

THE LORD'S SUPPER.

In the observance of this solemn and impressive ordinance, there is ample room for the exercise of all the great principles of true religion.—No institute of the Gospel has been more misunderstood, or more abused than this. It is of infinite consequence that it should be cleared from all the mistakes by which ignorance and superstition have beclouded and corrupted it. We remark, then, that the person by whom it is observed should be a genuine believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Unless this be the case, it cannot be done in faith at all. None but a true believer can enter into its design. All else must "eat and drink judgment to themselves, not discerning the Lord's body." It is not a *converting* ordinance but a strengthening and edifying one. It is poison, not food, to an unconverted man. The celebration of it in an unregenerated state ministers to delusion, and wraps the soul up in perpetual unbelief. There can be no exercise of faith in this ordinance, if there be not a principle of genuine belief already in the soul. Let none, therefore, be urged to observe the Lord's Supper, who have not first committed their souls into the Lord's hands, to be redeemed by his blood and regenerated by his Spirit.

And then, not only must the person partaking of the Lord's Supper be a true believer, but his observance of the Supper must be an act of his belief. It must itself be an exercise of faith. It must not be a mere formality and bodily ceremony; but while the senses are conversant with the material elements, the mind must be taken up with the authority, nature and design of the institute.

It should be observed with an intelligent and deep conviction of its Divine appointment and obligation; "I must needs keep this feast," says the Christian, "because Christ has enjoined it. He, and not man, instituted it. There is nothing of human device in it. I yield to his authority who said, 'Do this in remembrance of me.'" The rite has come down associated with the practice of the word of God in every age—apostles, martyrs, and reformers have observed it; but it is not on that ground that I continue the custom, but because I have faith in Christ, and not because I yield to ecclesiastical authority. He had a right to set it up this ordinance—he did set it up—and I submit to his authority and obey his commands.

The believer recognises its purely symbolical and commemorative nature. He does not sink into the revolting absurdity and degrading superstition of Romish or semi-Romish notions on this subject. It is true the Papist boasts of his greater faith in embracing the profound mystery of transubstantiation. He tells us he exceeds all men in faith, for he believes not only what is above reason, but against it. He discredits the testimony of the very senses, and believes that that which has the taste and smell and other accidents of bread, is still not bread in its substance. He boasts of the greatness and strength of his faith. This, however, is neither faith nor reason, but an abject credulity, a miserable delusion, an absolute renunciation of the human faculties, which by pretending to cleave to the literal import of our Lord's words, perverts their meaning, and makes them preposterously absurd. The intelligent Christian knows that the bread is still bread, the wine still wine, and nothing more; and that they are to be used as symbols of truth, the truth of the body and blood of Christ given for his salvation. He rejects the Lutheran notion of *consubstantiation*, which means the presence of the real body and blood of Christ with the bread and wine, as well as the Popish figment of *transubstantiation*. Nor does he entertain any notion of what is called "the mystical presence" of Christ with the elements. He does believe, and it is glory and felicity to believe, that Christ's presence is *with him* in the act of receiving the bread and wine; but he has no notion, and therefore no belief, of that presence in the elements. Whatever is in the bread and wine, he really and carnally eats and drinks, and the idea of eating and drinking the presence of Christ, is to him revolting. Besides, of what use would it be to him in a spiritual sense? What is eaten and drank goes into the stomach, and by the process of digestion and assimilation into the body, not into the soul.

It is not, then, the bread and the wine which are the objects of faith—these are objects of sense; nor is it these that do good to the soul of themselves, but the truths they represent. It is only truth that can sanctify; and the elements of the Lord's Supper are no further beneficial to the recipients of them, than as they are regarded in the light of symbols of truth. There is neither mystery nor obscurity in the Lord's Supper. It is the simplest thing imaginable; and its simplicity is its glory. It is an emblematic representation and commemoration of the sacrifice of Christ's human nature upon the cross for sin. It is an auxiliary to our faith through the medium of our senses: it is a stirring up of our memories to remember Jesus Christ. "Do this in remembrance of me." This is what it means, and all it means, so far as Christ is concerned. Men that love the marvellous and mysterious—that desire to make it an instrument of priestly power—that are prone to imagination and superstition, have laboured hard to make it something more, and in the attempt have destroyed its beautiful simplicity, as a representative and commemorating ordinance. Hence they have exhibited it as the mysteries of our holy religion; the channel of sacramental grace; the unbloody sacrifice of the mass; and have so wrapped it in obscurity and surrounded it with superstitious ceremony, that while some have been repelled from it as what is peculiarly awful, others have observed it as the very means of salvation. But what says the intelligent Christian? I believe in the sole authority of Christ to appoint rites and ceremonies. I believe that he has instituted this as a perpetual memorial to the world, of his

death: and to quicken my lively remembrance of this great event, in obedience to his command, I observe it for this purpose; and according to his promise I expect his presence and grace in the observance. What more need any one want or wish than this? Is not the penitential, believing, loving, joyful, obedient remembrance of Christ the highest state of mind to which a Christian can rise this side of heaven? For people that love the sentimental, the imaginative, the poetic, the mysterious, this will not be enough; but for those who understand the religion of the New Testament to the influence of truth received through the aid of the Holy Spirit by faith, it is all that is necessary for a life of godliness.

Faith, and not fancy, is the proper state of mind at the time of receiving the Lord's Supper. There is much misconception on this subject in the minds of many good people. Instead of allowing their understanding during the time of celebration of the Supper, to be conversant with the truth there represented, they are employing their fancy in conceiving of the fact there set forth. What I mean is this, instead of the mind, and heart, and conscience being refreshed by faith in the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin, they are all the while endeavouring to picture him personally to the imagination, nailed to the cross with the blood streaming from his temples, his hands, his feet, and his side; and thus work up the emotions by this scene of suffering. They bow, in fact, before a crucifix, though the crucifix is in the imagination instead of being suspended upon the wall. Every body is aware of that power of mind to call up before it by conception an absent scene, or person, or object; and this can be done in reference to the crucifixion, as well as any other object.—Now it is not the design of the Lord's Supper to do this, but to establish us in the belief of the truth that "Christ died for sin according to the Scriptures," and to keep up our hope of his second coming; and our work of faith at the Lord's table is, to rest with blessed confidence and peace on this sure foundation.

Faith in the Lord's Supper has special reference to Christ as our sacrifice for sin, not to the exclusion of other views of his person and work, but still it pre-eminently relates to this. This view implies other views. His humanity only died, or could die upon the cross, but without the Divinity to which that humanity was mysteriously and inseparably united, there could have been no atonement. The atonement, rather than the example of Christ, is the subject of commemoration; yet in making that atonement, Christ exercised the deepest submission to his Father's will, and the most exemplary patience; and it was these dispositions of his mind that united with the agonies of his body to make a propitiation for sins. So that there can be no separation of one view of Christ's person and work from the other: they are all united and form a glorious whole. Yet they may, like the colours of the rainbow, be viewed separately, though thus combined. It is, therefore, the death of Jesus—the breaking of his body and the pouring out of his blood upon the cross, we are here called upon to commemorate. The Lord's Supper is a standing, glorious, delightful embodiment of the great doctrine of the atonement. It is the fundamental truth in the most impressive form to the senses. It is a visible, material comment upon that passage, "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood." How sweetly does the Christian meditate in this ordinance, or should do so, on sin pardoned and God glorified. There mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other.

Nor does faith leave out of consideration any of the other collateral objects and designs of the Lord's Supper. It is not only a memorial of Christ's first advent, but a pledge of his second. "Ye do thus show forth the Lord's death till he come." The bridegroom and husband of the church has, for wise and ever-gracious purposes, left his bride and spouses in the wilderness: but he has given her not only a promise, but a pledge of his return to take her to himself. He is gone away into the heavens, but he will come again without a sin-offering unto salvation. "Meet," said he to her, "meet often at my table, and think and talk of me, and keep up the interest of my second coming." This is one part of our business and object to think of Christ's re-appearance. In this exercise of belief, both at the Lord's Supper and at other times, Christians generally are very deficient. We do not think enough of Christ's second coming. What would be said of the wife, who, when her husband was away in another country, could be happy without him, and be contented to think rarely about him? On the contrary, how the loving wife longs in such circumstances for her husband's return. "O, when will he come back," is her frequent exclamation. Wife of the Lamb, church of the Saviour, where is thy waiting, hoping, longing for the second coming of thy Lord? Is this thy blessed hope, as it was that of the primitive church? O Christian, art thou not wanting here? Every morsel of that bread thou eatest at the sacramental table; every drop of wine thou drikest, is the voice of Christ saying to thee, "I will come again and receive you to myself," and should draw forth thy longing desires, saying, "Come, Lord Jesus; even so, come quickly."

And then it is a joint participation—hence it is called the *communion* of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore we are to believe in the Holy Catholic Church. "We being many are one bread (loaf), and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread" (loaf). There, in that one loaf, yet consisting of many parts, is the emblem of the unity of the church. The Lord's Supper exhibits this, and the believer receives it, and rejoices in it. To him it is a matter of inexpressible pleasure to be able to say, "One Lord, one faith, one hope. We are all one in Christ." He breaks through the barriers of sectarianism, and embracing all who partake of like precious faith, and the common salvation, says, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."