

Of the Lord's Supper.

by John Gill

The Lord's Supper is an ordinance instituted by Christ, where believers partake of bread and wine to remember his body and blood shed for them.

Scripture: Matthew 26:26

Topics: "Spiritual Nourishment", "The Lord's Supper"

Description

John Gill emphasizes the significance of the Lord's Supper as a vital ordinance instituted by Christ, which serves as spiritual nourishment for believers. He explains that this sacrament is a continual reminder of Christ's sacrifice, where the bread symbolizes His body and the wine represents His blood, both essential for the sustenance of spiritual life. Gill stresses that only those who have been baptized and are in a right relationship with God should partake in this sacred meal, as it is meant for true believers who can discern its meaning. The Lord's Supper is not only a commemoration of Christ's death but also a means to foster unity among believers and express gratitude for God's grace. Ultimately, this ordinance is to be observed until Christ's return, reinforcing the ongoing relationship between the church and its Savior.

Transcript

A Body of PRACTICAL Divinity

Book 3--Chapter 2

OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

After the ordinance of baptism follows the ordinance of the Lord's Supper; the one is preparatory to the other; and he that has a right to the one has a right to the other; and none but such who have submitted to the former, ought to be admitted to the latter. Baptism is to be administered but once, when we first make a profession of Christ, and of faith in him; but the ordinance of the supper is to be frequently administered, and continued throughout the stage of life, it being our spiritual food, for the support and maintenance of our spiritual life.

It goes by various names in scripture; it is called, "the body and blood of Christ," from the subject matter of it; and that by Christ himself, "This is my body, and this is my blood," (Matthew 26:26, 28) which in this ordinance are symbolically represented to the faith of the Lord's people: and sometimes it is called, "The communion of the body and blood of Christ," (1 Cor. 10:16) because the saints have in it communion with

Christ, he sups with them and they with him; and particularly enjoy the fellowship of his sufferings, or partake of the blessings of grace which flow from the sufferings of Christ, from the offering up of his body, and the shedding of his blood.

Sometimes it is called, "This bread, and this cup of the Lord," (1 Cor. 11:27) because the bread represents Christ himself, the bread of life, and the cup signifies the New Testament in his blood. Sometimes it is expressed by "breaking of bread," (Acts 2:42, 20:7) a part for the whole, so denominated from a particular action used in the administration of it. And it is called, "The Lord's table," (1 Cor. 10:21) by a metonymy, for the food and entertainment upon it; a table which the Lord has prepared and furnished, at which he himself sits and welcomes his guests: and with great propriety may it be called a feast, because of the richness and plenty of the provision in it; as it seems to be in 1 Corinthians 5:8, "Let us keep the feast;" not the feast of the passover, now abolished, but the feast of the Lord's Supper, which exhibits Christ, the true passover, sacrificed for us.

But its most significant and expressive name, and which is commonly in use, is "The Lord's Supper," (1 Cor. 11:20) a "supper," being instituted after the passover, which was killed between the two evenings, and eaten in the night; and was first performed by Christ the evening in which he was betrayed; nor does this detract from the grandeur of the entertainment, since not only with the Romans their principal meal was a supper, but with the Jews also, especially their nuptial feasts were kept in the evening.

And it is called the Lord's Supper because it is by his appointment; it is made by him and for him; he is the sum and substance of it, and when rightly performed, it is according to his will; he is the maker and master of the feast, and is the feast itself. There are various other names which are given to this ordinance by the ancients; to recite which is to little purpose; the chief and principal, and the most ancient is, that of the "eucharist," by which name it was called in the times of Justin Martyr[1], and by Ignatius[2], and Irenaeus[3] before him, from a part of it, "thanksgiving," and because the whole of it gives just occasion for thanksgiving, for the many blessings of grace it exhibits to the view of faith.

In treating of it I shall consider, 1. First, the author of it, and show it to be an ordinance of Christ peculiar to the gospel dispensation, a standing ordinance in it, and which is to continue until the second coming of Christ. 1a. First, it was instituted by Christ himself; who not only has given an example to do as he has done, which has great force and authority in it; he not only practised and celebrated it himself, which was giving a sufficient sanction to it; but he has, by precept, enjoined it on his apostles and disciples, and all succeeding ministers, and on all his followers, to the end of the world; which is contained in these preceptive words of his used by him at the first institution of the ordinance; "Take, eat, this is my body; drink ye all of this, for this is my blood; this do in remembrance of me," (Matthew 26:26, 27; Luke 22:19) and particularly the apostle Paul expressly declares, that what he delivered concerning this ordinance, he "received from the Lord," (1 Cor. 11:23) so that it is not a device, and an invention of his, nor did he receive it of men, nor was taught it, but he had it by the revelation of Christ; and this being instituted by Christ, and celebrated by him, "the same night in which he was betrayed," shows the very great love of Christ to his church and people, and his affectionate concern for them, and care of them; that at a time his sufferings were coming upon him to an amazing degree, when his soul was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death, when he that was to betray him was at hand, when he was just about to be delivered into the hands of sinful men, who would put him to death, and when he was just ready to suffer and die for his people; that he should then, amidst all his sorrows, and in the near approach of his most dreadful sufferings, think of his people, and provide for them a divine repast, spiritual food for their entertainment to the end of the world. 1b.

Secondly, this ordinance is peculiar to the gospel dispensation. It was indeed typified by what Melchizedek did, who was himself a type of Christ, as king of righteousness and of peace, and as the priest of the most high God, who brought forth "bread and wine" to refresh Abraham and his weary troops, returning from the slaughter of the kings; so saints, who are in a warfare state, and are good soldiers of Christ, and are engaged in a war with potent and spiritual enemies, are regaled by Christ with bread and wine, and with what is signified by them; and what is better than these.

This ordinance was also pointed at in prophecy, respecting gospel times, as what should be in use when those times came. So in Proverbs 9:1-18, there is a prophetic representation of the church of Christ in gospel times, and of the provisions in it, and of guests invited to partake of them by the ministers of the gospel, who in Christ's name are bid to say, "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled". And in Isaiah 25:6 this feast is hinted at, which is a prophecy respecting gospel times; which, among other things, may include and have respect unto the ordinance of the supper; but that itself was not instituted nor practised till the night in which Christ was betrayed.

And, 1c. Thirdly, this is a standing ordinance in the church of Christ. It was not only kept the first night it was instituted and observed; but in after times, after the death and resurrection of Christ; it was observed by the first church at Jerusalem, the members of which are commended for continuing in fellowship, and in "breaking of bread," meaning, the ordinance of the supper; the disciples at Troas met together on the first day of the week "to break bread," that is, to celebrate this ordinance of Christ; and though there were disorders in the church at Corinth, in the celebration of it, yet the thing itself was not denied nor neglected by them, though they were disorderly in their attendance on it.

Justin Martyr gives us a very particular account of the celebration of it in his time, which was in the second century, and so it has been continued in the churches of Christ ever since to this day (Acts 2:42, 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:20, 21). 1d. Fourthly, it is to continue to the end of the world; it is one of those ordinances that cannot be shaken and removed, but will remain; it is among those "all things," and a principal one of them, Christ ordered his apostles, and succeeding ministers, to teach his followers to observe; promising to be with them, so doing, "to the end of the world," (Matthew 28:20) and this is plainly suggested by the apostle Paul, when he says, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come," (1 Cor. 11:26) which cannot be understood of his coming by the effusion of his Spirit, as on the day of Pentecost; for in this sense he was come when this instruction was given; nor is it an objection of any force, that types, figures, shadows, and ceremonies are now ceased; for though the shadows of the ceremonial law, which were figures of good things to come, are ceased, Christ, the body and substance, being come; yet there may be and are figures and representations of him as come, and commemorative of him, and of the good things come by him; baptism is said to be a "figure," that is, of the burial and resurrection of Christ (1 Peter 3:21), and so the Lord's Supper is a "figure" of his broken body and bloodshed, as will be seen hereafter.

I proceed to consider, 2. Secondly, The matter of the ordinance, or the outward elements of it, the bread and wine, which are the symbols of the body and blood of Christ. 2a. First, bread; whether the bread was leavened or unleavened bread, has been a matter of warm dispute between the Greek and Latin churches; the latter insisting on the use of unleavened bread, since that was what was used by our Lord at the first institution of this ordinance, it being at the time of the passover, the feast of unleavened bread, when no other was to be had; and the apostle directs to keep the feast, not with the "leaven" of malice, but with the "unleavened" bread of sincerity and truth: that the bread of Christ used in this ordinance was unleavened bread, is not to be doubted; but that it was designed as a rule in after administrations, is a

question; since Christ seems to have taken it without respect to its being leavened or unleavened, but as being at hand, and at that time in common use; nor does it seem so agreeable to retain and continue a Jewish ceremony at the passover, in a gospel ordinance; and though the apostle, in the exhortation referred to, alludes to the bread of the passover, yet by this figurative expression, he cannot be thought to design the use of unleavened bread in the Lord's Supper; but that every ordinance of God, and so this, should be observed with a sincere affection to Christ and one another.

It seems to be quite an indifferent thing what bread is used in the ordinance, be it what it may, which is used in any country for common food; such was the bread the disciples used at Troas, when they met to break bread, which was several days after the Jewish feast of unleavened bread was over, and so that sort of bread was not then in use (Acts 20:6, 7). However, the round wafers of the papists cannot be allowed of, they being not properly bread, nor so made as to be broken and distributed in pieces, nor palatable, nor fit for nourishment; and so improper emblems of what is spiritually nutritive.

Now the bread in the ordinance of the supper is a symbol of the body and flesh of Christ; "The bread," says Christ, "that I will give, is my flesh," (John 6:51, 55) which words, though not spoken of the Lord's Supper, which was not then instituted, yet might be said with respect to it, by way of anticipation, and, however, serve to illustrate and explain what our Lord said in it; "This is my body," that is, a symbol and sign of it, when he took the bread, blessed it, and brake it; and so says the apostle; "The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16) not his mystical body, the church, but his natural body, which was formed in the womb of the Virgin by the Holy Spirit, and which Christ took into union with his divine Person, and which he offered up upon the cross.

And the bread in the supper is a symbol of this body, not as living either on earth or in heaven, but as dead, the life of it being laid down by Christ, and given for the life of his people; though now raised and alive, and lives for evermore: nor as glorified, the form of which was marred by his sufferings and death, but raised, has a glory given it, and is become a glorious body; but as such the bread broken in the ordinance is not a symbol of it; but as crucified, suffering, slain, and dead; for in it Christ is "evidently set forth" before the eye of faith, as crucified; and to him as such believers are directed to look, whom they have pierced, and mourn; and as he is to be beheld in the midst of the throne, so particularly in this ordinance; "A Lamb as it had been slain!"

Christ's body broken by sufferings and death, is signified by the bread broken in it; for these words, "This is my body," 2a1. Are not to be understood in a proper sense, as if the bread was transubstantiated into the real body of Christ; this is contradicted by the testimony of the senses, of seeing, tasting, and smelling[4]; by all which the bread appears to be the same after its separation to the use of the ordinance it was before: it is contrary to reason, that accidents should be without a subject; that the qualities and properties of bread should remain, and not the bread itself; that a body should be in more places at one and the same time, and Christ have as many bodies as there are consecrated wafers; which is most absurd: it is contrary to the nature of Christ's body, which was like ours when on earth, and at the time of the institution; and after his resurrection was visible and palpable, and consisting of flesh and blood; and is now ascended to heaven, where it will be retained until the time of the restitution of all things; and is not everywhere, as it must be, if its real presence is in the ordinance in all places, and at all times, where and when it is administered: it is contrary to scripture, which declares the bread to be bread when blessed and broken; "The bread which we break;" and "this bread that ye eat;" and "this cup that ye drink;" and as the bread is still called bread, so the wine in the cup, "the fruit of the vine;" no real change is made in the one nor in the other: it is contrary to the very nature and design of the ordinance; it confounds the sign and the

thing signified: if the bread is no more bread, it ceases to be a sign, and the body of Christ cannot be signified by it; the analogy between both is taken away; to say no more, it is impious and blasphemous for a priest to take upon him, by muttering over a few words, to make the body and blood of Christ, and then eat them!

The folly, or rather madness of such, is reproved by Cicero the heathen, who thought no man could be so mad to believe what he eat to be a God[5]. 2a2. The phrase, "This is my body," is to be understood in a figurative sense; the bread is a figure, symbol, and representation of the body of Christ; many scriptural phrases are so to be understood; as when Joseph said to Pharaoh, "The seven good kine are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years;" so seven kine and ears signified, or were symbols of seven years of plenty; and the lean kine and thin ears, so many years of famine (Gen. 41:26, 27).

Again, in the parable of the sower, the seed and tares, signified such and such persons, and were emblems of them. Also, "That rock was Christ," (1 Cor. 10:4) that is, was a figure and representation of him; so the bread is the body of Christ, a figure[6], sign, and symbol of it. Christ compares himself to a kernal of wheat falling into the ground and dying, and reviving and bringing forth fruit, expressive of his sufferings and death, and of the blessed consequences thereof (John 12:24).

Breadcorn is a figure of Christ, as prepared for food, which is beaten out, winnowed, ground, kneaded, and baked, ere it becomes proper food for men; so Christ, by his various sufferings, being bruised, broken, crucified, and sacrificed for us, becomes proper food for faith; and as such is he represented, viewed, and received in the ordinance of the supper. Bread is the main sustenance of men, and is called the staff of bread, being the staff of life; which is of a very strengthening and nourishing nature, and is the principal means of maintaining and preserving life; of all which use is a crucified Christ, as he is held forth to faith, both in the preaching of the gospel and in the administration of this ordinance. 2b.

Secondly, the wine is another part of this ordinance, and of the matter of it, and one of the outward elements of it, a symbol of the blood of Christ. It is a question, whether the wine used at the first institution of the ordinance was red or white; at the passover that which was the best, whether red or white, was ordered to be used; the red was generally so accounted (see Prov. 23:31; Isa. 27:2); it is reckoned by some a matter of indifference; and therefore some, to show their sense of it as such, and to assert their Christian liberty, have sometimes used the one, and sometimes the other: though it may not be essentially necessary, I cannot but be of opinion, that the red, called the blood of the grape, is most expressive of, and bears a greater resemblance to the blood of Christ, it is a symbol of Genesis 49:11; Isaiah 63:2.

It is also a question, whether the wine used was mixed or pure; since it was usual with the Jews, whose wines were generous, to mix them (Prov. 9:2), but there is no need to dilute them in our climates; and as the quantity is so small drank at the ordinance, there is no danger of intoxication in those who are least used to it; though it is certain, mixing wine and water very early obtained, even in Justin's time; but that there should be a mystery in it, signifying, the blood and water which sprung from the side of Christ when pierced, and the union of the two natures in him, seems too fanciful.

However, 2b1. The wine is a symbol of the blood of Christ; for Christ says of it, "This is my blood," that is, a figure and representation of it; not that it was really changed into the blood of Christ nor it is called, "the fruit of the vine," as before observed; after it was poured into the cup and blessed (Matthew 26:28, 29), and the apostle Paul says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16) and it is a symbol of it, not as in his veins, but as shed from the various parts of his

body, particularly his hands, feet, and side, when pierced; and as wine is squeezed out of the grape in the winepress, so the blood of Christ was pressed from him, when it pleased the Lord to bruise him, and when he trod the winepress of divine wrath; and as wine cheers the heart of man, so the blood of Christ, applied by the Spirit, speaks peace and pardon to guilty minds, and puts joy and gladness into broken hearts and wounded spirits.

The wine in the supper is called, "The blood of the New Testament;" and the cup, "The New Testament in Christ's blood;" by which is meant, the covenant of grace, sometimes called a testament or will, which became of force by the death of Christ, the testator, and which was ratified, its blessings and promises, by the blood of Christ; which is therefore called, "The blood of the everlasting covenant" (Heb. 13:20). 2b2. The wine in the supper is a symbol of the love of Christ, shown in the shedding of his blood to obtain the remission of the sins of his people; which "love is better than wine," than the most ancient, the most generous, the most pure and refined; and therefore the church determines to remember it more than that; "We will remember thy love more than wine," and which is particularly done in the ordinance of the supper (Song 1:2, 4).

Now the bread and the wine being two separate articles, may denote and show forth the death of Christ; the body or flesh being separated from the blood, and the blood from that, in which the life is, death follows; and these being distinctly attended to, is expressive of that separation; and yet both together make a feast, and afford nourishment, refreshment, and delight: with food there must be drink, and when with bread wine, both make a banquet; Christ's church is a banqueting house, and the banquet in it, like Esther's, is a banquet of wine; such is the ordinance of the supper, a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees well refined. 3.

Thirdly, the next to be considered are the significant and expressive actions used by the administrator and the receiver; both with respect to the bread and the wine. 3a. First, with respect to the bread. 3a1. By the administrator; Christ, in his own person, at the first institution of the ordinance and by his ministers, under his direction, and by his orders and example, in all succeeding ones. 3a1a. Christ "took" the bread, an emblem of his body, which he took, being actually formed; and consisting of flesh and blood, he partook of it in the fulness at time; he took upon him, not the nature of angels, but the seed of Abraham; he took the human nature, consisting of soul and body, into union with his divine person; and he took this body which he assumed, and offered it without spot to God, an offering and a sacrifice of a sweet smelling savour; and of this body, his taking the bread in the supper was an emblem, and of his voluntary oblation of it. 3a1b.

He "blessed" it; or as another evangelist has it, he "gave thanks," (Matthew 26:26; Luke 22:19) such an action was sometimes used by him at other meals (Matthew 14:19, 15:36). This designs a separation of the bread from a common to a sacred use, as everything is sanctified by the word and prayer; by this action the bread was set apart from common use, and appropriated to this solemnity. This is what is sometimes called the consecration of it; but is no other than its destination to this peculiar service.

Blessing it, was asking a blessing on it, as spiritual food, that it might be nourishing and refreshing to those who partook of it; and giving thanks, is expressing thankfulness for what is signified by it, for Christ, the true bread the Father gives; for him, the unspeakable gift of his love, and for all the blessings of grace that come by him. 3a1c. He "brake" it. From this action the whole ordinance is denominated, "breaking of bread," (Acts 2:42, 20:7) and it was not only used by Christ at first, as an example to be followed; but by ministers in the churches, in all succeeding ages; in the first church at Jerusalem, and by the disciples at Troas, as the passages referred to show; and was practised by the apostle at Corinth, and in other places,

"the bread which we break," &c. (1 Cor. 10:16).

Song Clemens of Alexandria[7], in the second century, says, "As some divide the eucharist, they suffer everyone of the people to take a part:" And Irenaeus[8], before him, calls it, "the broken bread": and even Ignatius[9] speaks of the bishop and presbytery "breaking the one bread". And nothing is more common with the ancients than to speak of the parts and broken pieces in the supper; yea, to call the supper itself by these names: and this is a very expressive and significant action, and by no means to be omitted; and was used by Christ, not purely for the sake of dividing and distributing the bread; but for the sake of representing his death; it is an emblem of his sufferings, how his "body was broken" for us (1 Cor. 11:24), how it was torn by the scourges and lashes of the Roman soldiers, at the order of Pilate; how his head and temples were torn by the crown of thorns platted about them; how his hands and feet were pierced with nails, and his side with a spear; and how body and soul by death were torn and parted asunder; and he was brought to the dust of death, and liable to be crumbled into innumerable particles; but that his body was preserved from seeing corruption.

Moreover, it is an emblem of the communion of the many partakers of the one bread and of the one body of Christ; "For we, being many, are one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread" (1 Cor. 10:17). 3a1d. He gave it to the disciples (Matthew 26:26). Song the minister now gives the bread to the deacons, and they distribute it to the people; and thus they did in the times of Justin Martyr[10]: that everyone may have his part and portion. Song at the extraordinary and miraculous meals of the loaves and fishes, Christ, after looking up to heaven, and having "blessed and broke, he gave the loaves (broken) to his disciples and the disciples to the multitude; and they did all eat and were filled" (Matthew 14:19, 20, 15:36). 3a2.

There are other significant and expressive actions respecting the bread used by the receiver, or communicant; as to "take and eat". 3a2a. He is to "take" the bread, or receive it, according to our Lord's direction to his disciples, "take": at the Jewish passover everyone had a piece of the bread broken set before him, by him that broke it, and he "took" it in his hand[11]; and, as before observed from Clemens, it was the usage of the church at Alexandria, for everyone of the people to "take" his part of the eucharist when divided; and so Dionysius[12], bishop of the same place, speaks of one at the Lord's table, "stretching out his hand to receive" the sacred food; and Cyril of Jerusalem[13] says, it was received in the hollow of the right hand, the left hand being underneath it; for as yet it was not put into the mouth by the administrator, as now the wafer is, by a popish priest.

This action of taking the bread, is an emblem of the saints receiving Christ by the hand of faith, and all the blessings of grace with him (John 1:12; Col. 2:6). 3a2b. The receiver is to eat the bread, being taken; not as common bread, and as at a common meal; but in an ordinance way, being separated from common to holy use, and as a symbol of the body of Christ; and he eats it in such a way worthily, when he discerns the Lord's body in it, as represented by it, and can distinguish that from it, and by faith feed on it; for this is not to be understood of an oral manducation, or a corporal eating of the flesh and body of Christ, which the Capernaite Jews stumbled at, saying, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" but of a spiritual eating it by faith; Socinus[14] says, that nothing but bread and wine are received in the Lord's Supper, either by believers or unbelievers, neither corporally nor spiritually.

It is by faith believers eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ; it is by faith Christ dwells in their hearts; and it is by faith they live upon him, and by him; "He that eateth me, even he shall live by me," (John 6:57) it denotes a participation of Christ, and of the blessings of grace by him: to eat of this bread spiritually, is no other than "the communion of the body of Christ," or an having fellowship with him, while feeding on it,

and an appropriation and enjoyment of spiritual blessings in him: as bread taken into the mouth and chewed, is received into the stomach, and digested there, and becomes incorporated into the very substance of a man, and by which he is nourished and refreshed; so Christ being received and fed upon by faith, believers are one body and spirit with him, have union to him and communion with him; there is a mutual indwelling of Christ and them, they are one bread.

And having spiritual appetites, hungering and thirsting after Christ, they feed upon him, and grow up in him: the encouragement to eat this bread, as a symbol of Christ's body; and the argument enforcing it is, "This is my body which is given for you," (Luke 22:19) a token of the body of Christ, given for them: as their daily bread is the gift of God, and prayed for as such, so Christ, the true bread from heaven, is the gift of his Father, a free grace gift, and may be freely fed upon; and his body, which is signified by the bread, is given by himself an offering and a sacrifice to God "for," in the room and stead of, his people; the phrase denotes the voluntary substitution of Christ in their stead, to make atonement for their sins, being delivered for their offences into the hands of justice and death, on account of them; and therefore they may be encouraged to lay hold upon him by faith, and take him to themselves, as their Saviour and Redeemer; it is thus expressed by the apostle Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:24, "This is my body which is broken for you;" a sign of Christ's broken body, and so fit food faith to feed upon; and by it is signified, that the sufferings Christ endured in his body, were in the room and stead of his people, to make satisfaction to divine Justice for their sins; and since he, the passover Lamb, is "sacrificed for them," they have great encouragement to keep the feast, to eat the broken bread, and to "do this," as they are directed, "in remembrance" of Christ's body being given a sacrifice for them; and of its being broken, by the hand of divine Justice, in their room and stead (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24). 3b.

Secondly, there are also very significant and expressive actions to be performed, both by the administrator and receiver, with respect to the wine. 3b1. By the administrator; after the example of Christ, "who took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them," the disciples (Matthew 26:27). He "took the cup," wine being first poured into it, which, though not expressed, is implied, and the thing signified by it, is the shedding or pouring out of the blood of Christ, after mentioned (Matthew 26:28), or the pouring out his soul unto death.

Christ's taking it, shows his readiness and willingness to drink of it himself (John 18:11), and then he "gave thanks," for the blessings of grace, which came through his blood, of which this was the symbol; such as justification by his blood, remission of sins, for which it was shed, redemption through it, and peace by the blood of his cross: and having given thanks, "he gave it to them," his disciples, to drink of it; his immediate disciples drank of the cup of sufferings, as well as partook of the blessings of his grace; here not the former, but the latter is meant. 3b2, Other actions were to be performed by the receiver; particularly one, everyone was to drink of the cup; "Drink ye all of it": this shows that the ordinance was to be administered under both species; as the bread was to be eaten, the wine was to be drank; which is confirmed by the apostle's account of it (1 Cor. 11:25-29), and all were to drink of it; the cup is not to be denied to the common people, and restrained to the minister, as by the papists; both clergy and laity partook of it, from the earliest ages, as appears by innumerable instances in the writings of the ancients, quite down to the council of Constance, in the fifteenth century, when it was ordered not to be given to the common people; "hoc non obstante," the institution of Christ, and the practice of the primitive church, as the edict of the council expresses it[15].

But according to the first institution of the ordinance, and the explanation of it by the apostle Paul, any and every man who examined himself aright, might drink of the cup, as well as eat of the bread: which drinking is to be understood in a spiritual sense, as eating before; and both are done by close meditation on the

sufferings of Christ, and by a special application and appropriation of the blessings of grace by faith; the wine is not to be drank as common wine, but as a symbol of the blood of Christ; and the encouraging motive is, "This is my blood of the New Testament," a token of it, by which the New Testament, or the dispensation of the covenant of grace, under the gospel, is ratified and confirmed; "which is shed" freely and abundantly; as it was in the garden, in the hall, and especially on the cross; "for many," for as many as are ordained to eternal life; for as many as Christ has given himself a ransom for; for as many as are made righteous by Christ's obedience; and for the many sons the great Captain of salvation will bring to glory: and this is shed for them; it was shed for "the remission of sins;" by which it is procured in a way consistent with the holiness and justice of God; and in this ordinance the faith of the Lord's people is directed to the blood of Christ to look for it. 4.

Fourthly, the subjects of this ordinance, or who are the proper persons to be admitted to it, as communicants. 4a. Not infants: in a literal and natural sense, bread and wine are not food for them, but milk; and in a spiritual sense, they are not capable of eating the body and drinking the blood of Christ by faith; nor of examining themselves, previous to such eating and drinking; nor of recollecting, remembering, and showing forth the death of Christ. In the third century infant communion was admitted of, on a mistaken sense of John 6:53.

Indeed, infants have as good a right to this, as to the ordinance of baptism, which they were admitted to in the same century, on a like mistaken sense of John 3:5 and which practice of infant communion continued in the Latin church six hundred years after, and still does in the Greek church. 4b. Adult persons, who have the use of reason, and know what they do, are the proper subjects of this ordinance; yet only regenerate persons, who are quickened by the Spirit of God; for such only have spiritual life in them, and are only capable of receiving spiritual food, for the maintenance of it; such only can discern spiritual things, and so the Lord's body, which they that discern not, eat unworthily; such only have their taste changed, and can relish divine things; such only hunger and thirst after Christ, and can be satisfied with feeding on him by faith, and be nourished thereby: to others it must be a dry breast, and of no use. 4c.

Ignorant persons are unfit for this ordinance. Such who partake of it, ought to know themselves, the sinfulness of their state by nature, and the guilt of sin; that they may see their need of, and be affected with the grace of God in the remission of their sins, through the sufferings, death, and bloodshed of Christ: they ought to have knowledge of Christ, of his person and offices, and especially of him as crucified, and as being the propitiatory sacrifice for sin: they ought to have knowledge of God as their covenant God, whose covenant, testament, and will, is ratified and confirmed by the blood of Christ: and they ought to be acquainted with the various doctrines of the gospel, which this ordinance has a connection with; as justification, pardon of sin, reconciliation, atonement, &c. so Justin, in his time says[16], It is not lawful for any other to partake, but he that believes that what things are taught to them are true. 4d.

Persons scandalous in their lives and conversations, are by no means to be allowed subjects of this ordinance; "with such" we ought "not to eat," described 1 Corinthians 5:11 that is, at the Lord's table. 4e. None but penitent sinners, and true believers, and those baptized, upon a profession of their repentance and faith, are to be allowed communicants at this ordinance; for such only can look to Christ whom they have pierced, and mourn, and exercise godly sorrow and evangelical repentance; such only can eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ in a spiritual sense by faith; to such only Christ's flesh is meat indeed, and his blood drink indeed; such only can by faith discern the Lord's body, and please him in this ordinance; for without faith it is impossible to please God; wherefore a man, before he eats, should examine himself, whether he has true repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ;

whether he is truly sensible of sin, and humbled for it, and believes in Christ for the remission of it (1 Cor. 11:28; 2 Cor. 13:5). 5.

Fifthly, the ends of this ordinance; which are to be answered by it. 5a. To show forth the death of Christ; to declare his death, that he did die for the sins of his people; to set forth the manner of his death, by crucifixion, by his being pierced, wounded, bruised, and broken; and to express the blessings and benefits of his death, and the faith of his people in them, and thankfulness for them; for in this ordinance Christ is evidently set forth as crucified and slain. 5b.

To commemorate the sacrifice of Christ; Christ was once offered, and needs not to be offered up again; he has by one offering made perfect atonement for sin; but because Christ the passover is sacrificed for us, we should keep this feast as a memorial of his sacrifice, and through it look to Christ, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of men. 5c. To remember the love of Christ in dying for us, and in becoming a sacrifice for sin; hence he directed his disciples both to eat the bread and drink the wine in remembrance of him, of his body being broken and of his blood being shed for them; that is, to remember his love to them, which he expressed thereby (1 Cor. 11:24, 25). 5d.

To show our love to Christ, and thankfulness to him, for the blessings of his grace, by an attendance on this ordinance; we should call upon our souls, and all within us, to bless his name, and not forget his benefits, especially the great benefit of the redemption of our lives from destruction, by his blood, sufferings, and death. 5e. Another end of it is to maintain love and unity with each other; for by joining together in holy fellowship in this ordinance, we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.

But by no means is this ordinance to be used to qualify persons to bear any office under any government, and in any city or corporation. This is a vile and scandalous prostitution of it, which is only intended for sacred uses. 6. Sixthly, the adjuncts of this ordinance, the circumstances attending it, and the concomitants and consequences of it. 6a. The time of administering it is to be considered; not the time of day, morning, noon, or evening, which latter was the time of the first celebration of it, and is most suitable to a supper; but what day of the week or year, which in ancient times was variously observed; some were for keeping it every day in the week, and considered it as daily food; others were for observing it four times in the week; and others every Lord's day, which Dr.

Goodwin^[17] thinks is the stated fixed time for it in scripture; and so others. The disciples at Troas met together on the first day to break bread; but whether they did so for that purpose every first day is not clear and certain. Some kept it once a month, as many churches do now; at length it came to be observed only three times in the year, at the three grand festivals; and even to once a year. But though the precise time seems not to be ascertained in scripture, yet it is plain that it ought to be often practised; as may be concluded from the apostle's words, "As oft as ye eat this bread and drink this cup," &c.

And from the nature of the ordinance, it being in memory of Christ, which ought to be frequent; and a spiritual repast for souls, which ought to be often repeated. 6b. The gesture of the body to be used at it, whether kneeling, standing, or sitting; the former of these looks too much like the adoration of the host, the Papists plead for; standing is more eligible, being the gesture of servants, ready to do the will of their masters; but sitting is to be preferred, being a table gesture, and conformable to the practice of Christ and his disciples, at the first institution of the ordinance. 6c.

The place where celebrated; not in private houses, unless when the churches were obliged to meet there in time of persecution; but in the public place of worship, where and when the church convened; so the

disciples at Troas "came together" to break bread; and the church at Corinth came together in one place to eat the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18, 20, 33), for this being a church ordinance, is not to be administered privately to single persons; but to the church in a body, assembled for that purpose. 6d.

When the supper was ended, an hymn was sung by Christ and his apostles (Matthew 26:30), which fulfilled what was prophetically spoken of Christ, and by him (Ps. 22:22), and to this Pliny may be thought to have respect when he says, that Christians at their meetings sung an hymn together to Christ, as to a God; and by a sacrament, bound themselves not to commit such and such sins[18]. 6e. A collection was made for the poor, and distributed to them; which, perhaps, the apostle may have some respect unto (1 Cor. 16:1, 2), and so Justin says[19], When prayer and thanksgiving were finished, the richer sort, and as many as would, freely contributed what they thought fit; and what was collected was deposited with the president, out of which were relieved the fatherless and widows, the sick, and those in bonds, and strangers; and a very fit season this to make a collection for the poor, when the hearts of believers are regaled with the love of Christ, and enlarged by it. 6f.

The continuance of this ordinance is to the second coming of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26), and so, as it shows forth the end of his first coming to die for his people, it assures them of his second coming; and it is not to be made a question of, that this ordinance, and all other public ordinances of the present dispensation, and the ministers of them, will continue to the end of the world, to the second coming of Christ, and then all will cease (Matthew 28:20; Rev. 21:23, 21:5). ENDNOTES:

[1] Apolog. 2 p. 97.

[2] Epist. ad Smyrn. p. 6. ad Philadelph. p. 40. ed. Voss.

[3] Adv. Haeres. l. 5. c. 2.

[4] "Exterius quidem panis, quod ante fuerat, forma praedentitur, color ostenditur, sapor accinitur---quid enim aliud in superficie quam substantia vini conspicitur? Gusta, vinum sapit: odora vinum redolet; inspicere, vini color intuetur." Bertram. de Corp. Sang. Domini, in principio.

[5] "Ecquam tam amentem esse putas, qui illud quo vescatur, deum credat esse?" Cicero de Natura Deorum, l. 3. c. 19.

[6] "Acceptum panem et distributum discipulis, corpus illum suum fecit, hoc est corpus meum dicendo, id est, figura corporis mei," Tertull. adv. Marcion. l. 4. c. 40.

[7] Stromat, l. 1. p. 271.

[8] Adv. Haeres. l. 5. c. 2.

[9] Epist. ad Ephes. p. 29.

[10] Apolog. 2. p. 97.

[11] See my Exposition of Matt. 26:26. See Gill on "Matthew 26:26".

[12] Apud Euseb. Eccl. Hist. l. 7. c. 9. Vid. Theodorit. Hist. Eccl. l. 5. c. 18.

[13] Catech. Mystagog. l. 5. s. 18.

[14] Deut. Coena Domini Tract. Brev. p. 754. inter opera ejus. Tom. 1.

[15] "Quae haec est in ve bis Pharisaicis audacia? quae uno edicto antichristi impietas et truculentia?"
Aonii Palearii Testimonium, c. 14. p. 344.

[16] Apolog. 2. p. 97, 98.

[17] Government of Churches, b. 7. ch. 5. p. 328, &c.

[18] Epist. I. 10. ep. 97.

[19] Ut Supra.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-gill/of-the-lords-supper/>

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