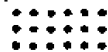


Partaking
of the
Lord's Supper

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Partaking of the Lord's Supper

1 Cor. x and xi.

Who are eligible to partake of the Lord's Supper? There appears to be an impression among many that this partaking of the bread and wine in remembrance of the Lord demands, on the part of those who do so, complete agreement upon and perfect understanding of all points in the revealed will of God. It is to be feared that many have been debarred this privilege through inability to conform to a particular form of speech used by certain companies of the Lord's people, because of their interpretation of Scripture or because of some action which did not satisfy the conscience of others. As long as the Church is on earth we may expect differences of opinion and interpretation among believers. True, we are distinctly commanded to be of one mind (2 Cor. xiii. 11 ; Phil. 1.27 ; ii. 2) and each member of the Assembly is responsible to bow to the leading of the Spirit in the Assembly that this end may be attained. But, though individual thoughts and opinions are subjected to the Assembly judgment in order that this may be unanimous, yet they will remain in the individual conscience.

The question to ask is :—Are these differences fundamental or do they concern only minor points and form no barrier to fellowship ? Let us consider the question in the light of the first Epistle to the Corinthians.

In the 21 Epistles of the New Testament we find the full and final declaration as to Christian behaviour. While the Gospels (and particularly the fourth) show how to become a Christian and the Revelation (among other truths) shows what becomes of a Christian, the Epistles show what becomes a Christian. They are a fulfilment of our Lord's promise in John xvi. 13, " When He, the Spirit of Truth, is come He will guide you into all truth." Only the devout study of and conformity to the truths there revealed will produce a life well-pleasing to God and Godly order in the Assembly.

In the Epistles to the Corinthians we have the fullest instructions as to the conduct of affairs in the Church of God. There was much disorder and error and serious abuses among the Corinthian saints but these give the opportunity for a very full treatise as to discipline in the Assembly for the maintenance of Godly behaviour that all things may be done, as 1 Cor. xiv. 40 says, " decently and in order."

It is of interest to note, as another has written, that " throughout these epistles we fail to track the footprints of official elders, bishops or

deacons. In the correction of abuses, in the observance of the Lord's Supper, in the ministry to the saints when gathered in public assembly, the saints as a *whole* are held responsible immediately and directly to God—no intermediate links are recognised. This is all the more remarkable for, if in any place official authority was requisite, surely it was in Corinth. What then is the undoubted teaching in the marked omission of official ministers amongst the Corinthians? Is it not that the Church has the *authority* in the written Word to act for God and as a witness to the grace, holiness and truth of Christ in the world and, further, that she has the *power* so to act as being the dwelling-place of the Holy Ghost? Nor must we confine the instructions here apostolically imparted to the Corinthian assembly *merely*; these instructions possess a breadth and completeness which embrace the whole Church of God in all ages; nay, they go further and insist upon the application of the truths contained in these epistles *wherever* Christ is named or owned as Lord—to the whole scene of Christian profession, as the apostle is careful to couple with the assembly at Corinth "all that *in every place* call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours." (1 Cor. i. 2.).

It will be seen that this verse (1 Cor. i. 2.) is in two parts. The building, the sanctifying and the calling are all of God but the invoking

of and confessing the name of Jesus Christ our Lord is our part and is the mark of the new-born soul (Rom. x. 9 ; 1 Cor. xii. 3). This shows the application of the whole Epistle to all the true children of God (Gal. iii. 26) throughout this dispensation and throughout the world. As the Apostle writes in Eph. iv. 4 and 5 : " There is one Body and One Spirit one Lord, one faith, one baptism." And, in 1 Cor. x. 17 : " We being many, are one bread, one body." When the Lord first instituted this supper it was in the presence of all His disciples (though it would appear that Judas had first " gone out " after receiving the sop). There was no question of one being there because more prominent or more spiritual or more affectionate. They had all failed of perfect obedience and were sadly lacking in knowledge, but they had all taken their place with Him for He had won their hearts. Therefore, He could require this proof of their love, " This do in remembrance of Me."

Turning to the first Epistle to the Corinthians there was, as we have already noticed, much disorder and error there. In chapters i to iii we read of divisions of opinion regarding the leaders whereby the sympathies and interests of the saints were gathered around certain persons instead of around their Lord. Thus we read of divisions, schisms and contentions (chap. i), faith standing in the wisdom of men (chap. ii) and the carnal spirit of chap. iii. In

chap. iv we meet the spirit of pride which scorned the humble Apostles (fools for Christ's sake) and ignored the authority which the Lord had given to them ; the appalling moral evil of chap. v is exposed. The Apostle tells them plainly, in chap. vi, that they do wrong in going to law before the unbelievers, standing up for their little rights here when, in God's time, they would judge angels. Chaps. vii, viii and ix deal with the questions of behaviour in which difference has to be made (vii. 34) and liberty may be enjoyed, only in the Lord (vv. 22, 25, 32 and 39). There is difference of knowledge recognised in viii. 7 and care for another's conscience enjoined in viii. 12 ; while in chap. ix the servant is shown to be responsible to his Lord that by one means or another the Gospel may be proclaimed.

There are three great passages in this Epistle which present the Assembly gathered together, i.e. chaps. v, x and xi. In chap. v we have this gathering as the moral centre from whence discipline proceeds and purity is maintained. The name of the Lord Jesus Christ (verse 4) is the only scriptural centre of gathering and is in contrast to the many names of chap. 1 which were the cause of division in the Church at Corinth. Then, again, in this verse 4, we find those thus gathered were gathered " with the *power* of our Lord Jesus Christ " in contrast to the carnal wisdom of chap. 2. The power for the Assembly

discipline here referred to was the presence of the Holy Spirit and chap. 12 shows His activity there, distributing the gifts according to His own will (verse 11) and these gifts included "governments" (verse 28). The Assembly thus gathered and acting in discipline had the full approval of the Apostle ("my Spirit"). Thus, in verse 4 of chap. v we have linked together Matt. xviii. 15-20 where the *authority* of the Church is seen to be in the Name unto which they are gathered and John xx. 20-23 where the *power to act* is seen to be in the presence in the Assembly of the Holy Ghost.

Their standing as God's Assembly made it imperative that their consciences should be exercised as to their bounden duty to put away from among themselves that wicked person. The fifth chapter clearly distinguishes the Church from the world—the former where the Holy Ghost acts, the latter where Satan rules ; *within* among the saints, *without* among the wicked. It is of the utmost importance, however, to remember that discipline is to be exercised, not in a vindictive spirit but with earnest longing and prayer for the restoration of the wrong-doers (1 Cor. v. 5 ; xi. 32 ; 2 Cor. ii. 7-11 ; Gal. vi. 1). If we are to be used for their restoration and blessing, we must have the "spirit of meekness" recognising our own infirmities and shortcomings.

The first part of chap. x, quoting Israel in the wilderness as the type, summarises their sins thus :—" . . . with many God was not well pleased," " lusting," " idolators," " fornicators," " tempting " and " murmurers." People like this might be found in the Assembly at Corinth (and in the professing Church throughout this dispensation) yet these are included among the very people addressed in the first chapter as "the Church of God, sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints " and at the same time linked with others under that all-enbracing title "the Name of Jesus Christ our Lord both theirs and ours." Their sin was the more heinous because of the privileges bestowed upon them.

Throughout these chapters however, with all the divisions and sins so vividly portayed, there is no suggestion of excommunication except in the case of the gross evils of chap. v. These evils were to be dealt with in and by the local Assembly with that discipline which it was their duty to exercise. It is only those who are inside who can be disciplined (chap. v. 12) in the authority committed to the Assembly by our Risen Glorified Lord (Matt. xviii. 15-20) and through the controlling power of the Holy Spirit in their midst, as gathered to the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John xx. 22, 23 ; 1 Cor. v. 4 and 5).

In chaps. x and xi of this Epistle, we have two aspects of the same institution. In chap. x. we read of the Table of the Lord and those who meet there and in chap. xi of the Supper of the Lord and those who eat and drink thereof. The first presents the Place at which and the persons with whom we gather but the second the Person to whom and the purpose for which we are gathered. In chap. x the Lord's Table is contrasted with the Table of Devils at which, in their unconverted state, they had associated and from the spirit of which the Apostle bids them flee (verse 14). Calling upon His name (chap. i. 2) had linked them with all who do likewise and the one loaf which they together partook of, symbolised their unity with the whole Church, the Body of Christ. This is quite clear from the New Translation of verse 17, "we are one loaf *for* we all partake of that one loaf." Partaking of the one loaf represents us as one body. As, in their unregenerate days, they had been one in the worship of idols, so now, they were one in the worship of the true God manifest in flesh and the sight of that one loaf was a constant reminder to them of that one Body into which they had been formed by the Holy Ghost. It is a serious question whether the use of small pieces of bread prepared beforehand does not violate this principle and, instead of witnessing to the unity of the Church, witness rather to those divisions and sects which so sadly mar her testimony in the world.

The argument from verse 23 to end is based upon this close union between all who are symbolised by that one loaf. The privilege of Christian liberty must always be exercised in consideration of those with whom they are thus linked, not seeking "his own but every man another's" (verse 24) and verse 31 gives a simple and weighty principle which, in the commonest affairs of life would keep the conscience free and enable one to walk in tender consideration of others. It must not be thought, however, that participation together in the Lord's Supper is sufficient as an expression of Christian fellowship. The word "fellowship" embraces participation in all the activities of the Assembly. That Assembly only is in a healthy state in which the saints are found at all the meetings and are, at other times, in loving and sympathetic intercourse. "They persevered in the teaching and fellowship of the apostles, in breaking of bread and prayers. (Acts ii. 42 N.T.).

In chap. xi the Lord's Supper is regarded, not as the expression of the unity of the body, as in chap. x but as a remembrance of the death of Christ. We are not in the presence of one another but of the Lord and, therefore, the suitable behaviour of man and woman in His presence is first discussed. Passing then to the subject of the Lord's Supper, the bread is here presented not as "the body of Christ" (Christ being the official title) but "the body

of the Lord " (the Name which the believer delights to give to the One Who has won his love and his loyalty). " My body for you " (verse 24). Thus in chap. xi. we have Calvary and the pouring out there of His precious blood, to stir our affections and constrain us to the remembrance of Him Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Who, then, are *ineligible* to partake of the LORD'S SUPPER? As far as the writer can trace there are only four passages in the Epistles which give definite reasons for withholding this privilege. Two concern doctrine, i.e. Gal. I. 6-9 and 2 John 9-11; two concern practice, i.e. 1 Cor. v. 11 (already referred to) and Titus iii. 10. In Gal. I the wrong doctrine is mixing Judaism with Christianity or the works of the law with grace, thereby denying the sufficiency of the work of Christ. In Titus iii we have a man who presses his personal opinion with such obstinacy as to cause a rift in the harmony of the Assembly. In 2 John the maintenance of the truth concerning the Person of Christ as the Son of the Father is the test: " the teaching which the Holy Ghost has given in His Word about Christ, not about His work but about His Person " (W. Kelly). In Gal. I the teacher concerned is " anathema "; in Titus iii he is to be avoided; in 2 John he is to be excluded from homes and friendly intercourse, while with the immoral person of 1 Cor. v. the saints are forbidden even to eat.

Therefore, we see, conversely, that every believer who is sound in these doctrines and godly in walk is *eligible* to partake of the LORD'S SUPPER, and should be welcomed by us when he presents himself with that desire. All other matters must be dealt with in and by the Assembly upon those who are within (1 Cor. v. 12). At the same time, in approaching the Table of the Lord separation is called for—the internal cleansing of ourselves not only from all filthiness of the flesh as in chap. x but also of the spirit as in chap. xi (2 Cor. vii. 1) ; examining oneself (1 Cor. xi. 28) for those hidden sources of defilement and acts of sin which are abhorrent to His holiness and make true participation in His Supper impossible. Yet, where this examination is honestly carried out, no sense of unfitness should keep us away from those memorials which speak to us “as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup,” of that death and Blood-shedding ; faith is our only title to partake. “Let a man examine himself, and so *let him eat.*”

The Lord grant that all His own may find their joy in obedience to His command and that we may place no unscriptural hindrances in the way but rather rejoice to receive one another as Christ has received us, to the glory of God. (Rom. xv. 7).

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