

I. With regard to the import and teaching of the *Scriptures* on this subject, we think it safe to affirm that their general bearing, if not their specific authority, is decidedly adverse to the practice of a private use of the Lord's Supper. They do not, indeed, contain any distinct and positive prohibition of this practice that we are aware, but they uniformly represent the ordinance as a public and social one. It was instituted originally in the company of the disciples, and all the Scriptural examples of its celebration or allusions to it exhibit it as occurring in the ordinary assemblies of the Church. The Apostle Paul reproves the Corinthian Church for irregularity in not making the Lord's Supper, in the strictest sense, a *communion* service, in which all should participate together, and bids them tarry for one another, that they might eat it in common—the rich and the poor alike. And whilst the social aspect of the ordinance is conspicuous and prominent, there is no intimation that it might take a private form under any circumstances. No example occurs in the *Scriptures* of its administration to the sick in this form, nor are any instructions to this effect given in the New Testament. And this last consideration is of some significance, when we remember that in one passage, at least, instructions are given with respect to the Christian treatment of the sick. I allude to the passage in James, where prayer and anointing by the elders of the Church are appointed for the benefit of the sick.—Were the private administration of the Lord's Supper intended to be authorized and made customary, or considered to be desirable in such cases as these, here would have been the natural occasion for its appointment and sanction. And the very silence of the Apostle on the subject, as it seems to us, is a circumstance of some consideration and weight.

Thus, then, stands the subject in the *Scriptures*. The Lord's Supper there appears as being clearly, in its own nature, a public ordinance, with no solitary example of its being administered elsewhere than in the ordinary assemblies of the saints, and with the presumption we have indicated, that no deviation from this practice should be made, even for the benefit of the sick.

II. Let us turn, in the next place, to *early Church history* for a further elucidation of the subject. The witness of Church History on the subject of the Lord's Supper is very instructive, not only as showing the readiness with which abuses crept in, in the use of this ordinance, but also as bearing on the question of its private administration.—From a careful examination of the ancient records, we are prepared to say explicitly that not an example can be found of the private use and administration of the Lord's Supper during the first three centuries.—

And the evidence on this subject is not merely negative evidence. It does not consist simply of the absence of such examples. We have positive and quite exclusive proof that no other than a public consecration of the elements, and a public administration of the ordinance in the ordinary assemblies of the Church were practised and allowed during this period. And one very striking circumstance to show this is the fact, which clearly appears, that it was customary to convey the elements from the common and public table to the sick and feeble members of the Church that were unable to attend in the public assembly, in order that such members might participate at the same time with the rest of the Church. It seems that, even as early as the second century, the opinion began to prevail that the use of the Lord's Supper was *essential* to salvation; that it was, in its own nature, a saving rite. It was even administered, under this idea, in some instances, to infants, as we have reason to believe. But with all the pressure of such a sentiment as this, they did not venture, in any instance that we are aware of, to celebrate the ordinance in private, but uniformly in their public assemblies; and in order to meet the case of the sick, or others similarly situated, they adopted the expedient, to which we have referred, of sending the elements to these by the hands of the deacons, at the same time that the rest of the Church communed in the customary place of concourse.

Shortly after the close of the third century, however, it would seem that a laxer practice began to appear, and examples of a private consecration and use of the Lord's Supper, apart from the public assemblies, seem to have occurred. We infer this from the action of the Council of Laodicea—a Council that was convened in the year 367, chiefly for the purpose of correcting certain practical abuses that began to show themselves in the Church. By an express injunction of this Council, the practice of consecrating the elements in private houses was explicitly condemned and prohibited, showing very clearly what had been the uniform practice of the early Church, and setting up a barrier to an incipient deviation from that practice.

It is unnecessary to go into the fifth, sixth, and succeeding centuries, for very soon after the ineffectual attempt of this Council of Laodicea to resist innovations, the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper at the tomb of the martyrs and at funerals, and also, at last, the use of private masses, became common in the Church.

Thus, then, stands the testimony of early Church history on this subject. Not a solitary example can be found of a consecration of the elements and celebration of the Lord's Supper apart from the public assem-