

On Communion in the Lords Supper.

by Philip Doddridge

The Lord's Supper is a solemn and peculiar act of communion with Christ, where we commemorate his death and renew our dedication to God through him, promoting our truest advantage and spiritual growth.

Scripture: Psalm 26:2, Psalm 28:9, Proverbs 15:19, Isaiah 60:8, Matthew 16:24, 1 Corinthians 5:11, 1 Corinthians 10:16, 1 Corinthians 11:24, Colossians 2:2, 2 Thessalonians 3:6

Topics: "Lord's Supper", "Christian Unity"

Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the importance of ratifying one's dedication to God through the Ordinance of Baptism by partaking in the Table of the Lord, as a way to express love for Jesus, surrender to God, and unity with fellow Christians. The ends for which the Ordinance was instituted, its usefulness, and the Authority of Christ's Appointment are emphasized to encourage participation. Objections of unfitness and weakness of grace are addressed, urging serious thoughtfulness on the subject and insisting on the observance of this precept. The chapter closes with a prayer for those desiring to attend the Table of the Lord but facing doubts, seeking guidance, removal of doubts, and blessings for the church and its members.

Transcript

1. If the reader has received the Ordinance of Baptism, and; as above recommended, dedicated himself to God.--2. He is urged to ratify that engagement at the Table of the Lord.-- 3. From a view of the ends for which that Ordinance was instituted.--4. Whence its usefulness is strongly inferred.--5. And from the Authority of Christ's Appointment; which is solemnly pressed on the conscience.--6. Objections from apprehensions of Unfitness.--7. Weakness of grace, &c. briefly answered.--8. At least, serious thoughtfulness on this subject is absolutely insisted upon.--9. The chapter is closed with a prayer for one who desires to attend, yet finds himself pressed with remaining doubts.

1. I hope this chapter will find you, by a most express consent, become one of God's covenant people, solemnly and most cordially devoted to his service; and it is my hearty prayer, that the engagements you have made on earth may be ratified in heaven. But for your farther instruction and edification; give me leave to remind you, that our Lord Jesus Christ hath appointed a peculiar manner of expressing our regard to him, by commemorating his dying love, which, though it does not forbid any other proper way of doing it, must by no means be set aside or neglected for any human methods, how prudent and expedient soever they may appear to us. 2.

Our Lord has wisely ordained, that the advantages of society should be brought into religion; and as, by his command, professed Christians assemble together for other acts of public worship, so He has been pleased to institute a social ordinance, in which a whole assembly of them is to come to his table, and there to eat the same bread; and drink the same cup. And this they are to do, as a token of their affectionate remembrance of his dying love, of their solemn surrender of themselves to God, and of their sincere love to one another, and to all their fellow-Christians. 3.

That these are indeed the great ends of the Lord's supper, I shall not now stay to argue at large. You need only read what the apostle Paul hath written in the tenth and eleventh chapters of his first epistle to the Corinthians, to convince you fully of this. He there expressly tells us, that our Lord commanded "the bread to be eaten," and "the wine to be drunk, in remembrance of him," (1 Cor. 11:24,25) or as a commemoration or memorial of him; so that, as often as we attend this institution, "we show forth the Lord's death," which we are to do "even until he come," (1 Cor. 11:26) And it is particularly asserted, that "the cup is the New Testament in his blood;" that is, it is a seal of that covenant which was ratified by his blood.

Now, it is evident, that, in consequence of this, we are to approach it with a view to that covenant, desiring its blessings, and resolving, by divine grace, to comply with its demands. On the whole, therefore, as the apostle speaks, we have "communion in the body and the blood of Christ," (1 Cor. 10:16) and partaking of his table and of his cup, we converse with Christ, and join ourselves to him as his people; as the Jews, by eating their sacrifices, conversed with Jehovah, and joined themselves to him.

He farther reminds them, that, though many, they were "one bread and one body," being "all partakers of that one bread," (1 Cor. 10:17) and being "all made to drink into one Spirit," (1 Cor. 12:13) that is, meeting together as if they were but one family, and joining in the commemoration of that one blood which was their common ransom and of the Lord Jesus, their common head. Now, it is evident, all these reasonings are equally applicable to Christians in succeeding ages. Permit me, therefore, by the authority of our divine Master, to press upon you: the observation of this precept. 4.

And let me also urge it, from the apparent tendency which it has to promote your truest advantage. You are setting out in the Christian life; and I have reminded you at large of the opposition you must expect to meet in it. It is the love of Christ which must animate you to break through all. What then can be more desirable than to bear about with you a lively sense of it? and what can awaken that sense more than the contemplation of his death as there represented? Who can behold the bread broken, and the wine poured out, and not reflect how the body of the blessed Jesus was even torn in pieces by his sufferings, and his sacred blood poured forth like water on the ground?

Who can think of the heart-rending agonies of the Son of God as the price of our redemption and salvation, and not feel his soul melted with tenderness, and inflamed with grateful affection? What an exalted view doth it give us of the blessings of the Gospel-covenant, when we consider it as established in the blood of God's only-begotten Son! And when we make our approach to God as our heavenly Father, and give up ourselves to his service in this solemn manner, what an awful tendency has it to fix the conviction, that we are not our own, being bought with such a price! (1 Cor 6:19, 20) What a tendency has it to guard us against every temptation, to those sins which we have so solemnly renounced, and to engage our fidelity to him to whom we have bound our souls as with an oath!

Well may our hearts be knit together in mutual love, (Col. 2:2) when we consider ourselves as "one in Christ:" (Gal. 3:28) his blood becomes the cement of the society, joins us in spirit, not only to each other, but "to all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours," (1 Cor. 1:2) and we anticipate in pleasing hope that blessed day, when the assembly shall be complete, and we shall all "be for ever with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:17) Well may these views engage us to deny ourselves, and to "take up our cross and follow our crucified Master." (Matt. 16:24) Well may they engage us to do our utmost, by prayer, and all other suitable endeavors, to serve his followers and his friends; to serve those whom he hath purchased with his blood, and who are to be his associates and ours, in the glories of a happy immortality. 5.

It is also the express institution and command of our blessed Redeemer that the members of such societies should be tenderly solicitous for the spiritual welfare of each other: and that, on the whole, his churches may be kept pure and holy, that they should "withdraw themselves from every brother that walketh disorderly;" (2 Thess. 3:6) that they should "mark such as cause offences" or scandals among them, "contrary to the doctrine which they have learned, and avoid them;" (Rom. 16:17) "that if any obey not the word of Christ by his apostles," they should "have no fellowship or communion with such, that they may be ashamed;" (2 Thess. 3:14) that they should "not eat with such as are notoriously irregular" in their-behavior, but, on the contrary, should "put away from among themselves such wicked persons," (1 Cor. 5:11-13) It is evident, therefore, that the institution of such societies is greatly for the honor of Christianity, and for the advantage of its particular professors.

And consequently, every consideration of obedience to our common Lord, and of prudent regard to our own benefit and that of our brethren, will require that those who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity should enter into them, and assemble among them, in these their most solemn and peculiar acts of communion, at his table. 6. I entreat you, therefore, and if I may presume to say it, in his name and by his authority, I charge it on your conscience, that this precept of our dying Lord go not, as it were, for nothing with you; but that, if you indeed love him, you keep this, as well as the rest of his commandments.

I know you may be ready to form objections. I have elsewhere debated many of the chief of them at large, and I hope not without some good effect.* The great question is that which relates to your being prepared for a worthy attendance; and in conjunction with what has been said before, I think that may be brought to a very short issue. Have you, so far as you know your own heart, been sincere in that deliberate surrender of yourself to God, through Christ, which I recommended in the former chapter?

If you have, whether it were with or without the particular form or manner of doing it there recommended, you have certainly taken hold of the covenant, and therefore should devote yourself to God, in obedience to all his commands. And there is not, and cannot be, any other view of the ordinance in which you can have any further objection to it. If you desire to remember Christ's death; if you desire to renew the dedication of yourself to God through him; if you would list yourself among his people; if you would love them, and do them good according to your ability, and, on the whole, would not allow yourself in the practice of anyone known sin, or in the omission of any one known duty, then I will venture confidently to say, not only that you will be welcome to the ordinance, but that it was instituted for such as you. 7.

As for other objections, a few words may suffice by way of reply. The weakness of the religious principle in your soul, if it be really implanted there, is so far from being an argument against your seeking such a method to strengthen it, that it rather strongly enforces the necessity of doing it. The neglect of this solemnity, by so many that call themselves Christians, should rather engage you so much the more to

distinguish your zeal for an institution in this respect so much slighted and injured.

And as for the fears of aggravated guilt, in case of apostacy, do not indulge them. This may, by the divine blessing, be an effectual remedy against the evil you fear; and it is certain, that after what you must already have known and felt, before you could be brought into your present situation, (on the supposition I have now been making) there can be no room to think of a retreat; no room, even for the wretched hope of being less miserable than the generality of those that have perished.

Your scheme, therefore, must be to make your salvation as sure, and to make it as glorious, as possible; and I know not any appointment of our blessed Redeemer which may have a more comfortable aspect upon that blessed end, than this which I flat recommending to you. 8. One thing I would at least insist upon, and I see not with what face it can be denied. I mean, that you should take this matter into serious consideration; that you should diligently inquire, "whether you have reason in your conscience to believe it is the will of God you should now approach to the ordinance or not;" and that you should continue your reflections, your inquiries, and your prayers, till you find farther encouragement to come, if that encouragement be hitherto wanting.

For of this be assured, that a state in which you are on the whole unfit to approach this ordinance, is a state in which you are destitute of the necessary preparations for death and heaven; in which, therefore, if you would not allow yourselves to slumber on the brink of destruction, you ought not to rest so much as one single day.

A Prayer for one who earnestly desires ins to approach the Table of the Lord, yet has some remaining doubts concerning his right to that solemn ordinance.

"BLESSED LORD! I adore thy wise and gracious appointments, for the edification of thy church in holiness and in love. I thank thee that thou hast commanded thy servants to form themselves into churches; and I adore my gracious Savior, who hath instituted, as with his dying breath, the holy solemnity of his Supper, to be through all ages a memorial of his dying love, and a bond of that union which it is his sovereign pleasure that his people should preserve. I hope thou, Lord, art witness to the sincerity with which I desire to give myself up to thee; and that I may call thee to record on my soul, that, if I now hesitate about this particular manner of doing it, it is not because I would allow myself to break any of thy commands, or to slight any of thy favors.

I trust thou knowest that my present delay arises only from my uncertainty as to my duty, and a fear of profaning holy things by an unworthy approach to them. Yet surely, O Lord! if thou hast given me a reverence for thy command, a desire of communion with thee, and a willingness to devote myself wholly to thy service, I may regard it as a token for good, that thou art disposed to receive me, and that I am not wholly unqualified for an ordinance which I so highly honor and so earnestly desire.

I therefore make it my humble request unto thee, O Lord! this day, that thou wouldst graciously be pleased to instruct me in my duty, and to teach me the way which I should take 'Examine me, O Lord! and prove me, try my reins and my heart!' (Psa. 26:2) Is there any secret sin, in the love and practice of which I would indulge? Is there any of thy precepts in the habitual breach of which I would allow myself? I trust I can appeal to thee as a witness, that there is not. Let me not, then, wrong my own soul, by a causeless and sinful absence from thy sacred table!

But grant, O Lord! I beseech thee, that thy word, thy providence. and thy Spirit, may so concur as to `make my way plain before me!" (Pro. 15:19) Scatter my remaining doubts. if thou seest that they have no just foundation! Fill me with more assured faith, with a more ardent love, and plead thine own cause with mine heart in such a manner as that I may not be able any longer to delay that approach, which, if I am thy servant indeed, is equally my duty and my privilege! In the mean time, grant that it may never be long out of my thoughts; but that I may give all diligence.

If there be any remaining occasion of doubt, to remove it by a more affectionate concern to avoid whatever is displeasing to the eyes of thine holiness, and to practice the full extent of my duty. May the views of Christ crucified be so familiar to my mind; and may a sense of his dying love so powerfully constrain my soul, that my own growing experience may put it out of all question that I am one of those for whom he intended this feast of love! "And even now, as joined to thy church in spirit and in love, though not in so express and intimate a bond as I could wish, would I heartily pray that thy blessing may be on all thy people; that thou wouldst `feed thine heritage, and lift them up for ever!" (Psa. 28:9) May every Christian church flourish in knowledge, in holiness, and in love!

May all thy priests be clothed with salvation, that by their means thy chosen people may be made joyful. (Psa. 132:16) And may there be a glorious accession to thy churches every where, of those who may fly to them `as a cloud, and as doves to their windows.' (Isa. 60:8) May thy table, O Lord! be `furnished with guests,' (Matt. 22:10) and may all that `love thy salvation say, Let the Lord be magnified, who hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servants.' (Psa. 35:27) And I earnestly pray, that all who profess `to have received Christ Jesus the Lord,' may be duly careful to `walk in him,' (Col. 2:6) and that we may all be prepared for the general assembly of the first-born, and may join in that nobler and more immediate worship where all these types and shadows shall be laid aside; where even these memorials shall be no longer necessary; but a living, present Redeemer shall be the everlasting joy of those who here his absence have delighted to commemorate his death. Amen'

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