulfillment of the Old Testament ritual; I must die sacrificially.” Everything led up to this, and I would like to suggest to you – this is only a suggestion – that this cup and the bread are more than simple reminders. The fact that the Lord Jesus took the bread and gave to them, and the fact also that he took the wine and said, divide it among yourselves, is evidence of the fact that he is the dispenser of these blessings.

In other words, the cup is more than a reminder. It is designed to stress for us the fact that here is the visible token, here is the absolute guarantee that your sins and iniquities I will remember no more, for that was the fundamental line of the new covenant. Everything led up to, “And their sins and their iniquities I will remember no more,” Jeremiah 31:34. So as the Lord gave them the bread and gave them the wine, he was saying, I am giving to you the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies concerning the new covenant; I am giving to you the forgiveness of your sins as you take of it. So that the bread and the cup were not simply visible tokens, but they were guarantees of the significance of those symbols.

And did you notice this? The Lord Jesus did not partake of the bread. He did not drink the wine. He didn’t eat the bread; he did not drink the wine. The reason is obvious. He had no sins for which to receive forgiveness. So, it is he who divides to them. He takes the elements and gives to them and says divide among yourselves. It is your responsibility, for we are the sinners. He is the sinless, sovereign Savior. He does not partake, because he does not need forgiveness of sins. He is the one dispensing the forgiveness of sins. So, he gave it to them. He gave it to them to drink.

You can see the sovereignty of God and the sole saviorhood of Jesus Christ every time you observe the Lord’s Supper. Every time the elders or the men stand as representatives of the Lord Jesus in the observance of the supper and serve the congregation with bread and wine, there is a visible token and a guarantee of the forgiveness of sins to those who partake out of the faith that they have exercised in the Lord Jesus.

Now we do not believe that the forgiveness of sins comes through the partaking of the elements any more than that the forgiveness of sins comes from the waters of baptism, which we shall see tonight in our meeting. But, those things are expressive of the things that have happened to us, and so every time we take the bread, we think Jesus Christ has granted us eternal salvation through the blood that was shed.

Now he says, do this in remembrance of me. He says it not only once, he says it twice. Why? Because we so easily forget. It’s so easy to forget. Why, do you know that there are believing Christians who haven’t sat at the Lord’s table in a year? Two years? Three years? I meet them all the time. Jesus said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Now I know that there are some of you who have difficulties. Some of you for physical reasons would find it difficult. I’m not speaking about that. I’m sure there is much more mercy with the Lord than there is with me. But it is a strange thing that the Lord Jesus should say, do this in remembrance of me. He uses the present tense suggestive of

something that we continually do. Do this – it is also an imperative, a command – do this in remembrance of me, and we don’t do it.

Is it any surprise, then, that we wonder about our dedication to the Lord Jesus Christ? Is it any wonder that we really do not experience the blessings of the Christian life that we ought to, when the simplest of his commands, which anyone can do – you may have difficulty in walking by the Spirit; I have difficulty in walking by the Spirit. Perhaps it’s easy for you; it’s not for me. I have difficulty in walking by the Spirit, but I have friends who talk a lot more about walking by the Spirit than they do sitting at the Lord’s table, which is something anybody can do. So, I think that probably it’s better for us to begin our Christian life doing the simple things that we can do first. We might find that it is easier to do these other things if we do these simple things.

Well, it’s sad to think that he should have to repeat it. Do this in remembrance of me, but he does. Can a maid forget her ornaments? Or a bride her attire? Jeremiah says. Have you ever seen a bride who didn’t have constantly upon her mind her wedding dress? The wedding is six months off. She thinking about the dress she’s going to wear at the wedding. But, Jeremiah adds, speaking for the Lord, Yet my people have forgotten me days without number. A bride can look forward to the wearing of the wedding dress and can never forget it, but my people have forgotten me days without number. This do in remembrance of me. I appeal to you, my dear Christian friends, if you want to know what spiritual life is, here is a simple place to begin. This do in remembrance of me.

Now we also read in verse 26, “For as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup.” Now that eating and drinking is the appropriation. That’s the expression of response. We eat the bread and we drink the wine, and the fellowship of the appropriation strengthens our faith. When we sit at the Lord’s table, we are strengthened in our faith. And furthermore, we preach. You proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. Now that’s striking, isn’t it? Preaching the gospel by the Lord’s table. You wouldn’t think

that would be something that would take place, but it does. We proclaim his death, and that’s the fundamental fact of his gospel.

Now a few years ago, I made reference to this story that Dr. Ironside used to tell us when he was here in Dallas, teaching the word at the theological seminary. He used to tell the story about how he was in Sacramento one time – he was a man of great experience, had a fount of very interesting experiences; this was one of them – he said that he was in Sacramento and was getting ready to observe the Lord’s Supper with a group of about twenty believers. He usually observed the Lord’s Supper every Sunday, and when he was asked to be the teacher of the word at the Moody church in Chicago, he said he would come provided the elders at the Moody church instituted a Lord’s Supper at the church every Sunday, which they did in order to have Dr. Ironside come, and he observed the Lord’s Supper every Sunday there.

Well, at this meeting, there was a Japanese who had come, a friend of one of the members. His name was Yataro Yamaguchi. And since he was with him, he asked if he might come and sit at the Lord’s table, too. And he was given permission to come. He was told, Dr. Ironside said, that only those who know and love the Lord could participate at the table; that is, could take the elements. Well, the meeting was an open meeting in which the men stood on their feet and expressed their praise and thanksgiving, and they sang hymns together and they prayed, and they ministered the word. And in the midst of the service, Mr. Yamaguchi arose on his feet and he said, “I like to pray.”

Dr. Ironside said he felt sorry he’d not told him he better not take part in the other part of the meeting, too, because he feared there might be some unpleasant disturbance because of what he might say, and some of the other brethren might get a little upset, and criticize him publicly, straighten him out on his doctrine. But this was his prayer, Dr. Ironside said. He said, “O God, I all broke up. One whole year I fight you. I fight you hard against your Holy Spirit. O God, I cannot fight any more. I see your people eat the

bread, drink the wine, tell how Jesus die for sinner like me. O God, I give up. I take him now for my Savior. Forgive all my sin. Save me now for Jesus’ sake. Amen.”

Well, Dr. Ironside said, “Needless to say, it didn’t spoil our meeting.” [Laughter] As a matter of fact, when the meeting concluded, there was not a dry eye in the place. Then Mr. Yamaguchi said to Mr. Ironside, “Jesus say before he go away, when you believe him, you bury in water. Show old life gone, new life begin. I like bury.” Well, Mr. Ironside tried to postpone the meeting until the next week, because they weren’t prepared for it this day. But Mr. Yamaguchi said, “An evangelist told me other day that Jesus coming soon. Will he wait until after next Sunday?” And Dr. Ironside said No, he might come before next Sunday. Then, Mr. Yamaguchi said, “I like no wait until next Sunday. I like show no fight anymore. I like be buried today.” [Laughter]

So, Ironside said he and the believers decided to go down to the river which was nearby. They went down to the river and there, that afternoon, the Japanese Mayor, which was the richest man in the Japanese community in Sacramento – he was called the Japanese Mayor – and about forty of the Japanese came down dressed in their best clothes and they observed Mr. Yamaguchi be baptized. And H.A.I. had the privilege of preaching the word of God at his baptism. Well, it does show us that when we observe the Lord’s Supper, we do proclaim the word, Jesus’ death until he comes.

Now the apostle goes on in the following verses to speak of its application to the Corinthians. He says in verse 27, in the first world of the Authorized Version, “Wherefore.” That’s really an expression of result. It’s a consecutive particle, and so we would render it, “it follows that” -- Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” Now, every body is unworthy. He’s not saying that there are some who are worthy to eat the supper and some are unworthy, because all believers are unworthy. We are all sinners.

Rabbi Duncan, the Scots call it “rabbie” instead of “rabb’I” – Rabbi Duncan was the Professor of Old Testament at the University of Edinburgh several generations back. He

made a number of memorable statements, and on one occasion, a woman in one of the meetings expressed some reticence about observing the Lord’s Supper because she felt so unworthy. And so Rabbi Duncan is supposed to have said to her, as the elements were passed, “Tak it, woman, tak it! It’s for sinners!” All of us are unworthy. So we take the bread and we take the wine, not because we are worthy. We are unworthy. We’re worthy in the sense that we receive the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ as a free gift.

To eat unworthily is to eat as some of the Corinthians were doing: in a disorderly manner. Some of the wealthier people evidently were arriving ahead of time, eating their better food and their more lavish table, and therefore keeping the poorer ones who didn’t have sufficient food and the same kind of food from eating. So that some were filled and were actually drunk with the wine, and others were hungry and did not have anything to drink. That’s what it means to meet in an unworthy manner. So, he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.

Now he says in verse 28, “Let a man examine himself.” There is such a thing as moral scrutiny when we approach the Lord’s table. There must be preparation before participation. For example, we are not to observe the Lord’s Supper if we have not been converted. If we do not know the Lord Jesus Christ, we are not to take the bread and take the wine. We do not share in him. To take the bread and to take the wine is a confession of the fact that we share in him, and also that we have a common life with others who do. So it is necessary for us to become converted, to receive the Lord Jesus as our own Savior.

Donald Grey Barnhouse, many years ago when he was pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia met, as was the custom of all of the Presbyterian ministers in the presbytery, met with them in their meetings. And usually their meetings were held in the different churches. That’s the custom still today in most presbyteries, the

monthly meetings being held in the different churches of the presbytery, which may extend over several counties or more.

Well, when the time came to meet in Dr. Barnhouse’s church, the Lord’s Supper usually concluded their meetings and when they observed the Lord’s Supper, Donald Grey Barnhouse was very prominent in it because it was in his church, and it was obvious that he was not going to partake with them. And knowing his stand for the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and knowing the fact that others in the presbytery did not believe in the deity of Christ, did not believe in the atonement of Jesus Christ, but had lapsed into a liberalism of self-salvation through good works or through the church, or through the observance of the ordinances, he was called to account before the presbytery at the next meeting. And he was asked to explain why he would not participate in the Lord’s Supper with the others.

Well, Dr. Barnhouse said, “I did not participate with you because there are many of you that are not believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I did not want to share in that disobedience.”

And they said, “But when you became a minister of this particular church, you promised that you would study the purity and the peace of the church.” Those are words expressed in the Book of Church Order back sometime ago. Today, it’s, “study the peace and the welfare of the church, or the purity and the welfare of the church,” I should say. They said, “Dr. Barnhouse, you are not studying the purity and peace of the church by not observing the Lord’s Supper and saying you don’t because others are not believers.”

He said, “Well I would like to remind you of the order of the words. We are called as ministers of the Presbyterian Church to study the purity and the peace of the church, and the purity of the church precedes peace. And you cannot have peace if you do not have purity. There is no such thing as a peace that is not grounded in the purity of the teaching of the word of God. And when there is responsiveness to the word of God, and we have peace through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ, then we have

purity in the church and purity among the ministers of the church. At that time, I will be happy to observe the Lord’s Supper with you.”

Well needless to say, he was not on very happy terms with the presbytery, but he was on happy terms with the presbytery up there which counts a great deal more. And I know that in heaven, as he is now, he’s happy that he was faithful in that respect. It is also the normal thing for individuals to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and be baptized in token of their confession of faith before they observe the Lord’s Supper.

And then of course we should ask ourselves the question, are we eating in an unworthy manner. So that conversion, baptism in water, and our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ determines our spiritual condition and preparation for the Lord’s Supper. One of the old saints, Robert Bruce, a Scot, said, “Since we go to the table of the king of heaven, it becomes us to put on our best apparel, and our best apparel is the experience of conversion, the experience of water baptism in token and in confession of our faith, and then the scrutiny of our relationship to the Lord if there is nothing that is hindering our fellowship with him at the moment that God has put his finger upon as being contrary to his will.

That was a serious matter, Paul says, Because many of you in verse 30, are weak and sickly among you, and some have fallen asleep. That’s physical sleep. That’s the sleep of death. So because of failure to observe the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner, many were weak, many were sickly, and some had actually had their lives taken away from them. They were bringing reproach upon the name of Christ. When a visitor came in and saw those Corinthians who were filled and drunk with the wine, what would they think about that which this ceremony was supposed to represent? And so, Paul says, because of your disobedience, you are weak, some of you are sick, some of you have died.

God is a Father who disciplines. He’s like a good earthly father. He disciplines his children, and his discipline can be very strong. Ananias and Sapphira are testimonies

to that. The generation in the wilderness of Israelites are testimonies to that. It’s a serious thing to be a member of the family of God. It’s a great thing, it’s a privilege -- what a wonderful thing it is to have a Father who loves us enough to discipline us. Every child that grows to maturity and looks back, realizing he had a father that disciplined them thanks God for it.

Now Paul says in verse 31, “If we would judge ourselves we should not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world.” You see, our responsibility, our privilege, is to judge ourselves in order that we not be judged.

Let me close by simply saying this. It’s important that you examine your heart, your mouth, your hands and your feet. The things that you are doing. Do they agree with the word of God? If so, there is spiritual health. Is there indifference? Is there unbelief? Is there lethargy in the Christian life? Is there disobedience of some simple precept of the word of God? These are things that are important. This supper is an ordinance of communal incorporation. We look to the past. It’s an ordinance of a triumphant celebration, because we look forward to the coming of a resurrected Savior.

Have you ever thought about this? The first people who observed the supper were individuals who looked back on their immediately preceding life as a life of failure. Think of all of Peter’s failures. And then at the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, they had all forsaken him, and they had fled from him. Can you not imagine that if they had observed the Lord’s Supper, Sunday after Sunday, they reflected upon their failures? But nevertheless, if you study the early church, you find that this was always a feast of joy. Why? Because it was a feast in honor of a resurrected Savior.

When they were observing the Lord’s Supper, they were observing a relationship to one that they now knew was alive and with them. O, if we could just have our eyes opened like Elijah’s servant, who saw all the forces of God over the mountains at Dothan and then had a true picture of the situation. The enemies that are human are all about,

but the forces of God standing for the prophet were so superior. If we could just at the Lord’s Supper have a picture of what is really taking place – why it’s not Howard Prier or Charles Howard or some of the other men who are serving the elements. It is the Lord Jesus Christ. He walks in the midst of the candlesticks which represent the church of the living God. He is with us here in the Lord’s Supper. It is he who ministers to us. And in that supper, it is he who takes the lead.

Chrysostom was right when said many hundreds of years ago, “Even today is he who doeth all and delivers it even as then.” Do you notice the various attitudes that prevail in the Lord’s Supper? Just take it simply. We look back at the cross. We look forward to the coming. We look up and about us to the resurrected Savior and the other Christians who form part of the body of Christ. Those are the attitudes that we have at the Lord’s Supper.

Now he said, “Take, eat” and he also said “drink.” These are words of appropriation, so that we not only remember. It’s not enough simply to remember Christ died. There must be a reception of our Lord Jesus Christ. So, at the Lord’s Supper, we receive. We receive the edification that comes through the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and it reminds us of the necessity to receive our Lord Jesus Christ if we never have.

There was an old Scotswoman who was too old to attend the meetings of the Lord’s Supper, but when the members of her family came home, she would say to them, “Did you meet anyone in the service?” They would say, oh yes, we met Fred or we met John or we met James. But she would say, “Did you meet anyone in particular?” She of course was thinking of the meeting with the Lord. That’s the highlight of the Lord’s Supper. That’s why the early church remembered the Lord’s Supper. They realized they were doing something that the Lord Jesus just took great delight in.

You don’t know how I have longed to eat this Passover with you before I die, Jesus said. And he’s given us this great inestimable privilege of remembering him in the bread and the wine. May God help us to respond to it.

You may be here and you’ve never believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. You don’t really have a right to sit at the table and partake of the elements yet. The Son of God completed the new covenant in the shedding of his blood, the giving of his body, and he said, this is the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins. If God has spoken to your heart, convinced you you are in a lost condition, come to Christ. Receive the benefits of the saving work, the forgiveness of sins, take your place at the Lord’s table. Remember him after you have been baptized in testimony to your faith.

To be baptized, that’s a testimony. We don’t testify to our faith by signing a decision card. We don’t testify to our faith by coming down front in a meeting. We don’t testify to our faith by raising our hands in a meeting. The New Testament way to confess your faith in Christ is to come to the elders and say, “I’d like to be baptized in water and give testimony to my faith.” May God help you to come to faith in Christ, be baptized, enjoy the fellowship of the Lord’s table.

Let’s stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Our heavenly Father, we are grateful to Thee for this wonderful ordinance, the Lord’s Supper, given to us so simple and yet so meaningful. And we do ask that Thou wilt enable us to be appreciative and grateful for all that it represents. And we pray that if there are some here who do not know the Lord Jesus as their own Savior yet, draw them by the love of God and efficacious grace to trust in him. May grace, mercy and peace be ours now as we part.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.

“Paul and the Lord’s Supper, part II” by S. Lewis Johnson
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