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## The Lord's Supper as Presented in Scripture.

### A LAYMAN'S VIEW.

#### I. THE LORD'S SUPPER AS INSTITUTED.

**T**HE whole presentation of the Lord's Supper in Scripture is contained in twenty-six verses, and is made on three occasions.<sup>1</sup> The story of its institution is told in each of the synoptic Gospels in two or at most three verses; and its communion and purport are spoken of by St. Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians.

This is a remarkable testimony to the unique character of the Word of God, if we consider that when these records were written it was not only customary to give the most minute directions with regard to every ordinance, but under the Pharisaic rule was absolutely obligatory. We perceive by what a gulf the inspired records are separated from the writings of the time; and to my mind no theory except that of verbal inspiration<sup>2</sup> can possibly account for the unique literary character of the Gospels, quite apart from their subject matter.

The immediate purpose of the Lord's Supper is remembrance of the absent Lord in His atoning sacrifice; from this flows the communion of saints with the Lord and with one another; and, lastly, the Supper is also most undoubtedly a spiritual meal. To these three points St. Paul adds the fact that it constitutes a public witness of the Lord's death until His return. In this Supper we remember and we feed upon our crucified Saviour in the presence of, and in communion with, our living glorified Lord: Christ Himself fills the scene at the Supper as at no other time. At other church services, meetings, lectures, etc., man is seen and heard; but at the Supper, the heart is brought into contact with Him who wholly possesses it. We realize at this time as at none other our dependence for ALL on Christ in His atoning death, and the whole soul spiritually feeds on the Lamb of God in the expression of His love at Calvary. Christ is known in the Lord's Supper as the real Centre wherever a Christian church is found.

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xxvi. 26-28; Mark xiv. 22-24; Luke xxii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. x. 16, 17, 21; xi. 20-34.

<sup>2</sup> By this is meant not a quasi-mechanical action; but inspired thought clothed in inspired words.

Moreover it is the death of the *Lord*. What a title to our devotion! He is our Lord and Master, in virtue of His purchase of us by His blood. Thus He becomes the Master of a veritable slave, and that slave, myself—wholly His. This is a dominant thought throughout this Feast.

Curiously enough the words—the Lord's Supper—are not, strictly speaking, found in Scripture, the word used being, not the noun "Kurios" or "Lord," but the adjective "kuriakos" or "lordly." This word occurs only twice in the New Testament; once in reference to the Lord's Day (Rev. i. 10) and once to the Lord's Supper, thus closely connecting the two in a remarkable though quite incidental way. The Lordly Supper is partaken of on the Lordly Day; that is to say the Supper, distinguished from all other meals by being connected with the Lord in *death*, is received on the Day distinguished from all other days, by being connected with the Lord in *resurrection*.

It is worthy of careful note that the Lord's table is not, however, called the "Lordly" table; but is the table where the Lord presides. It is not so with the Supper; this in itself is Lordly. A special term is thus used for the day and the Supper, but not for the table.

We now turn to the history of the Feast. First, the upper room of the institution of the Lord's Supper. We note in Mark xiv. 51, 52, that at the betrayal a certain (nameless) young man dressed in a linen cloth was seized, but fled away naked.<sup>1</sup> This mysterious episode is entirely explained if the last Supper were taken in the house of St. Mark's father, a supposition which is confirmed in Acts xii. 12,<sup>2</sup> where we find this very house the centre of the infant Church in Jerusalem. The incident of the young man being recorded solely by St. Mark himself is naturally explained, if we remember that Judas left the upper room to betray Jesus, and when he received the band of soldiers from the priests, would undoubtedly lead them back there first. When they arrived, on rousing the house, they found that Christ had left; and Judas knowing, as it is said that "He oft resorted" to Gethsemane, followed Him there with the soldiers. The young man Mark doubtless hurried after them, hastily covering

<sup>1</sup> He would be so called when only dressed in the scanty undergarment.

<sup>2</sup> "He came to the house of Mary, the mother of John whose surname was Mark; when many were gathered together and were praying."

his scanty inner garment with a linen cloth, to warn the Saviour, and thus was caught. It is therefore probable that the Supper was held in St. Mark's house ; and that there the disciples constantly assembled until Pentecost "was fully come," and that subsequently the house remained as the chief centre of the Church at Jerusalem.

Peter and John were charged with the provision of this Passover, and their first duty would be to procure the sacrifice. For this they would enter the Temple courts and purchase their lamb, which would only cost them about three shillings of our money (Christ, we remember, being sold to the priests for £3). At about four o'clock they would take the lamb up to the brazen altar and there kill it, the blood being poured out by the priest at the base of the altar. They then sang the "hallel"—"Blessed be he that cometh in the Name of the Lord." The lamb was then flayed and dressed and would be carried on a board with staves by Peter and John to the house of Mark, where it had to be roasted whole. Later in the evening our Lord and the other ten disciples entered for the Feast.

The upper room was always the best room in the house ; the table would be very low, and the seats would be large cushions placed on the floor on which the guests reclined. For several reasons which one need not now enumerate, Judas appears to have been on our Lord's left, which was the place of honour, and to secure which was possibly the cause of the unseemly strife which occurred on the entrance of the disciples into the room. St. John reclining on our Lord's right could naturally lean his head "in Jesus' bosom," while St. Peter apparently occupied the lowest place at the other end of the table.<sup>1</sup> The lamb, and four cups of wine, bitter herbs, and a thick paste made of fruits to resemble the clay of Egypt, with three cakes of unleavened bread, would be placed later upon the table. In Egypt the Passover, as we know, was taken standing, for they were still slaves and not yet delivered ; but in the land where they were free men, having passed out of bondage, they were accustomed to recline at their utmost ease.

We must notice that this Passover was the only sacrifice offered by Christ ; when He attended the Feast at other times, He was only one of a company, but here He was the "head of the household," which must consist of at least ten persons.

<sup>1</sup> This order is supported by Edersheim and others.

After the first cup of thanksgiving, it was usual to wash the hands, but in this case our Lord rose from the supper table and, girding Himself, proceeded to take the lowest place, and to their great surprise, to wash the disciples' feet—a strong but tacit rebuke to their unseemly dispute as to which of them should be the greatest. The scene is wonderful, for not only had there been an angry contention amongst the chosen twelve, but the heart of one of them was already a raging devil of hate against his Lord, at the very moment when the heart of Christ was consumed with self-sacrificing love for His own. The same word is used for the action of Satan as for Christ's action, when it is written Satan "*poured*" hate into the heart of Judas, and Christ "*poured*" water into a basin.

After the washing, on which I do not here dwell, the Passover dishes were all placed on the table, and our Lord breaking an unleavened cake would say, "This is the bread of misery which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt." He then took the sop which was the portion given to each, and which consisted of some of the flesh of the lamb on a piece of the unleavened bread, together with some bitter herbs, and gave it to Judas. This was at the very beginning of the Passover Feast, and as Judas went immediately out, he neither fully "ate the Passover," nor partook of the Lord's Supper which followed it.

The cup of blessing was probably the third cup of wine, and practically concluded the Passover Feast.

The Passover Feast was the more remarkable, for the Passover was the only sacrifice not offered by an Aaronic priest, and also was not of the Law, but was instituted before it was given. In like manner Christ in heaven became a priest not after the order of Aaron, and His death as the Lamb of God was primarily a sacrifice, not after the order of Leviticus.

The Passover being now practically ended, our Lord took another cake<sup>1</sup> of unleavened bread; in the words of Scripture, "He took bread, He brake it and said, this is . . . for you." In these three actions we see, as has been beautifully pointed out by others, first

<sup>1</sup> We must note here that in St. Luke *xxii.* 14–23, we get another illustration that the order (Luke i. 3) the evangelist follows in his Gospel is not historical. Not only are the events narrated in a different order in this passage, the contention, as well as the departure of Judas being here placed after the Supper, but part of verses 19 and 20 are not found at all in many manuscripts.

in the taking of the bread, our Lord's voluntary incarnation ; then in the breaking of it, our Lord's violent death ; and in the words " for you," His vicarious sacrifice.

It is only fair to mention here, that there is a difficulty as to this being a real Passover Feast. It would be quite out of place to enter into the argument as to whether the Passover that year was held on the Thursday or the Friday. It has been ably urged that our Lord did not eat the Passover at all on this occasion save in the mystical form of the Lord's Supper, the Passover being kept when Jesus died on the next day. Edersheim, however, and many others clearly show that at that time there were two observances of the Passover : the Pharisees and the Jews keeping it on one day, the Sadducees and Galileans on the next, thus making it possible for our Lord to take the Feast on the Thursday, and yet Himself to be the Passover Lamb on the following day.

The words " This is my body " signify that the material bread was at the time the body of the Lord <sup>1</sup> to the spiritual understanding.

" This cup is the new covenant in my blood " clearly marks the close of the old covenant of law (2 Cor. iii. 14), and the foundation of the new covenant of grace (2 Cor. iii. 6) with Israel (Jer. xxxi. 31), to be fully ratified on their national repentance hereafter.

The words " I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God " doubtless refer primarily to this future time.

It is interesting to note that our Lord Himself instituted both the Lord's Supper and Christian Baptism, and that both of them have reference to His death and resurrection. In baptism we are buried into His death, out of it we rise ; in the Lord's Supper we remember Him in His death, on the day He rose, until He comes.

The Lord's Supper is essentially a sacrament and not a sacrifice ; and a sacrament is " the material and visible symbol of an invisible and spiritual reality." Observe, a symbol is much more than a description, inasmuch as sight is much more than hearing ; the Queen of Sheba indeed says it is twice as much. The sacrifices of Israel were all true sacraments, and in this lay all their value.

This being clearly understood, we may point out that " This is my body " cannot mean, " This has become my body." The words

<sup>1</sup> There is nothing in Scripture to show it was so regarded before or after ; or even that it was all consumed at the time.

imply no change in the elements, but clearly point out, that that which in physical reality is still *bread* in the sacrament (after the "blessing" or giving thanks, see 1 Cor. xi. 27), in spiritual reality is the *body* of Christ to those who rightly partake. "This do" also cannot be rendered "this offer"; "doing" never means offering.

In the early Church, the Supper was inseparable from the *agapee* or love-feast, the occasion of happy Christian fellowship, and which was also one of almsgiving to the poor, when all that was eaten were gifts of food brought for the occasion. The connexion of the two was doubtless felt to be warranted by the association of the Lord's Supper with the Passover. The *agapee* or love-feast is mentioned in Jude 12. The eucharist, as the Lord's Supper was called, was the concluding part of the *agapee*, or a second supper. The *agapee* was really the elevation of an ordinary meal to a fellowship of love and almsgiving, and long formed a part of the Lord's Supper; but eventually, on account of many abuses, the latter was separated from it.

In the early Church, confession of sin was habitual before partaking of the Supper, in accordance with the injunction of 1 Corinthians xi. 28, "Let a man examine himself," and to avoid the judgment that there falls on those who carelessly partake. The fasting communion, that began to be practised when the Supper became a breakfast, and was separated from the *agapee*, was really at first simply a recoil from the excesses of 1 Corinthians xi, and not at all from the idea that the Lord's Supper should be the first food to pass the lips. This is very evident when we remember that this Supper for over a century was taken in the middle or at the end of a meal. The eating of gifts before or after the Holy Communion, a survival of this primitive practice, may still be seen in the Greek Church, in the old Coptic, and in some Latin Churches.

For the first century at least, the Supper was after six o'clock on the Sabbath, that is at the commencement of the Lord's Day, which thus began with God. When the time was changed from Jewish to Roman, the day ending at midnight instead of 6 p.m., the Supper was taken after midnight on the Sabbath, and always either in the middle or at the end of the love-feast. The change to such a late hour unfortunately brought in many serious abuses, which were at length stopped by Trajan's Rescript, which was an edict issued A.D. 112 against associations; the younger Pliny wrote about it.

The Lord's Supper then became a breakfast, the use of candles, however, being still sometimes continued, as an indication that originally it was a supper. It began to be corrupted by Ignatius, only sixty years after St. Paul, by the adoption of heathen mysteries, faith then representing the flesh of the Lord, and love—His blood. The real doctrinal corruption, and the sacramental teaching that involved a change in [the elements, and transubstantiation, began later on, at the close of the second century, in the days of Justin Martyr. The Supper required then the presence of a bishop and a special priesthood, and ceased to be a congregational meal. In the Lord's Supper after its first institution there was, as in the Jewish Passover, nothing official—no priest, president or officer, no rules nor ritual, nor official formula, nor even any exactly prescribed order.

At first, for a long period, the cup preceded the bread, as in 1 Corinthians x ; while later, and down to the present day, the bread is given before the cup. In the Didache, or teaching of the twelve Apostles (a very early document), the order is the cup and the bread.

This Supper, together with almsgiving, was undoubtedly the centre of Christian worship, and chief occasion of the gathering together of the early Church. This dominant position was almost entirely lost for a time in the Protestant Churches, but the Supper is now being restored to a more prominent place. It is remarkable that while one large body of Christians—the Quakers—dispensed with it altogether, another body of Christians—known as Brethren—have always, in all parts of the world, assembled on the Lord's Day for no other purpose ; and although perhaps only few in number locally, have therefore sometimes formed the largest body of communicants in the town.

Many illustrative allusions to the Lord's Supper, more or less direct, occur in Scripture. The first of course that we notice is the Passover Feast in Egypt, of which indeed it was the antitype and fulfilment. Another is in Exodus xxiv. 11, in that mysterious sacred meal, when on Sinai the nobles beheld God, and did eat and drink ; surely a beautiful description of what the Supper should be to us. It is also probable that the discourse in St. John vi. though not primarily referring to the Supper at all, but to saving faith in our Lord's death, is indirectly connected with it. 1 Corinthians v. 6, 7, "Let us keep the feast," may also contain some reference to it. 1 Corinthians x commences with baptism, and continues with eating

spiritual meat and drinking spiritual drink, a distinct reference again to the Lord's Supper, as was also the wonderful Supper on the Lord's Day at Emmaus.

The Christian's three sacrifices—his praise, his alms, and himself—are all connected with the Supper. As holy priests we offer the sacrifice of praise according to Hebrews xiii., and in the collection,<sup>1</sup> "to do good and to communicate" we "forget not," "for with such sacrifices" God "is well pleased"; and with regard to our bodies, while the Supper recalls that God gave His only begotten Son (St. John iii. 16) it cannot also fail to remind us that therefore "we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii. 16). It is thus the three sacrifices are connected with the Lord's table. The altar on which these are placed is Christ, for it is "through Him" they are offered (Heb. xiii. 15).

Breaking bread was in the East a common expression referring at first to eating at any meal, inasmuch as the bread is not of a soft spongy character which can be cut, but crisp and hard as our biscuits, and requiring to be broken; then later on amongst Christians the expression was reserved for the love feast and the Lord's Supper, and lastly it became restricted to the latter only.

The Lord's Supper has three aspects—past, present, and future. It refers to the past in 1 Corinthians xi. 24, 25, in "remembrance"; to the present in 1 Corinthians x. 16, 17, in "communion"; to the future in 1 Corinthians xi. 26, in "showing or proclaiming." It is connected first with Christ, secondly with His Church, and thirdly with the world. It has three objects—for remembrance, for communion and food, for witness. It is linked with the Passover in the Gospels, with idolatry in 1 Corinthians x, and with great disorder in the Church in 1 Corinthians xi.

Speaking of disorders, I might briefly refer to two evils of modern times. We have seen that the remembrance is that of the Lord Jesus in His death, symbolized by the cup (representing the blood) being apart from the bread (representing the body), for while blood in the body is a sign of life, poured out it is a sign of death; and it is our Lord's *shed blood* in death that is the ground for the remission of our sins: not His blessed life when He went about doing good, and

<sup>1</sup> Here as elsewhere more familiar words such as "offertory" might be used, but throughout, as far as possible, Scriptural as distinguished from merely ecclesiastical expressions are adhered to.

when the blood was in the body. In like manner at the Passover in Egypt, it was not the spotless lamb, but its sprinkled blood, that saved the people. In the Church of Rome, where the cup is withheld from the laity and the wafer eaten by them as containing both the flesh and blood of our Lord, it is evident that the symbol represents life rather than death, and to this extent the spiritual force of the Supper is annulled. Moreover, we must never forget that to eat blood throughout the Scripture is death, and was strictly forbidden. There is no doubt that, if we follow the Lord's Supper as instituted, that the blood must be drunk and not eaten; and it is equally apparent that if the wafer only be taken as the Supper, the blood is eaten and not drunk, or is altogether omitted.

I will only pause here a moment to remind a few ultra-spiritual people who dispense with the Supper altogether as being too material, that the command is not to "remember the Lord," but to "eat the bread and drink the cup," before passing on to an evil that often accompanies too frequent communion. There is of course the greatest blessing in a weekly communion, which appears to have been the New Testament custom, but there is also a considerable danger attached to it, which, alas, is far too little understood—one from which only the Spirit of God can save us. Nothing indeed but this can prevent that which so constantly recurs, from becoming a mechanical or a common act, of which little is thought once it is past. The reverence, the solemnity, the worship which must attend this Supper if the Spirit of God be present, is frequently, painfully, and conspicuously absent. One cannot but value, though carried to great extremes, those preparations still surviving in parts of Scotland of perhaps a week's fasting, prayer and confession to God before the table is approached. While therefore to take the Lord's Supper on the Lord's day is the right practice, one does feel the danger of the sin of carelessness and irreverence when communicating every week.

One word may be said, in closing, on the "future" aspect of the Supper as connected with Christ's return. The Epistle to the Corinthians was, as we know, written six years before the close of the Acts of the Apostles. These Acts of the Apostles (with the exception of St. Paul) were concerned specially with those Jews who became believers in Christ; added to whom, chiefly through the ministration of St. Paul, were an increasing number of Gentiles. The Jews,

however, were still in "the patient forbearance of God" under trial, and if they repented, "the times of refreshing would come to them from the presence of the Lord" (Acts iii. 19). This return of Christ, had there been a national repentance, would have been very speedy, and in those Epistles written before the close of the Acts (when the door already closed on Judea, was also closed to the dispersion at Rome) is so presented; whereas in those letters of St. Paul that were written after the final doom of Israel was pronounced in Acts xxviii. 26-28, it is not so prominent. These words "until He come" would in the Corinthian Epistle, and before the last shutting of the door of grace (until the future restoration of Israel) in the close of the Acts, have a very special and immediate force: similar indeed to that which, in these closing days in which we live, it has now.

It is important to note that these words: "ye do show (or proclaim) the Lord's death until He come," are not in the imperative mood as a command; but are the statement of a fact that the repetition of this memorial feast constitutes in itself a proclamation of the return of Christ, possibly then very imminent.

Many results doubtless flowed from this Supper; but only the one is placed on record in the Scripture which we should be most likely to overlook, and that is its public proclamation of the Lord's death to the world which crucified Him. We are told on high legal authority, that the regular public remembrance of any act or deed from its first occurrence establishes it as an historical fact to future generations. For instance, if there were no history of it, the annual Waterloo banquet would suffice to establish the fact of there having been such a battle; and there can be no doubt that the world has yet to answer for the legalized murder of the Son of God. This is indeed the reverse side of the picture presented by the Lord's Supper: to those within, salvation; to those without, judgment. In the proclamation itself, however, we may still see the grace of God, which until the door be closed brings salvation and a seat at the table to all who believe.

We have completed our brief survey of the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and considered generally its purpose, its history and its results. In the articles that follow, we will look at it more closely as a remembrance, a communion, and as spiritual food.

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[Next article: "The Lord's Supper as a Remembrance."]