

# **The Lord's Supper**

*The Importance and Wisdom of the Ordinance*

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A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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## The Lord's Supper

*Reading: Matthew 26:1–29; Luke 22:24–38; 1 Corinthians 1:16–22; 11:23–24*

Our Lord left us only two ordinances, which therefore become remarkable by their very fewness of number and concentrate our attention on their singular importance. He left us the ordinance of baptism and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, so as we survey together the familiar theme of the Lord's Supper we shall inevitably think of its importance. This is something very rare that our Lord asked us to do. In addition to perceiving its importance we shall, I trust, be helped by God to see the wisdom that lies behind our Lord's injunction.

It is a lovely thing for every believer when he is given to see the wisdom of God behind his gracious commands. It goes without saying, of course, that we owe our Lord unquestioning obedience to every one of his commands even if we cannot perceive the wisdom behind them, trusting the heart of him who loves us and the mind of an all wise Saviour and God. But how lovely when God treats us not as infants, merely to be commanded without understanding why, but rather as grown up sons to whom he may entrust his secrets and explain his ways so that we might perceive their wisdom and with all wholeheartedness cooperate with him. Let us then, by God's grace, see the importance of this ordinance and also its exceeding wisdom.

I want first to say a few words on the Lord's Supper from an historical viewpoint, to see what we may learn from its very institution. It shows us what is, and what must always be, the prime and central Christian emphasis, but I must reflect for a moment that when our Lord instituted it he was instituting something by which we should remember him.

There are many things about him that we love that he might have chosen to help us remember him. There were all those wonderful miracles that he did, full of grace and kindness every one of them, but it is not his miracles that he asks us to recall by this constantly repeated rite. Again we think how lovely his teachings were; how glorious those parables he taught; how striking and how gripping his moral teaching, but we cannot fail to notice that he didn't ask us to stand publicly and recite his parables so that we might remember what he said in them, or to recite publicly the Sermon on the Mount so that we might remember his ethical teaching.

From all his life and ministry he chose to select something that should recall the offering of himself as a sacrifice for our sins. Bread and wine, his body and his blood given for us—'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Matt 26:28). We cannot think that this

was some casual thing that our Lord did without forethought or deliberate intention. It must be that in asking us to do this, which recalls his sacrifice and death, our Lord wished to imprint it as the central theme in the whole of Christianity, the thing that lies nearest his heart. It is the most important of all that he ever said or did. We should remember that he gave his body as a sacrifice and shed his blood for the forgiveness of human sin.

I want to submit to you that here we perceive our Lord's wisdom in this provision. A glance back at history will show us that there have been days when the church has not seen too clearly what was its main emphasis and felt that its main task was a programme of social reform—its message to the world was for the social improvement of the masses or for the political setting up and putting down of kings. There have also been days when the church has spoken to the world as though the main thing in Christianity were its rules and regulations. With its Christian ethics the church has bid the world to keep the golden rule, and of course it is transparently clear in the New Testament that we are exhorted to do good to all men and to have a care for our neighbour.

There are injunctions and commandments binding upon Christians, but I venture to say that these are not central in Christianity. Christianity is unique among all religions on earth. Our Lord was a Saviour who came to die for human sin, so that sin might be forgiven and people put right with God. Happy is the church that has allowed the constant celebration of this central theme to imprint upon its mind that this is the fundamental thing. *Our Lord came as a sacrifice for sin.* Should we forget all else we must remember this and preach it with all our powers.

Allow me a little bit of a sermon! If you have a heart for the souls of men, do not yield to this world's incessant clamour. It is cheap with its advice to the church and what the church should preach and do, suggesting that you would make a bigger impact on the world if you drop these mysterious things and get on with social reform. Listen rather to the Lord's will. Let him by this institution imprint upon our minds that this is the message of Christianity; it is the thing by which we remember Christ and what he came to do. It was not necessarily to relieve human poverty, but pre-eminently it was to die for our sins and put us right with God.

We can see our Lord's wisdom in the institution of this supper from another, theological, viewpoint. We have lived to see a day when, in the name of Christ and Christian theology, there are many who would preach that our Lord's divinity, his atoning death and his bodily resurrection are ideas that originated with the church and were not taught by our Lord himself. Liberal scholars say that the records we have in the Gospels of what our Lord said and did were compiled by the church years after our Lord went back to heaven. Jesus himself never claimed divinity; it was the church that claimed it for him. Looking back over the years and remembering him, his wisdom and his teaching, the church affectionately put a halo of divinity around his head, thinking to honour him and give him the status of Godhead. They will tell you that it was the church that wrote the Gospels and not our Lord—he wrote nothing.

When we talk about his atoning death they say again that this is not what our Lord intended by his death at all. His death was to show us how we ought to deny self and say to

God, 'Not my will but yours be done.' They will tell us that there were later apostles, notably Saul of Tarsus, whose minds were soaked in Judaism. They interpreted the death of Christ in the light of Old Testament sacrifices, suggesting that God needed blood and fire before he could forgive his erring children. The liberal theologians say, 'That is not what Christ taught. It's what the apostles taught and what the church taught.'

When we come to the glorious fact of the resurrection they say it is not a fact at all, it is only a belief! You must not believe that the bones literally came out of the grave—that is not what our Lord meant at all. He meant that if you were willing to say 'No' to the flesh, to crucify self, you would find new life in your experience of God. That is all he meant, but those later Christians made a myth out of it. Our Lord only meant that by being willing to crucify self we should find greater life and experience of God, but they had misunderstood it. They thought he meant that he was going to literally, physically rise again from the dead!

If you have not come across those theories then you needn't bother yourself with them, but some of our younger folk must. Your children may be taught such things in school, if their teacher is of a liberal persuasion.

How wise of God, who foresees the end from the beginning, that our Lord himself should have instituted a ceremony that gives the lie to all these liberal fallacies. He did this before he died on the cross, years before the first Gospel or epistle was written. Matthew and Luke were written some time after our Lord's ascension to heaven, recalling the details of the institution of the Supper, but Christ instituted the Supper itself before he died and it was celebrated from the very beginning in the Christian church. It stands as the earliest record we have of what our Lord claimed and taught about himself and his work.

From Pentecost day onwards, if not before, as little groups of Christian men and women gathered together they enacted a record that the Lord himself told them to enact. The record contains what is vital to true Christianity, our Lord's atoning death—'My body given, my blood poured.' He specifically said, 'the blood of the *new* covenant' and 'for the remission of sins' (Matt 26:38, see KJV). Long before there was a book called the New Testament, Christians met to celebrate *the* new testament—the new covenant that Christ performed and secured for us when he died. The bread and the wine of which we partake at the Lord's Supper are the symbols of it.

Before he died, not only did he say that he was going to die for human sin, but implied in that was his claim to deity—what ordinary human could say that he had come to die as a sacrifice for the sins of the world? What sane man would ever breathe any such notion? Moses in his highest flights of oratory never dreamed of it. Isaiah in his personal ministry never expressed any such idea. There was only one who, being sane and commanding men's respect, ever claimed he had come to die for the sins of the whole world. It implies that he was more than man, for only God incarnate could offer a satisfactory sacrifice for sin.

Do we not perceive that the very claim that he was about to die for human sin involves the claim that he rose again? For he often said that he would be delivered and crucified and the third day rise again. Indeed, as the later apostles said, 'If Christ has not been raised, your

faith is futile and you are still in your sins. . . . If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied' (1 Cor 15:17, 19).

I would like now to point out how Matthew goes out of his way to demonstrate that the idea of the atoning death of Christ, enshrined in the Lord's Supper, is not an idea that originated with the church. It did not even originate with the apostles; it originated with Christ. The Passover was coming, and our Lord said that the Pharisees would want to take him. He knew that he would die on this Passover, only a few hours distant in time, and he came with his followers to the house of Simon (Matt 26:6–13). There they made him an ordinary supper, during the course of which a woman anointed his head and feet with ointment. This gave rise to severe criticism. Said the disciples one and all, 'Why this waste? For this could have been sold for a large sum and given to the poor' (vv. 8–9). Our Lord defended the woman, and said something remarkable:

'Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a beautiful thing to me. For you always have the poor with you but you will not always have me. In pouring this ointment on my body, she has done it to prepare me for burial.' (vv. 10–12)

I suggest to you it descended upon them like a thunderclap. Burial! Was he going to die so soon that he regarded this as the anointing of his dead body? As I read it, the evidence suggests that, for all Christ had said, those apostles were not expecting him to die. Had they been expecting it, or if they had the slightest notion that this was the last occasion ever on which they might have the opportunity to express their gratitude to him, they would have given him not merely the value of the ointment—they would surely have given him anything. Would Peter, John and James have grudged our Lord that token, had they realised that almost tomorrow he would be dead? When our Lord told them that they would not always have him, did they say, 'Now we see what the Old Testament is saying. He is going to die for sin, so we shall do everything in our power to get our Lord crucified by the Jews and we can tell the people that he has fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy! This is a good scheme to get people to believe that he is the Messiah'? Did Peter, John and James think like that? I fancy not!

They went out into the night, slept while our Lord prayed, and presently there came the squad to arrest him. Manfully Peter drew his sword, surprised that the Lord did nothing. And then, to his utter dismay, the Lord told Peter, 'Put up your sword into its place.' What was this? Bold men, prepared to give their last drop of blood to save him from dying, now to be disappointed, the zeal that would have given everything only now to be repulsed! He said, 'No, I don't want it, Peter.'

'You don't want it! You're not going to stand there and let them take you, are you?' says Peter. 'Don't you know what they are going to do if they get their hands on you?'

'But,' said our Lord, 'don't you see, Peter; if I wanted I could call for twelve legions of angels, each with a sword. But how then should the Scripture be fulfilled?'

'What Scripture?'

'That this is the way I should be taken and die.'

They all said, 'If that is your idea, it is not ours.'

Then all his disciples forsook him and fled (v. 56). For a Messiah that willingly gave himself up to his enemies to die, that wasn't in all their theological vocabulary! It is sheer nonsense to say that the idea originated with the church.

Let's finally look at the chief of the apostles, Peter himself. When the others ran away he came back and entered the judgment hall where our Lord was on trial before the religious authorities. He went to see the end (v. 58). And what would this Jesus of Nazareth do now? Here was a situation, if ever you saw one. If he had resisted the squad of soldiers and had done a miracle and called angels to deliver him, then there was some sense in claiming to be the Son of God. But for a man who lamely gave himself up like that and let himself be overpowered and taken into the judgment hall—now he would have to be careful! They are bent on getting evidence to crucify him, and if he dares to say that he is God's Son and Messiah they will have his head. Peter listens with bated breath. The high priest at last challenges the prisoner: 'Are you then the Son of the Blessed?' I think I see Peter tremble in his shoes. Whatever will he say now, as he stands there bound hand and foot? Is he going to claim to be Messiah, still claim to be the Son of God? It will be suicide if he does, but a voice comes back from the bound prisoner, 'I am.'

Somebody nudged Peter. It was a girl. She said, 'You are one of them, aren't you?'

'Look here,' he said, 'I am not with him!' If Christ had been standing there claiming to be the Son of God with a sword drawn and legions of angels laying his enemies low, Peter would have been with him to the last drop of his blood. But to willingly give himself up to death and still claim to be God's Son? 'No,' said Peter, 'I am not with that. I am not with him!' He had never heard such a suicidal thing in all his life.

It was common knowledge in Jerusalem that, when our Lord claimed to be the Son of God and at the same time willingly gave himself to death, his chief apostle wiped his hands of him. I say again that it is utter nonsense to say that our Lord's claim to give himself to an atoning death as a sacrifice for sin originated with the church. The central thing of Christianity is that one should come to our world, claiming to be God's Son and human together, and willingly give himself to death. This is something that originated in the heart of God and was written in Old Testament Scripture: 'It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard' (Heb 2:3).

So I come back to my main point. Time and time again as we gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper we stand, so to speak, on the bedrock of God's divine revelation to men. Cling to it, my young friend! Be faithful only to the Lord here, and come constantly at his injunction to remember him. God will write it on your heart and you will come to such understanding of God's gospel, such an appreciation of God's divine revelation, that you shall be kept safe from the insidious attack of liberal theology that is overthrowing the faith of so many.

But someone will say, 'Suppose Christ did want to remind us of his death because it is the central thing in Christianity, why did he do it this way and institute a ceremony with bread and wine, in which the congregation of the church takes part by receiving that bread and wine? Surely the memory could have been perpetuated in some other way? Someone could have got up and read a book that Christ himself wrote in which he explained the doctrine of

the atonement in full, and we just listened. Why did he make it something in which we not only listened, but something in which we had personally to take part by eating the bread and drinking the wine?' You may then say, 'Well, first of all, because it graphically portrays his death—the body and the blood are separate.' Obviously that is so, but may I suggest another reason? It is because this Lord's Supper is not merely a record, but it is a symbol of a covenant of which we are the beneficiaries, a covenant under which we receive all our spiritual blessing. And as we take the symbol we reaffirm again and again that we received God's salvation on God's terms—the terms of that covenant!

This is the new covenant, 'the cup of the *new* covenant'—new because it stands distinct from the old covenant. What was the old covenant? The old covenant was the Ten Commandments, which were put inside the Ark that formed the throne of God. The old covenant expressed the principles upon which God proposed to govern the nation of Israel. He offered it at the foot of Sinai and said, 'Now these are my terms. If you and I are going to be in communion one with another, you shall be my people and I shall be your God. I shall be your king and you will be my subjects. Here are the terms upon which I propose to rule you. Are you prepared for the terms?' Christ's sacrifice has obtained for us a great salvation. There are terms with it also. As we take the symbols we are saying to him, 'Yes, I receive you as Lord, and I accept your terms.'

Let us consider the situation as Luke gives it (see ch. 20). He points out that when our Lord arrived on his final visit to Jerusalem he found the nation's heart barred against him. Who are those in the temple? Men who have appropriated the vineyard and its produce that belongs to God for their own pockets. And even as the rightful heir came to the vineyard they said, 'This is the heir; we'll kill him and take the inheritance ourselves.' The enemy occupied Jerusalem city that should have been his. What did he do? He had come as Israel's king, in the name of the Lord, riding upon a donkey. But the enemy occupied the city and presently they were to cast him out and put him on a tree. Must he go back to heaven defeated?

For many nights now he had been going out of the city because it was not safe for him to stay there. During the day the multitude hung upon his words, but at night he took the precaution of going outside the city because 'the vineyard men' were after him. On the last night he said to the disciples, 'Go into the city and you shall see a man bearing a pitcher of water [a most unusual thing]—follow him in and find out who owns the house where he goes in. It won't be that man, it will be some other man who owns the house—speak to him.'

'Why all this secrecy, Lord? Why make all these arrangements on the quiet?'

'Because Jerusalem is a hostile city; they are after my blood. Humanly speaking it is dangerous for me to be found there. But there is one man in Jerusalem who is prepared to take the very best room in his house and, knowing that my enemies are after my blood, he is prepared to open his door and have me right in the very heart of the enemies' territory. I shall go in there tonight' (see Luke 22:7–13).

While all was dark around in the city that was thirsting for his blood, he not only kept the Passover in that upper room but he instituted his kingdom and gave the terms of the covenant. In token he gave his body and blood to seal the covenant. Happy is that man who gave his room as a place where, in enemy territory, Christ might establish his kingdom on



earth. He forms a picture of every human heart that dares to receive Christ. This world's night is not yet past. The day is coming, and the night is indeed far spent; but it is not yet past and our Lord is still rejected. Happy are all those human hearts who, in enemy territory, have opened the very best room and said, 'Lord, come in. Set up your kingdom here.'

When the Caesars raged and tried to blot out the very name of Christ from the earth, there were lovely little groups of Christians around the Roman world who opened their homes, their barns, their secret meeting places and gathered together to take bread and wine. What were they doing? They were pledging again that they were members of his kingdom; on this little spot on earth Christ reigned supreme as their Lord and God, and they were his. Do you not think it cheered the heart of God and touched the heart of the ascended Christ as they thus pledged their loyalty in answer to his request?

The same heart looks down upon us now, brothers and sisters, none the less touched when in a hostile world you gather and break the bread and drink the cup, affirming again that, here at least, Christ is king. It is not by your works. What are the terms of his covenant? And how much superior it is to that old, first covenant, where the responsibility lay upon men to keep God's law to earn salvation. What a different covenant this is, when all we have to do as bankrupt sinners is to receive the salvation that Christ has secured, and with it forgiveness and the promise:

And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,' then he adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.' (Heb 10:15-17)

What a lovely covenant! We said 'yes' to him when first we came in our bankruptcy, and do we not love to say it as often as we possibly can? Look up into his face and take the bread and the cup and say, 'Lord, I affirm it. I take it.' If I have never done it before, I should do it right now.

They had been arguing, forgetful of the solemnity of the occasion and forgetful of the depths of the Lord's suffering (Luke 22:24-27). But he reproved them gently, saying, 'It is not the *big man* that is the boss. Let the big one serve—the one who serves is greatest.' What a lovely kingdom when the very king holds this viewpoint. He says, 'I am among you as one who serves.'

Tell me, who in this world is counted bigger—the man that serves at table, or he that sits? There is no doubt about that. The man who sits is the big man and the man who serves is only the small man. When you go home and you push a button by the fireplace in your lounge and presently the servant comes and says, 'Yes, Sir', you feel important! Suppose you could go home and press a button and presently God's own Son comes and says, 'What would you like?'

We are the ones 'who recline at table'. How it touches our hearts, and how could we have it otherwise? Do we not sit at that great banquet of salvation, watch him serve and remember the toil he had in order to prepare the feast? As we take the bread and the cup we are unworthy to sit and eat, but he insists on doing the serving. It is there that we begin to learn the ways of heaven and see clearly the fundamentals of our faith: his atoning death, his deity,

his resurrection and his promised coming again. How can we do it and immediately turn round and try to boss it over a fellow-Christian?

'I had to borrow this room; it is not mine,' said he. 'You have continued with me all this long while—how grateful I am to you men!' We may quietly think that they haven't done very much, but how grateful Christ is to them. 'You have continued right to this very present time.' It was genuinely a comfort to him. What would we think if he had said, 'I'd like you to be here at Passover hour, gentlemen, to take this bread and wine,' and Peter said, 'I'm sorry but I cannot come today; I don't think it is important. I don't get much out of it, Lord!?' I don't think even Peter really knew how much Christ got out of it. 'You are those who have stayed with me in my trials (v. 28). Oh how he valued it. 'I'll do better for you one day,' he says. 'It won't be a borrowed upper room; I will appoint you a kingdom and you will sit and eat with me at my table in my Father's kingdom! Now I am rejected and you will have to pay your own expenses in this world now, for they will cast me out. I shall be reckoned with the outlaws. But one of these days I shall give you a place at my table in my Father's kingdom.' He was prophesying not only his death but his coming again.

'And in the meantime, Peter,' says Christ, 'you are running into some trouble. Your faith is going to be tested almost to breaking point, but I have prayed for you, Peter. And you, my disciples who sit here today keeping this covenant supper, I shall pray for you so that of a certainty your faith shall not fail and you shall sit down with me in the courts of heaven.' Lovely kingdom, lovely king! It is a wonderful thing to sit with him, be it only a borrowed room and only bread and wine. He says, 'As sure as you sit here today I shall see to it that you shall sit with me at my Father's table in his kingdom, for I shall pray for you that your faith shall never fail. You will have to pay your expenses and fight your own way because I am to be reckoned as an outlaw and for this time you must be prepared to take your place with me and share my rejection' (see vv. 35–38). And then they went out.

Why have a supper that is constantly repeated in which we take part? It is so that in this world that now rejects him we might constantly reaffirm our loyalty to the Lord. You may say it is only a small thing, and you want to get busy serving the Lord!

I am told that when dutiful husbands go away on business for, say, six months, they write once a month. I am told that deluxe husbands write once a week. I have occasionally come across extraordinary men who write every day. You say, 'I shouldn't bother writing home to your wife! Aren't you doing the business for her—just get on with the business! Aren't you buying her a new coat, why bother to write and tell her anything about that? Just get on with the business!' But love won't have it that way; affection won't have it that way. He could work for the whole six months, but if he never wrote (even if he only said it was cold weather, that he had cabbage for dinner, or whatever), is it not the gesture? You say, 'Never mind, even if he doesn't write, he said "I will" once, and he doesn't need to keep on saying it!'—Doesn't he have to keep on saying it?

The Lord says, 'I know you are mine and I should like you to come, please, and reaffirm it to me.' Shall we say, 'Lord, I'm too busy getting on with your work'? Shall we not see that the Lord wants it and values it, or else he would never have requested that we do it?

If you walk round the walls of the city of Chester in England they will show you into a little museum. Inside there is a table, and on the table a board painted in dark browns and

blues. It looks like a smudge of meaningless colour, and then the keeper will come and bring a brightly coloured tankard and set it down on the board. As he does so he will tell you to look at the curve inside the tankard, and there reflected in the tankard are these colours. But now they are no longer a meaningless shamble of colours, there is a face—the face of the exiled king! Living in a country that was against their king, his loyal followers gathered to think about him and plot for him. As they drank that cup and put it on the board the colours meant nothing to the world outside, but to those who knew where to look they saw the very face of the king himself. The world thinks it is a cheap thing, my brothers and sisters. They see no value in that bread and wine, but as you take that cup and as you take that ordinary bread can you not at times see the very face of your absent king?

Someone might say, 'This is all very good, but it is somewhat remote! Devotional maybe, but ought we not to have something practical?' Indeed we ought to have something practical, and it should have a tremendously practical emphasis in our Christian life. It is not good merely to dwell upon our blessings in Christ without seeing our responsibilities. But should we wish to find a place where Christianity blossoms in all its practical implications, there is no place better than the Lord's Supper. When it comes to the practical advancement of Christianity in my life—the real strivings of God's Holy Spirit to make me into a holy person—there is a place where God's Spirit has calculated to do it supremely above all, and that is at the Lord's Supper.

So Paul writes to the Corinthians, alas in a quagmire of misbehaviour, and calls their attention to the Lord's Supper. He says, 'You must take this supper seriously. The Lord instituted it on the night when he was *betrayed*.' Ugly word, that anyone could *betray the Lord*. 'I want to talk to you about his lordship', says Paul:

For I have received from the Lord what I also delivered unto you, how that the Lord Jesus in the night when he was betrayed took bread. . . . Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Cor 11:23, 27–29)

If you were to take that supper unworthily you would be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. This is the Lord's Supper. We have not merely a Saviour, we have a divine Lord, and he has put the seal of his lordship on the command that we break bread and drink wine in memory of him.

You say, 'It wouldn't be a very difficult commandment to keep. How does that test our willingness to yield to his lordship? Are we not all allowed to come and partake?' Wait a minute; it's not quite so easy as that! If we were to eat and drink unworthily we would be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. How is that so? Our sins, did they not cause his death? To come then to a ceremony that recalls his death with sin in our hearts, the very sin that nailed him to the cross; to sit by and see the emblems of his death and say, 'Yes it is sin that I have in my heart that caused his death, but I am not going to give the sin up. I don't care if it did kill him I am going on with it'—how should we be better than Judas, who betrayed his Lord for his silver? No, we may not carelessly eat this supper.

'That's the reason I don't eat it at all; I don't feel worthy to eat of it!' says someone.

My dear brother or sister, you are not at liberty to take that view. I know it sounds holy to say, 'I am not worthy to take it and therefore I don't', but you are not given permission to stay away. You have got to come. You never will be worthy!

'But what can I do to prepare myself?'

Repent! My heart must not say, 'I like my sin and I know that I am not worthy to go to the Lord's Supper, but I like my sin so I shall stay away and that will be all right.' It won't be all right! The Lord has bidden us to come, and commanded us as we come to repent. He isn't so unrealistic as to ask us to be sinless and perfect for we cannot be. But he does ask that we discern ourselves. We are not content to go along thinking we are all right. We have the responsibility to discern ourselves and we ought now to be seeing things in ourselves that we have learned to call sinful, that perhaps ten years ago we were not perturbed about. If God is dealing with our hearts we ought now to be putting a label across this habit and that habit—*that's sin and that attitude is wrong*—that ten years ago perhaps we weren't aware of. We are asked to discern ourselves and to repent. What comfort and encouragement we shall receive. Coming in the knowledge of our sinfulness we shall see that the Lord still loves us.

On the very night he was betrayed he took bread. It was on that very night he went out to die for you. 'I have let him down so much,' you say. And you have, but he will never let you down. It was on the very night in which he was betrayed that he took the bread and gave it for you. As we come there and learn our security we find the grace and the courage to turn round and have a look at ourselves. As you take the cup at the breaking of bread you may find yourselves thinking, 'O Lord, help me to be different.' And as you see in those emblems a vivid portrayal of what sin did to Christ—what that lovelessness of heart, that narrowness of mind, that bitterness of tongue did to Christ—don't you find the desire to be a different person? We must come and we must discern ourselves, and if we do so we shall not be judged. But if we don't discern ourselves and repent and judge ourselves, then that same faithfulness that drove our Lord to give himself even when he was being betrayed will impel him, with resolute and determined love, to bring us to repent and get us to drop from our hands the weapons that caused him such hurt and which will only continue to lacerate our souls.

'Even those who have so failed that I have had to take them home in discipline shall not perish with the world, they themselves shall be saved' (see vv. 30–32). In his faithfulness, expressed in the emblems of that supper, we have the secret of deliverance from sinning and a perfection of Christian character.

It is not only a selfish thing. I read deliberately from chapter 10, which is describing a different thing from the Lord's Supper. It is describing the Lord's table (v. 21)—that table loaded with all its spiritual provisions that Christ has procured for us by his sacrifice. We enjoy it at any and every time, whether we are at the Lord's Supper or the prayer meeting, at home in the kitchen, in the office or the shop, we are always sitting at the Lord's table enjoying his benefits.

Paul uses the symbols of the Lord's Supper to illustrate a principle that applies to the Lord's table. 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' (10:16). He

says, 'Having fellowship with the Lord at his table, it is a communion, a sharing and having something in common.' He is using an illustration from the Lord's Supper. 'That loaf, that cup—it's a communion, a sharing.' As the congregation sits there the bread is broken and each member takes a little piece. If there are so many present that by the time the last person has taken the last crumb and there is no bread left, where is the bread now? Where is the loaf that was on the table a few moments ago? Says Paul, 'The members of the congregation, being many, are the loaf' (v. 17). It's in them physically. If you want to see where the loaf is now you will have to get everybody that has eaten it and, when they're all together, you will have the whole loaf there.

Everybody who has received salvation from Christ has a right to his table—it's a communion. What we do when we gather for the Lord Supper and what we do when we take that loaf gives expression to this. We are one with every single blood-bought child of God who has tasted God's salvation. Not by virtue of some organization, we are one with them whether we like it or whether we don't like it, for there is a particle of loaf in that person, and that person, and that person! And whether we realise it or not it is to be found in everyone who eats it, the aggregate of all those individual souls that have tasted and seen that the Lord is gracious. We do well to sing, even as we take the sacred emblems and think primarily of him, 'We would remember we are one with every saint that loves thy name.'<sup>1</sup>

But oneness with true believers is to be put at the other extreme from separation from demons. 'You can't just go along to that heathen temple,' says Paul, 'because that is being one with them—you can't eat of their table and the Lord's table' (10:21). I must remind my heart to be faithful, to steer clear of spiritual uncleanness. Christian businessmen cannot go along to secret societies and engage in ceremonies to Baal, Bel or Bul, or Osiris and all the other heathen deities, and partake of the Lord's Supper, unless they want to provoke the Lord to jealousy (v. 22). One with all true Christians, but forever separate from false religion that is energised by the father of lies.

We have thought about a lot of things, and our minds will be exceedingly tired. But maybe in the coming days in our quieter moments this little bit or that little bit that the Lord designed especially for you or for me will come back, and his voice will speak it again. Pray God he shall find in us a more ready heart and a more willing zeal that we may give pleasure to our absent and rejected Lord and affirm his lordship in our lives and service.

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<sup>1</sup> James G. Deck, 1802–84, 'Lord, we would ne'er forget Thy love.'

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING** is Professor Emeritus of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. His international teaching ministry is marked by fresh and careful expositions of both testaments. He has published scholarly studies on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John 13–17, Acts, Hebrews and the New Testament's use of the Old Testament.