

THE LORD'S SUPPER (I)

For the past few weeks we have been discussing the matter of worship. We have considered several unacceptable ways of worshipping God, and we have pointed out that our worship of God must be based upon the New Testament alone. That God in his providence has set a pattern for us to follow in the New Testament, and this includes a pattern for the way in which God wishes to be worshipped. We have no right to worship God anyway we please, for as it is God who we worship, it is also God who decides how we are to worship. The past two weeks we considered the question of when we ought to worship God. While it is true that we ought to worship God every minute of our lives, it is also true that the New Testament indicates a very special day of worship for the saints. That day is Sunday, the first day of the week because on that day our Lord rose from the dead.

This morning, however, we want to begin a series of lessons which will focus in on some of the specific acts of worship outlined in the Bible. When we meet on the first day of the week, what are we to do? Since God is the only one who can determine the worship of the saints, has God in the Bible given us any indication of what he wants us to do when we meet together? The answer to that question is an unequivocal yes! And this morning we will begin to discuss some of those specific acts which God has ordained should be the instruments of his children in worshipping him.

On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the day when the church began, we find the Christians meeting together performing certain acts as worship to God. In Acts 2:41 we read that 3000 souls were baptized on that day, and in verse 42 we read of what these new babes in Christ did after their entrance into the church. Acts 2:42 reads: "And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostle's doctrine and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Thus, on the very first day of the church's existence, we find the disciples gathered together for fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer, following in these particular what was the express teaching of the apostles. For our purposes this morning, we want to discuss "the breaking of bread" in particular? What is the breaking of bread? Of what does it consist? What is its meaning? How often should it be done? We now want to turn our attention to these vital questions.

When the New Testament speaks of the breaking of bread, it usually refers to what we most often call the Lord's Supper or as some would say, the Eucharist. Throughout history, the nature and meaning of the Lord's Supper has become a complex and complicated discussion. But in the New Testament, the observance of the Lord's Supper is a very simple matter, and not at all complicated. We therefore turn to the New Testament to find the simple, yet profound meaning of the Lord's Supper is.

The first point we must consider with regard to the Lord's Supper is whether or not it is even necessary for Christian people to partake of it today. Some denominational groups do not observe the Lord's Supper at all. Are we to follow their example, and ignore the observance of the Supper? A close study of Scripture would demand that we answer no to that question. The teaching of Jesus is quite plain, we must observe this memorial or we will spiritually die. Listen to what our Lord said as it is recorded in John 6:53,54: "Truly, Truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the son of Man and drink His Blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My Blood has eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day." Nothing, it seems to me, could be clearer. If we do not eat the body of Christ (represented by the bread of the Lord's table) and drink the blood of Christ (represented by the fruit of the vine), then eternal life can not dwell within us. Salvation will escape us if we do not observe the Lord's Supper.

This brings us to a second point, what are the elements of the Lord's Supper? Of what does the Supper consist? The Christians of Corinth misunderstood this important area of the Lord's Supper. They seemingly thought that it did not matter what the Supper consisted of, so they combined their regular meal which the church ate together with the Lord's Supper. In I Corinthians 11, the apostle Paul rebukes them for their misunderstanding. Some today, however, have not learned either. They substitute certain elements in the place of the Biblical elements. The Mormons, for instance, use water in the cup, instead of the fruit of the vine. This is clearly in contradiction with the Bible. For Scripture teaches us that there are two and only two elements of the Lord's table: there is the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. In Matthew 26:26-29, Jesus gives his disciples the bread to eat and the fruit of the vine to drink. The bread represents the body of Christ and the fruit of the vine represents the blood of Christ.

Some would have us to believe that when we partake of communion, that the bread turns into the actual and literal body of Christ, and the fruit of the vine turns into the actual and literal blood of Christ. But this is without foundation in Scripture. While it is true that Jesus called the bread "His Body" and the fruit of the vine "His blood" that does not mean it necessarily has to be literally so. Jesus is called a rock, a bright and morning star and calls himself a vine, but that does not mean he is literally a vine or a rock. He merely represents a rock or a vine in some respect. So when Jesus said that the bread was his body, he meant that it represents his body. Nothing more can be derived from the text.

A third point concerning the Lord's Supper is that in the New Testament, the participants of the Supper always ate the bread and drank the fruit of the vine. Some groups today only eat the bread, but this is clearly not in line with the Bible. In the Scripture, all the participants also drank the fruit of the vine as well as ate the bread.

Concerning the Lord's Supper, then, we have shown that it is a necessary part of Christian life and worship, and that it consists in eating ^{both} unleavened bread and drinking the fruit of the vine. Any religious group claiming to be Christian which does not teach these two points about the Lord's Supper is not the church of the New Testament, and cannot in this respect be called Christian.

THE LORD'S SUPPER (II)

Last week we began a discussion of the Lord's Supper. In that lesson, we concluded on the basis of Scripture that the observance of the Lord's table is both a necessary and essential part of Christian life and worship. We can not possess eternal life we do not eat the body of Christ and drink his blood. Second, we observed that in the New Testament the Supper consisted of two and only two elements: the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, and that all participants partook of both. If we substitute either one of these elements with something else or we add another element or eliminate one altogether we do not act in accordance with the New Testament. Thus, if we willfully change the arrangement of God, we make ourselves to be wiser than God. It is God who determines the worship of the saints, including the elements and function of the Lord's Supper. To change any particular then is to change the plan and will of God, and we sin thereby.

In discussing the Lord's Supper, let us consider a fourth point: who may partake of the communion? The Lord himself provides us with the answer in Luke 22:29,30. There he says to his disciples: "Just as my Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom." Further, in Matthew 26:29 Jesus says: "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's Kingdom." Thus, Jesus clearly indicates that only those who are in the Kingdom of God can partake meaningfully of the Supper, that is, only those who are members of the New Testament Church can meaningfully partake of the Supper. However, no one has the right to bar another from taking the Supper. Only God can judge such. We must only examine ourselves as Paul pointed out in I Corinthians 11:28. We cannot judge the spiritual relationship of any man with his God, and thus we cannot bar anyone from taking the Supper. But in the eyes of God, only those who are members of his Church are able to participate in the Supper.

Our fifth point concerns the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Why take the time to participate at all? One reason is that God commanded it, and that is enough. But the Bible also gives us the reason why God commanded such a thing. Let us read together what Paul wrote in I Corinthians 11:23-26. He remembers that on the night which Jesus was betrayed our Lord took the "bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said 'This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way He took the cup also after supper saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

From the apostles's words, we may infer two things concerning the meaning of the Lords Supper. First, the Supper looks back into the past at the death of Christ. It is a sweet and simple memorial of the suffering and death of our Lord. It is a sacred and holy event in the memory of Christ. Jesus said for us to do this in remembrance of him. The Lord's Supper reminds us of what Christ did for us on that cross of Calvary. Second, the Supper looks forward into the future at the second coming of Christ. Paul commanded that we observe this memorial until Christ comes back again. The Lord's Supper, then, is a memorial which points backward to the Lord's death, and forward to his coming.

This brings us to our sixth point. Since the Lord's Supper is designed so that we might remember Christ, it is fitting that we should partake the Supper quite often. Unfortunately, I have heard men boast that they have not partaken of the commonuinn for several years. I dare say that those who do as they boasted do not really grasp the meaning of the Supper for they in no wise remember the death of Christ in the manner God ordained. But, then, how often should one partake of the Lords Supper? Or more specifically, when should one partake of communion?

The answer to our question was given several weeks ago. In the New Testament, the day upon which Christians everywhere met together for the explicit purpose of worshipping God was the first day of the week. Now this does not mean we cannot meet on other days as well, but it does mean that Christians in the first century meet every Sunday together in order to praise God. This is seen in the example of the Corinthian church. Notice what Paul said in I Corinthians 16:1,2. He writes: "Now concerning the collection for the saints as I directed the churches of Galatia so do you also. On the first day of every week let each of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collectionz be made when I come." Paul's command assumes that the church in Corinth met every first day of the week, else how would they all have contributed. In fact the verse explicitly states that this is to be done every first day of the week. Christians, therefore, in the New Testament met every first day of the week. But why did they meet every first day of the week? Luke provide us with the answer in Acts 20:7. Notice carefully what Luke records there, he writes: "And on the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his message until midnight." The explicit purpose for the disciples gathering together in Acts 20:7 is to partake of the Lord's Supper! This is the reason why they met on the first day of the week. They met to remember