

A Look at Communion

by J.C. Ryle

The Lord's Supper is a solemn ordinance that should be received with understanding, repentance, faith, and love, and is meant to be a remembrance of Christ's sacrifice and benefits.

Scripture: Matthew 13:30, Matthew 13:38, Luke 22:19, John 21:22, Acts 17:30, Romans 3:26, 1 Corinthians 11:25-29, Hebrews 13:10

Topics: "Self-Examination", "The Lord's Supper"

Description

J.C. Ryle emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Supper, urging believers to examine themselves before partaking in this sacred ordinance. He addresses common misconceptions and the importance of understanding the true purpose of communion, which is to remember Christ's sacrifice. Ryle highlights that the Lord's Supper is not a means of justification or conversion, but rather a means to strengthen faith and deepen repentance. He warns against the dangers of neglecting this ordinance and encourages believers to approach it with reverence and understanding. Ultimately, Ryle calls for a return to the biblical truth surrounding communion to foster unity and spiritual growth among Christians.

Transcript

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread

and drinks of the cup" (1 Corinthians 11:28)

The words which form the title of this paper refer to the subject of vast importance. That subject is the Lord's Supper.

Perhaps no part of the Christian religion is so thoroughly misunderstood as the Lord's Supper. On no point have there been so many disputes, strifes, and controversies for almost 1800 years. On no point have mistakes done so much harm. The very ordinance which was meant for our peace and profit has become the cause of discord and the occasion of sin. These things ought not to be!

I make no excuse for including the Lord's Supper among the leading points of "practical" Christianity. I firmly believe that ignorant views or false doctrine about this ordinance lie at the root of some of the present divisions of professing Christians. Some neglect it altogether; some completely misunderstand it; some exalt it to a position it was never meant to occupy, and turn it into an idol. If I can throw a little light on it, and clear up the doubts in some minds, I will feel very thankful. It is hopeless, I fear, to expect that the controversy about the Lord's Supper will ever be finally closed until the Lord comes. But it is not too much to hope that the fog and mystery and obscurity with which it is surrounded in some minds, may be cleared away by plain Bible truth.

In examining the Lord's Supper I will be content with asking four practical questions, and offering answers to them.

I. Why was the Lord's Supper ordained?

II. Who ought to go to the Table and be communicants?

III. What may communicants expect from the Lord's Supper?

IV. Why do many so-called Christians (church-going unbelievers) never go to the Lord's Table?

I think it will be impossible to handle these four questions fairly, honestly, and impartially, without seeing the subject of this paper more clearly, and getting some distinct and practical ideas about some leading errors of our day. I say "practical" emphatically. My chief aim in this volume is to promote practical Christianity.

I. In the first place, "why was the Lord's Supper ordained?"

It was ordained for the continual remembrance of the sacrifice of the death of Christ, and of the benefits which we thereby receive. The bread which in the Lord's Supper is broken, given, and eaten, is meant to remind us of

Christ's body given on the cross for our sins. The wine which is poured out and received, is meant to remind us of Christ's blood shed on the cross for our sins. He that eats that bread and drinks that wine is reminded, in the most striking and forcible manner, of the benefits Christ has obtained for his soul, and of the death of Christ as the hinge and turning point on which all those benefits depend.

Now, is the view here stated the doctrine of the New Testament? If it is not, forever let it be rejected, cast aside, and refused by men. If it is, let us never be ashamed to hold it close, profess our belief in it, pin our faith on it, and steadfastly refuse to hold any other view, no matter who teaches it. In subjects like this we must call no man master. It matters little what great theologians and learned preachers have thought fit to put forth about the Lord's Supper. If they teach more than the Word of God contains they are not to be believed.

I take down my Bible and turn to the New Testament. There I find no less than four separate accounts of the first appointment of the Lord's Supper. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul, all four describe it: all four agree in telling us what our Lord did on this memorable occasion. Only two tell us the reason why our Lord commanded that His disciples were to eat the bread and drink the cup. Paul and Luke both record the remarkable words, "Do this in remembrance of me." Paul adds his own inspired comment: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." (Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26). When Scripture speaks so clearly, why can't men be content with it? Why should we mystify and confuse a subject which in the New Testament is so simple? The "continual remembrance of Christ's death" was the one grand object for which the Lord's Supper was ordained. He that goes further than this is adding to God's Word,

and does so to the great peril of his soul.

Now, is it reasonable to suppose that our Lord would appoint an ordinance for so simple a purpose as "remembering His death?" It most certainly is. Of all the facts in His earthly ministry none are equal in importance to that of His death. It was the great settlement for man's sin, which had been appointed in God's promise from the foundation of the world. It was the great redemption of almighty power, to which every sacrifice of animals, from the fall of man, continually pointed. It was the grand end and purpose for which the Messiah came into the world. It was the cornerstone and foundation of all man's hopes of pardon and peace with God. In short, Christ would have lived, and taught, and preached, and prophesied, and performed miracles in vain, if He had not "crowned it all by dying for our sins as our Substitute on the Cross!" His death was our life. His death was the payment of our debt to God. Without His death we would have been the most miserable of all creatures. No wonder that an ordinance was specially appointed to remind us of our Savior's death. It is the one thing which poor, weak, sinful man needs to be continually reminded.

Does the New Testament authorize men to say that the Lord's Supper was ordained to be a sacrifice, and that in it Christ's literal body and blood are present under the forms of bread and wine? Most certainly not! When the Lord Jesus said to the disciples, "This is my Body," and "this is my Blood," He clearly meant, "This bread in my hand is an symbol of my Body, and this cup of wine in my hand contains a symbol of my Blood." The disciples were accustomed to hear Him use such language. They remembered His saying, "The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one" (Matthew 13:38). It never entered into their minds that He meant to say He was holding His own body and His own

blood in His hands, and literally giving them His literal body and blood to eat and drink. Not one of the writers of the New Testament ever speaks of the Lord's Supper as a sacrifice, or calls the Lord's Table an altar, or even hints that a Christian minister is a sacrificing priest. The universal doctrine of the New Testament is that after the one offering of Christ there remains no more need of sacrifice.

If any one believes that Paul's words to the Hebrews, "We have an altar" (Hebrews 13:10), are a proof that the Lord's table is an altar, I remind him "Christians have an altar where they partake. That altar is Christ our Lord, who is Altar, Priest, and Sacrifice, all in One."

Throughout the Communion Service the one idea of the ordinance continually pressed on our attention is that of a "remembrance" of Christ's death. As to any presence of Christ's natural body and blood under the forms of bread and wine, the clear answer is that "the natural body and blood of Christ are in heaven, and not here." Those Roman Catholics who delight in talking of the "altar," the "sacrifice," the "priest," and the "real presence" in the Lord's Supper, would do well to remember that they are using language which is entirely non-Biblical.

The point before us is one of vast importance. Let us lay hold upon it firmly, and never let it go. It is the very point on which our Reformers had their sharpest controversy with the Roman Catholics, and went to the stake, rather than give way. Sooner than admit that the Lord's Supper was a sacrifice, they cheerfully laid down their lives. To bring back the doctrine of the "real presence," and to turn the communion into the Roman Catholic "mass," is to pour contempt on our Martyrs, and to upset the first principles of the Protestant Reformation. No, rather, it is to ignore the plain teaching of God's Word, and do dishonor to the priestly office of our Lord

Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches expressly that the Lord's Supper was ordained to be "a remembrance of Christ's body and blood," and not an offering. The Bible teaches that Christ's substituted death on the cross was the perfect sacrifice for sin, which never needs to be repeated. Let us stand firm in these two great principles of the Christian faith. A clear understanding of the intention of the Lord's Supper is one of the soul's best safeguards against the delusions of false doctrine.

II. In the second place, let me try to show "who ought to receive the Lord's Supper?" What kind of persons were meant to go to the Table and receive the Lord's Supper?

I will first show who ought not to be partakers of this ordinance. The ignorance which prevails on this, as well as on every part of the subject, is vast, lamentable, and appalling. If I can contribute anything that may throw light upon it, I will feel very thankful. The principal giants whom John Bunyan describes, in "Pilgrim's Progress," as dangerous to Christian pilgrims, were two, Pope and Pagan. If the good old Puritan had foreseen the times we live in, he would have said something about the giant Ignorance.

(a) It is not right to urge all professing Christians to go to the Lord's Table. There is such a thing as fitness and preparedness for the ordinance. It does not work like a medicine, independently of the state of mind of those who receive it. The teaching of those who urge all their congregation to come to the Lord's Table, as if the coming must necessarily do every one good, is entirely without warrant of Scripture. No, rather, it is a teaching which is calculated to do immense harm to men's souls, and to turn the reception of the Lord's Supper into a mere form. Ignorance can never be the mother of acceptable worship, and an ignorant communicant who comes to the Lord's Table without knowing why he comes, is altogether in the wrong place.

"A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."--"recognizing the body of the Lord,"--that is to understand what the elements of bread and wine represent, and why they are appointed, and what is the particular use of remembering Christ's death--is an essential qualification of a true communicant. God commands all people everywhere to repent and believe the Gospel (Acts 17:30), but He does not in the same way, or in the same manner, command everybody to come to the Lord's Table. No: this thing is not to be taken lightly, or carelessly! It is a solemn ordinance, and solemnly it ought to be used.

(b) But this is not all. Sinners living in open sin, and determined not to give it up ought never to come to the Lord's Table. To do so is a positive insult to Christ, and to pour contempt on His Gospel. It is nonsense to profess we desire to remember Christ's death, while we cling to the accursed thing which made it needful for Christ to die. The mere fact that a man is continuing in sin is clear evidence that he does not care for Christ, and feels no gratitude for the offer of redemption.

The ignorant Roman Catholic who goes to the priest's confessional and receives absolution, may think he is fit to go to the Roman Catholic mass, and after mass may return to his sins. He never reads the Bible, and knows no better! But the professing Christian who habitually breaks any of God's commandments, and yet goes to the Lord's Table, as if it would do him good and wipe away his sins, is very guilty indeed. So long as he chooses to continue his wicked habits he cannot receive the slightest benefit from the Lord's Table, and is only adding sin to sin. To carry unrepented sin to the Lord's Table, and there receive the bread and wine, knowing in our own hearts that we and wickedness are yet friends, is one of the worst things man can do, and one of the most hardening to the conscience. If a man must have his

sins, and can't give them up, let him by all means stay away from the Lord's Supper. There is such a thing as "eating and drinking in an unworthy manner" and to our own "judgment." To no one do these words apply so thoroughly as to an unrepentant sinner.

(c) But I am not done yet. Self-righteous people who think that they will be saved by their own works, have no business to come to the Lord's Table. Strange as it may sound at first, these persons are the least qualified of all to receive the Lord's table. They may be outwardly correct, moral and respectable in their lives, but so long as they trust in their own goodness for salvation they are entirely in the wrong place at the Lord's Supper. For what do we declare at the Lord's Supper? We publicly profess that we have no goodness, righteousness, or worthiness of our own, and that all our hope is in Christ.

We publicly profess that we are guilty, sinful, corrupt, and naturally deserve God's wrath and condemnation. We publicly profess that Christ's merit and not our's, Christ's righteousness and not our's is the only cause why we look for acceptance with God. Now what has a self-righteous man to do with an ordinance like this? Clearly nothing at all.

One thing at any rate, is very clear: a self-righteous man has no business to receive the Lord's Supper. The Communion Service of the Church bids all communicants declare that "they do not presume to come to the Table trusting in their own righteousness, but in God's numerous and great mercies." It tells them to say, "We are not worthy so much as to gather up the crumbs under Your table," "the memory of our sins is grievous to us; the burden of them is intolerable." How many self-righteous professing Christians can ever go to the Lord's Table and take these words into his mouth, is beyond my understanding! It only shows that many professing Christians use the "forms"

of worship without taking the trouble to consider what they mean.

The plain truth is that the Lord's Supper was not meant for dead souls, but for living ones. The careless, the ignorant, the willfully wicked, the self-righteous, are no more fit to come to the Lord's Table than a dead corpse is fit to sit down at a king's feast. To enjoy a spiritual feast we must have a spiritual heart, and taste, and appetite. To suppose that the Lord's Table can do any good to an unspiritual man, is as foolish as to put bread and wine into the mouth of a dead person. The careless, the ignorant, and the willfully wicked, so long as they continue in that state, are utterly unfit to come to the Lord's Supper. To urge them to partake is not to do them good but harm. The Lord's Supper is not a converting or justifying ordinance. If a man goes to the Table unconverted or unforgiven, he will be no better when he comes away (actually worse due to the associated judgments for coming unworthily).

But, after all, the ground having been cleared of error, the question still remains to be answered--Who are the sort of persons who ought to receive the Lord's Supper? I answer that by saying, people who have "examined themselves to see whether they have truly repented of their former sins, steadfastly purposing to lead a new life--have a true faith in God's mercy through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of His death--they are in love with all men." In a word, I find that a worthy communicant is one who possesses three simple marks and qualifications--repentance, faith, and love. Does a man truly repent of sin and hate it? Does a man put his trust in Jesus Christ as his only hope of salvation? Does a man live in love towards others? He that can truly answer each of these questions, "I do," he is a man that is Scripturally qualified for the Lord's Supper. Let him come boldly. Let no barrier be put in his way. He comes up to the Bible standard of

communicants. He may draw near with confidence, and feel assured that the great Master of the banquet is not displeased.

Such a man's repentance may be very much imperfect. Never mind! Is it real?

Is he truly repentant? His faith in Christ may be very weak. Never mind!

Is it real? A penny is as much true currency as is a one hundred dollar

bill. His love may be very defective in quantity and degree. Never mind!

Is it genuine? The grand test of a man's Christianity is not the quantity of holiness he has, but whether he has any at all.

The first twelve communicants, when Christ Himself gave the bread and wine, were weak indeed--weak in knowledge, weak in faith, weak in courage, weak in patience, weak in love! But eleven of them had something about them which outweighed all defects: they were real, genuine, sincere, and true.

Forever let this great principle be rooted in our minds--the only worthy communicant is the man who has demonstrated repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, and practical love toward others. Are you that man? Then you may draw near to the table, and take the ordinance to your comfort. Anything less than this I dare not change in my standard of a communicant. I will never encourage someone to receive the Lord's Supper who is careless, ignorant, and self-righteous. I will never tell anyone to keep away till he is perfect, and to wait till his heart is as unruffled as an angel's. I will not do so, because I believe that neither my Master nor His Apostles would have done so. Show me a man that really feels his sins, really leans on Christ, really struggles to be holy, and I will welcome him in My Master's name. He may feel weak, erring, empty, feeble, doubting, wretched, and poor. But what does that matter? Paul, I believe, would have received him as a right communicant, and I will do likewise.

III. In the third place, let us consider "what benefit communicants may

expect to get by receiving the Lord's Supper."

This is a point of grave importance, and one on which many mistakes abound.

On no point, perhaps, connected with this ordinance are the views of Christians so vague and indistinct and undefined.

One common idea among men is that "receiving the Lord's Supper must do them some good." Why, they can't explain. What good, they can't exactly say. But they have a loose general notion that it is the right thing to be a communicant, and that somehow or other it is of value to their souls! This is of course nothing better than ignorance. It is unreasonable to suppose that such communicants can please Christ, or receive any real benefit from what they do. If there is any principle clearly laid down in the Bible about any act of religious worship, it is this that it must be with understanding.

The worshiper must at least understand something about what he is doing.

Mere bodily worship, unaccompanied by mind or heart, is utterly worthless.

The man who eats the bread and drinks the wine, as a mere matter of form, because it is the "right" thing to do, without any clear idea of what it all means, derives no benefit. He might just as well stay at home!

Another common idea among men is that, "taking the Lord' Supper will help them get to heaven, and take away their sins." To this false idea you may trace up the habit in some churches of going to the Lord's Table once a year, in order, as an old farmer once said, "to wipe off the year's sins." To this idea again, you may trace the too common practice of sending for a minister in time of sickness, in order to receive the ordinance before death. Yes, how many take comfort about their relatives, after they have lived a most ungodly life, for no better reason than this, that they took the Lord's Supper when they were dying! Whether they repented and believed and had new hearts, they neither seem to know or care. All they know is that "they took

the Lord's Supper before they died." My heart sinks within me when I hear people resting on such evidence as this.

Ideas like these are sad proofs of the ignorance that fills the minds of men about the Lord's Supper. They are ideas for which there is not the slightest warrant in Scripture. The sooner they are cast aside and given up, the better for the Church and the world.

Let us settle it firmly in our minds that the Lord's Supper was not given to be a means either of justification or of conversion. It was never meant to give grace where there is no grace already, or to provide pardon when pardon is not already enjoyed. It cannot possibly provide what is lacking with the absence of repentance to God, and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. It is an ordinance for the penitent, not for the impenitent, for the believing, not for the unbelieving, for the converted, not for the unconverted. The unconverted man, who fancies that he can find a "shortcut" to heaven by taking the Lord's Supper, without treading the well-worn steps of repentance and faith, will find to his cost one day, that he is totally deceived. The Lord's Supper was meant to increase and help the grace that a man has, but not to impart the grace that he does not have. It was certainly never intended to make our peace with God, to justify, or to convert.

The simplest statement of the benefit which a truehearted communicant may expect to receive from the Lord's Supper, is the strengthening and refreshing of our souls--clearer views of Christ and His atonement, clearer views of all the offices which Christ, fills as our Mediator and Advocate, clearer views of the complete redemption Christ has obtained for us by His substituted death on the cross, clearer views of our full and perfect acceptance in Christ before God, fresh reasons for deep repentance for sin, fresh reasons for lively faith--these are among the leading returns which a believer may

confidently expect to get from his attendance at the Lord's Table. He that eats the bread and drinks the wine in a right spirit, will find himself drawn into closer communion with Christ, and will feel to know Him more, and understand Him better.

(a) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "humbling" effect on the soul. The sight of the bread and wine as emblems of Christ's body and blood, reminds us how sinful sin must be, if nothing less than the death of God's own Son could make satisfaction for it, or redeem us from its guilt. Never should we be so "clothed with humility," as when we receive the Lord's Supper.

(b) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "cheering" effect on the soul. The sight of the bread broken, and the wine poured out, reminds us how full, perfect, and complete is our salvation. Those vivid emblems remind us what an enormous price has been paid for our redemption. They press on us the mighty truth, that believing on Christ, we have nothing to fear, because a sufficient payment has been made for our debt. The "precious blood of Christ" answers every charge that can be brought against us. God can be "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus"

(Romans 3:26).

(c) Right reception of the Lord's Supper has a "sanctifying" effect on the soul. The bread and wine remind us how great is our debt of gratitude to our Lord, and how thoroughly we are bound to live for Him who died for our sins. They seem to say to us, "Remember what Christ has done for you, and ask yourself whether there is anything too great to do for Him."

(d) Right reception of the Lord's Supper into hearts, has a restraining effect on the soul. Every time a believer receives the bread and the wine he is reminded what a serious thing it is to be a Christian, and what an

obligation is laid on him to lead a consistent life. Bought with such a price as that bread and wine call to his recollection, ought he not to glorify Christ in body and spirit, which are His? The man that goes regularly and intelligently to the Lord's Table finds it increasingly hard to yield to sin and conform to the world.

Such is a brief account of the benefits which a right hearted communicant may expect to receive from the Lord's Supper. In eating that bread and drinking that cup, such a man will have his repentance deepened, his faith increased, his knowledge enlarged, his habit of holy living strengthened. He will realize more of the "real presence" of Christ in his heart. Eating, that bread by faith, he will feel closer communion with the body of Christ. Drinking that wine by faith, he will feel closer communion with the blood of Christ. He will see more clearly what Christ is to him, and what he is to Christ. He will understand more thoroughly what it is to be "one with Christ, and Christ one with him." He will feel the roots of his soul's spiritual life watered, and the work of grace in his heart established, built up, and carried forward. All these things may seem and sound like foolishness to a natural man, but to a true Christian these things are light, and health, and life, and peace. No wonder that a true Christian finds the Lord's Supper a source of blessing!

Remember, I do not pretend to say that all Christians experience the full blessing of the Lord's Supper, which I have just attempted to describe. Nor do I say that the same believer will always find his soul in the same spiritual frame, and always receive the same amount of benefit from the ordinance. But I boldly say this: you will rarely find a true believer who will not say that he believes the Lord's Supper is one of his best helps and highest privileges. He will tell you that if he were deprived of the Lord's

Supper on a regular basis he would find the loss of it a great detriment to his soul. There are some things of which we never know the value of till they are taken from us. So I believe it is with the Lord's Supper. The weakest and humblest of God's children gets a blessing from this ordinance, to an extent of which he is not aware.

IV. In the last place, I have to consider "why it is that so many so-called Christians (false believers) never come to the Lord's Supper."

It is a simple matter of fact, that myriads of persons who call themselves Christians never come to the Table of the Lord. They would not endure to be told that they deny the faith, and are not in communion with Christ. When they worship, they attend a place of Christian worship; when they hear religious teaching, it is the teaching of Christianity; when they are married, they use a Christian service. Yet all this time they never come to the Lord's Supper! They often live on in this state of mind for many years, and to all appearance are not ashamed. They often die in this condition without ever having received the ordinance, and yet profess to feel hope at the last, and their friends express a hope about them. And yet they live and die in open disobedience to a plain command of Christ! These are simple facts. Let any one look around him, and deny them if he can.

Now why is this? What explanation can we give? Our Lord Jesus Christ's last injunctions to His disciples are clear, plain, and unmistakable. He says to all, "Eat, drink: do this in remembrance of Me." Did He leave it to our discretion whether we would obey His injunction or not? Did He mean that it was not significant whether His disciples did or did not keep up the ordinance He had just established? Certainly not. The very idea is absurd, and one certainly never dreamed of in apostolic times. Paul evidently takes it for granted that every Christian would go to the Lord's Table when it was

available. A class of Christian worshipers who never came to the Table, was a class whose existence was unknown to him. What, then, are we to say of that number which fail to receive the Lord's Supper, unabashed, unhumiliated, not afraid, not the least ashamed? Why is it? How is it? What does it all mean? Let us look these questions fairly in the face, and endeavor to give an answer to them.

(1) For one thing, many fail to go to the Table because they are utterly careless and thoughtless about religion, and ignorant of very first principles of Christianity.

They go to church, as a matter of form, but they neither know, nor care anything about what is done at church! The faith of Christ has no place either in their hearts, or heads, or consciences, or wills, or understandings. It is a mere affair of "words and names," about which they know no more than Festus or Gallio. There were very few such false Christians in Paul's times, if indeed there were any. There are far too many in these last days of the world. They are the dead-weight of the Churches, and the scandal of Christianity. What such people need is light, knowledge, grace, a renewed conscience, a changed heart. In their present state they have no part of Christ; and dying in this state they are thrown into hell.

Do I wish them to come to the Lord's Supper? Certainly not, till they are converted. No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born again.

(2) For another thing, many false Christians do not receive the Lord's Supper because they know they are living in the habitual practice of some sin, or in the neglect of some Christian duty.

Their conscience tells them so long as they live in this state, and do not turn away from their sins, they are unfit to come to the Table of the Lord.

Well: they are so far quite right! I wish no man to be a communicant if he

cannot give up his sins. But I warn these people not to forget that if they are unfit for the Lord's Supper in that condition they will be lost eternally. The same sins which disqualify them for the ordinance, most certainly disqualify them for heaven. Do I want them to come to the Lord's Supper as they are? Certainly not! But I do want them to repent and be converted, to cease to do evil, and to break off from their sins. Forever let it be remembered that the man unfit for the Lord's Supper is unfit to die.

(3) For another thing, some are not communicant because they fancy it will add to their responsibility.

They are not, as many, ignorant and careless about religion. They even attend church regularly and listen to the preaching of the gospel. But they say they dread coming to the Lord's Table and making a confession and a profession. They fear that they might afterwards fall away, and bring scandal on the cause of Christianity. They think it wisest to be on the safe side, and not commit themselves at all. Such people would do well to remember that if they avoid responsibility of one kind by not coming to the Lord's Table, they incur responsibility of another kind, quite as grave, and quite as injurious to the soul. They are responsible for open disobedience to a command from of Christ. They are shrinking from doing that which their Master continually commands His disciples--confessing Him before men. No doubt it is a serious step to come to the Lord's Table and receive the bread and the wine. It is a step that none should take lightly and without self-examination. But it is "no less a serious step to walk away and refuse the ordinance," when we remember Who invites us to receive it, and for what purpose it was appointed! I warn the people I am now dealing with to be careful what they are doing. Let them not flatter themselves that it can

ever be a wise, a prudent, a safe line of conduct to neglect a plain command of Christ. They may find at length, to their cost, that they have only increased their guilt and forsaken their mercies.

(4) For another thing, some false Christians stay away from the Lord's Supper because they believe they are not yet worthy.

They wait and stand still, under the mistaken notion that no one is qualified for the Lord's Supper unless he feels within him something like perfection. They pitch their idea of a communicant so high that they despair of attaining to it. Waiting for inward perfection they live, and waiting for it they die. Now such persons would do well to understand that they are completely mistaken in their estimate of what "worthiness" really is. They are forgetting that the Lord's Supper was not intended for unsinning angels, but for men and women subject to weakness, living in a world full of temptations, and needing mercy and grace every day they live.

A sense of our own utter unworthiness is the best worthiness that we can bring to the Lord's Table. A deep feeling of our own entire indebtedness to Christ for all we have and hope for, is the best feeling we can bring, with us. The people I now have in view ought to consider seriously whether the ground they have taken up is defensible, and whether they are not standing in their own light. If they are waiting till they feel in themselves perfect hearts, perfect motives, perfect feelings, perfect, repentance, perfect love, perfect faith, they will wait forever. There never were such communicants in any age--certainly not in the days of our Lord and of the Apostles--there never will be as long as the world stands. No, rather, the very thought that we feel literally worthy, is a symptom of secret self-righteousness, and proves us unfit for the Lord's Table in God's sight. Sinners we are when we first come to the throne of grace--sinners we will be till we die; converted,

changed, renewed, sanctified, but sinners still (though not like before--sin is not the pattern of a believer's new life). In short, no man is really worthy to receive the Lord's Supper who does not deeply feel that he is a "miserable sinner."

(5) In the last place, some object going to the Lord's Table because they see others partaking who are not worthy, and not in a right state of mind. Because others eat and drink unworthily, they refuse to eat and drink at all. Of all the reasons taken up by those refusing to come to the Lord's Supper to justify their own neglect of Christ's ordinance, I must plainly say, I know none which seems to me so foolish, so weak, so unreasonable, and so unscriptural as this. It is as good as saying that we will never receive the Lord's Supper at all! When will we ever find a body of communicants on earth of which all the members are converted and living perfect lives? It is setting up ourselves in the most unhealthy attitude of judging others. "Who are you that you judge another person?" "What is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:22). It is depriving ourselves of a great privilege because others profane it and make a bad use of it. It is pretending to be wiser than our Master Himself. It is taking up ground for which there is no warrant in Scripture. Paul rebukes the Corinthians sharply for the irreverent behavior of some of the communicants; but I cannot find him giving a single hint that when some came to the Table unworthily, others ought to draw back or stay away. Let me advise the non-communicants I have now in view to beware of being wise above that which was written. Let them study the parable of the Wheat and Tares, and mark how both were to "grow together until the harvest" (Matthew 13:30).

Perfect Churches, perfect congregations, perfect bodies of communicants, are all unattainable in this world of confusion and sin. Let us covet the best

gifts, and do all we can to check sin in others; but let us not starve our
ourselves because others are ignorant sinners, and turn their food into
poison. If others are foolish enough to eat and drink unworthily, let us not
turn our backs on Christ's ordinance, and refuse to eat and drink at all.
Such are the five common excuses why myriads in the present day, though
professing themselves Christians (but they are not), never come to the Lord's
Supper. One common remark may be made about them: there is not a single
reason among the five which deserves to be called "good," and which does not
condemn the man who gives it. I challenge anyone to deny this. I have said
repeatedly that I want no one to come to the Lord's Table who is not properly
qualified. But I ask those who stay away never to forget that the very
reasons they assign for their conduct are their condemnation. I tell them
that they stand convicted before God of either being very ignorant of what a
communicant is, and what the Lord's Supper is; or else of being persons who
are not living right, and are unfit to die. In short, to say, I am a non-
communicant, is as good as saying one of three things--I am living in sin,
and cannot come--I know Christ commands me, but I will not obey Him--I am an
ignorant man, and do not understand what the Lord's Supper means."

I know not in what state of mind this book may find the reader of this paper,
or what his opinions may be about the Lord's Supper. But I will conclude the
whole subject by offering to all some warnings, which I venture to think are
highly required by the times.

(1) In the first place, "do not neglect" the Lord's Supper.

The man who coolly and deliberately refuses to use an ordinance which the
Lord Jesus Christ appointed for his profit, may be very sure that his soul is
in a very wrong state. There is a judgment to come; there is, an account to
be rendered of all our conduct on earth. How any one can look forward to

that day, and expect to meet Christ with comfort and in peace, if he has refused all his life to commune with Christ at His Table, is a thing that I cannot understand. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(2) In the second place, "do not receive the Lord's Supper carelessly," irreverently, and as a matter of form.

The man who goes to the Lord's Table, and eats the bread and drinks the wine, while his heart is far away, is committing a great sin, and robbing himself of a great blessing. In this, as in every other means of grace, every thing depends on the state of mind in which the ordinance is used. He that draws near without repentance, faith, and love, and with a heart full of sin and the world, will certainly be nothing better, but rather worse. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(3) In the third place, "do not make an idol" of the Lord's Supper.

The man who tells you that it is the first, foremost, chief, and principal precept in Christianity, is telling you that which he will find it hard to prove. In the great majority of the books of the New Testament the Lord's Supper is not even named. In the letter to Timothy and Titus, about a minister's duties, the subject is not even mentioned. To repent and be converted, to believe and be holy, to be born again and have grace in our hearts--all these things are of far more importance than to be a communicant. Without them we cannot be saved. Without the Lord's Supper we can. Are you tempted to make the Lord's Supper override and overshadow everything in Christianity, and place it above prayer and preaching? Be careful. Pay attention what you are doing.

(4) In the fourth place, "do not use the Lord's Supper irregularly."

Never be absent when the Lord's Supper is administered. Make every effort to

be in attendance. Regular habits are essential to the maintenance of the health of our bodies. Regular use of the Lord's Supper is essential to the well-being of our souls. The man who finds it a burden to attend on every occasion when the Lord's Table is spread, may well doubt whether all is right within him, and whether he is ready for the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. If Thomas had not been absent when the Lord appeared the first time to the assembled disciples, he would not have said the foolish things he did. Absence made him miss a blessing. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(5) In the fifth place, "do not do anything to bring discredit" on your profession as a communicant.

The man who after attending the Lord's Table runs into sin, does more harm perhaps than any sinner. He is a walking sermon on behalf of the devil. He gives opportunity to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. He helps to keep people away from Christ. Lying, drinking, adulterous, dishonest, passionate communicants are the helpers of the devil, and the worst enemies of the Gospel. Does this hit home to you? Be careful what you are doing.

(6) In the last place, "do not despair" and be cast down, if with all your desires you do not feel that you get a lot of good from the Lord's Supper. Very likely you are expecting too much. Very likely you are a poor judge of your own state. Your soul's roots may be strengthening and growing, while you think you are not growing. Very likely you are forgetting that earth is not heaven, and that here we walk by sight and not by faith, and must expect nothing perfect. Lay these things to heart. Do not think harsh things about yourself without cause.

To every reader into whose hands this paper may fall, I commend the whole subject of it as deserving of serious and solemn consideration. I am

nothing, better than a poor or fallible man myself. But if I have made up my mind on any point it is this--that there is no truth which demands such plain speaking, as truth about the Lord's Supper.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/a-look-at-communion/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net