

Something to Remember

By

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Recently I heard a college professor; lecturing on “Religion,” say that Christians have the communion to “remember the Last Supper.” Not being a Christian, the professor doesn’t understand that we observe the communion to remember Christ’s death for us, and not to remember the “last supper.”

It is surprising that so many people, even many Christians, fail to understand what it is we remember as we come to the Lord’s Supper. How often have you heard someone say, at the time of the communion, “We have come to remember the Lord’s Supper?” And how often do our prayers include “thanksgiving for this institution of the Lord’s Supper?” Whatever the intent of the speaker, it would sound as though we were doing just what the professor said, remembering the last supper.

Jesus said, “This do in remembrance of ME” (Luke 22:19). The communion is something we do, but the object of our remembrance is Christ and what He did.

WE CONCENTRATE ON JESUS

When someone has a birthday party the birthday cake may occupy the center of the table. The guests eat the cake. But the center of attention is not the cake, but the one having the birthday. While we do not want to forget to cut the cake, it is not the cake we come together to remember, but the one whose birthday it honors.

The communion also occupies the center of the table as the saints meet on Sunday morning. But it is not the bread and the cup we celebrate. It is not the supper — no, not even the “last” supper — which we celebrate, but the Lord’s death.

We are not redeemed nor assured of immortality through the last supper. It is Christ’s death which meets the penalty for our sin - “for the wages of sin is death” — and thus gives us the assurance of cleansing from sin and ultimate escape from the judgment upon sinners.

Therefore everything connected with the communion is to remind us that we are saved by the death of Jesus. The bread reminds us of His flesh, and the juice reminds us of His life-blood. Together they mean that He was put to death, taking our place in judgment, that we might not have to die in judgment but might have life. The fact that we eat real bread, and drink literal juice, is to indicate that His death was real, that the judgment death for sinners is literal, and that the life which we hope for is just as real.

Those who administer the Communion, who offer meditations upon it and pray over it, have responsibility to keep Christ’s death as the focal point in the whole service. It is not

a time to discuss various other subjects, no matter what their importance. Neither is it a time to pray concerning other areas of life and worship. It is not a time to pray concerning the sick and other needs. It is not man's temporal sickness we seek to remember in the loaf and the cup, but man's ultimate need: redemption from sin and death. So it is Christ's suffering and death for which we are grateful and upon which our minds should be focused. There are plenty of other opportunities in the assembly of the church to pray for the sick, and consider temporal blessings which God gives.

If there is music during the communion, the musician also has a responsibility to contribute to the meaning of the supper and aid in concentration upon Christ. The tendency to strive for variety (They will think I don't know how to play anything else.), to demonstrate, to utilize one's knowledge of the world's music, all present a temptation to the musician. As a musician I know .only too well the pressure from within and without to make the music a "performance," and in doing so one cannot help but think of whether or not the listeners are going to be pleased.

But if ever the musician is to be obscure, it is during the communion. Only the one who knows the meaning of the communion and is honestly willing to glorify Christ rather than self can succeed in successfully aiding the communion service. If the music detracts or calls attention to it, it defeats the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

I once endured three Sundays of a revival meeting in which the organist played from a book of familiar tunes to which had been given religious words and titles. I remember what a time I had meditating on the cross to the strains of the romantic tune, "Moonlight and Roses." On another occasion I recall listening to portions from the "Overture to Romeo and Juliet," hardly the background for considering the redeeming death of Jesus.

Probably the most appreciated and helpful music for the communion (if there is to be any at all) are the old familiar hymns. The communion itself is repeated over and over, and with it we do not mind having repeated the familiar hymns that point our minds to the cross.

The less we have to think about the "mechanics" of the communion, the order and method of serving, the better we may concentrate on the meaning of Christ's death. Some churches have the custom of holding the cup and bread in hand until all are served, so all may eat and drink in unison. But this requires one to keep an eye peeled for the signal to partake, and seems to me to prohibit undivided attention to the personal meditation so valuable in the communion. Also, many people are very self-conscious in a group, and the care of partaking in unison creates some anxiety for them, when they should be at peace, thinking only of the Lord. The communion is with Christ — not with the others in the assembly.

WHO CAN CELEBRATE

Over and over arises the question as to whether or not one is "worthy" to partake of the Lord's Supper. The thought is raised from I Corinthians, chapter 11.

“Wherefore whosoever shall eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment unto himself, if he discern not the body” (1 Cor. 11:27-29).

While the church does not sit in judgment as to who eats the Lord’s Supper, it is unfair to any person to leave him in a quandary as to whether or not he should participate in this feast.

Since the communion is a commemoration of Christ’s death and since it is a personal memorial between an individual and Christ, then the person is celebrating the fact that Christ died for him. He celebrates because He believes that Christ’s death took the place of his own dying for sin in judgment. He not only believes the fact of Christ’s death, but he has been baptized into His death, and thus assured of the promise, that “he that has died is justified from sin” (Romans 6:7), he has a good reason to celebrate Christ’s death. He will want to gather at every opportunity to be reminded of the life that is his because of that death on Calvary. No one will need remind him of it nor urge him to come to the Lord’s Table. He will come gladly and joyfully and participate in the feast wholeheartedly and with his mind centered on the price paid for his redemption.

But suppose an individual comes to this table knowing that Christ died for him, but refusing to apply the benefit of His death. Although he knows the meaning of this death, realizing that in Christ’s death is the only opportunity of forgiveness for sin and hope of immortality; he rejects the whole plan, and refuses to be united with Christ in the likeness of his death through baptism. Then how can he celebrate this death? Knowing that he is outside the Kingdom of God, knowing that he will go to his grave without a ray of hope, knowing that he has refused the very means of life Christ’s death offers, how can he lift the cup to his lips and the bread to his tongue with the giving of thanks? In so doing he would only be reminding himself that condemnation awaits him. Therefore the apostle wrote that he eats and drinks judgment unto himself!

THE UNWORTHY MANNER

This expression, “unworthy manner,” refers to your manners and not to your personal worthiness. No one is actually “worthy,” in the sense of being sinless. We are each made to feel our unworthiness most deeply as we think of Christ’s death, made necessary by our sinfulness. If therefore, we waited until we felt “worthy” we would wait forever, and never partake of the communion. Nor is it proper to ask God to make us “worthy” to partake. Indeed He has cleansed us from sin through Christ, and thus already made us worthy to come into His presence. But as for the manner in which we eat and drink the supper, the command is that we “prove” or examine ourselves. (I Cor. 11:28). Only the individual can know in his heart if he is a true believer. Only the individual can govern his thoughts, and “discern” (consider) the meaning of Christ’s death. Of course, to go

through the motions and eat and drink the supper, but fail to recognize its meaning is to eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

FEAST OF JOY

Coming to the Lord's Table with faith in Him and His word, knowing Christ has met fully the penalty for our sin, the feast becomes one full of joy and gladness. Too bad that some have surrounded it with mystery and ghost-like qualities and such somber notes of doubt and fear that often it is more like a fast of sorrow than a feast of joy. It is to be solemn, but not sad. True, the Lord suffered untold agony on the cross; this we could not and would not forget. But scripture states that it was for the "JOY" that was set before him" that Jesus suffered death on the cross. It was joy because it was the culmination of Cod's plan to redeem man from sin and reconcile him to Cod. It was joy because it was the opening of the door of life and immortality. It was joy because the death of Christ was to result in the defeat of death itself. It was joy in that every person who is united in the death of Jesus rolls out from under the load of sin and its penalty, death.

God has "appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness" through Jesus Christ (Acts 17:31). All history is working toward this day. All of God's revelation is focused upon this Day of the Lord and the final destiny of all mankind. God will not forget it. It is as if He thought of nothing else. His patience and long-suffering, the withholding of His wrath upon evil until all have repented who will repent, all emphasizes the approaching day, and the fact that God remembers! But man is prone to forget. He cannot be reminded too often: hence the Lord's Supper, to remind us that judgment and death is our destiny—but for Christ and our perpetual faith in Him.

No wonder that this supper was known from the beginning as the "Eucharist," because the Creek word, "Eucharist" simply means thanksgiving. And as Jesus lifted the cup and took the bread and gave thanks, so every true Christian comes to the Lord's Table to give thanks for the victory accomplished for him on Calvary.

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes" (1 Cor. 11:26).

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