

The Lord's Supper as Presented in Scripture.

A LAYMAN'S VIEW.

III. THE LORD'S SUPPER AS A COMMUNION. (I Cor. x.)

"Grace be unto you and peace, from him which *is*, and which *was*, and which *is to come*; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful Witness, and the first-begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that *loveth* us, and *washed* us from our sins in his own blood. . . . Behold *he cometh* with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him; and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." *Revelation* i. 4, 5, 7.

IN these verses we see that the Eternal God, the Son of the Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, no longer, since He has become a man, speaks of Himself as the unconditioned "I am," but in terms of time, as He "which is, and which was and which is to come." He uses human language here to express the Godhead, for we never can say "I am," but we can speak of past, present, and future. "He is," for we read He "loveth us"; this is the present aspect of Christ as connected with His love; "He was," for He "washed us"; this is the past of Christ as connected with His sacrifice; "He is to come," for "He cometh"; this is the future of Christ as connected with His return.

In like manner, the Lord's Supper has these three aspects of time: past, present and future. The past and the future are found in I Corinthians xi. He washed us from our sins, therefore we recall His death in the past; He is coming with clouds in the future, and therefore we "do this" until He come. But here we have to do with I Corinthians x., which is not primarily concerning the past—what Christ has done, nor the future—His return; but is the ineffable present of the love of Christ which passes knowledge. So that in this chapter we have before us those three words, "He loveth us"; for the love of a present and living Lord is the subject of I Corinthians x.

In the first few verses of I Corinthians x. we find (as I have already said) a distinct allusion to the two sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is clearly prefigured in the crossing of the Red Sea—"Our fathers . . . were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea." As to eating the bread and drinking the wine, we read: "And did all eat the same spiritual

meat and did all drink the same spiritual drink ; for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them ; and that Rock was Christ."

In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we eat a spiritual meat ; in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we drink a spiritual drink. It is true that then the literal drink was water, and now the spiritual drink is blood, because for us " He came not by water only, but by water and by blood " ; and this is symbolized in the bread and in the wine upon the table.

Now turn to chapter x. 15, "I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say." We are thus commanded here to use the wisdom that God has given us to discriminate the truth of what is said ; we are to judge what is written in this Scripture because it is very deep ; it is so deep indeed that no man by his own wisdom alone can fathom the depth of the next two verses. It is an unique and profound view of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The whole passage is a testimony to verbal inspiration ; for if the very words of the next two verses were not given by the Holy Spirit, St. Paul would hardly have used words entirely different from those in the next chapter, and it is probable we should have had many more of them. The alteration or addition of a single word may make all the difference between truth and error in these profound mysteries. I know no other inspiration but verbal inspiration (combined with, and not opposed to, plenary inspiration). I cannot conceive of God supplying thoughts, and then leaving to men the words in which those thoughts are to be expressed ; and in many ways we get good evidence that the words of Scripture are the words of God. If, for example, our four Evangelists had written the four Gospels in their own words, though they might have been generally inspired to do so, they would certainly have written four narratives very different from those we have. If there be one thing more than another that the Eastern delights in, it is descriptions ; full of epithets and adjectives expressing his delight and wonder in the subject of his narrative. It therefore strikes us dumb with amazement to find that from beginning to end of the four Gospels no adjectives express the delight with which they wrote of Christ ; no epithets are attached to His Holy Name. With cold pens and yet with burning hearts, they simply wrote down the bare narrative, and expressed neither surprise nor delight nor admiration nor love in what they were

writing ; no Eastern could do that, unless his pen was held by another Hand than his own.

In the last chapter we considered the Lord's Supper as a remembrance—a looking back to the past. Here we have the present communion with the risen Lord Christ. There is no " Jesus " in this chapter. " Jesus " has to do with the past when He was on earth ; this is communion now with the Lord Christ—the present aspect of the Lord's Supper.

The cup in this 10th chapter is definitely placed before the bread ; and this was probably the practice in the first century of the Christian Church ; but the practice now—as in the institution—is for the bread to be taken first and then the cup. Why then is the order given in 1 Corinthians x. the reverse of that in the 11th chapter ? Because our blessing is first of all individual ; we come as individual sinners to Christ ; afterwards the blessing is corporate, and connected with the whole Church. Though this is not the order in the Holy Communion, it is the way we approach the Divine sacrifice, the way it reaches us from our standpoint ; for the cup comes historically in our experience before the bread.

Moreover the cup refers to Christ alone ; the bread refers to Christ, and also to His Church.

Notice again, the word is " the cup " ; not " the wine." I have mentioned already that the Bible never speaks of bread and wine but of the bread and the cup. I have said I do not know the reason. I will however make two suggestions that may be probably true, and partly answer the question. First of all it is what we see ; we see the bread but do not see the wine if the wine be in a cup. The other suggestion is this. As the Lord may have foreseen, down the ages many difficulties arising in some countries of procuring wine, the question of what is in the cup is not insisted on ; it is never called wine, although there is no doubt it was wine and should be wine. At the same time if there is something else than wine in the cup, it is still the cup ; for the emphasis is not on the wine but on the cup, and therefore whatever is in the cup is spiritually the blood of Christ, and we so drink of it. I know of some parts in China where wine cannot be got, they use some other fluid, nevertheless it is the Lord's Supper ; and I daresay if we could see with an omniscient eye the practice over the world, we should be surprised to find in the cup how many substitutes for wine the circumstances required.

As I have said, the cup is mentioned first here, for "Without shedding of blood there is no remission," and our first connexion is with the blood of Christ.

Then I learn my corporate blessing—Himself and His Church. What I learn first in the cup is what He *has done* for me; then secondly I learn in the bread what He *is* to me, a living Christ "Who loveth me."

We see therefore the reversed order here is most significant, and wise men who judge what Paul says will understand the reason of the change.

But let us look further at these two profound verses.

"The cup of blessing which we bless" (verse 16). *We* bless.

May I be allowed here to refer to the wonderful words of a great teacher (I refer to the late Dean Alford) on this word "we" and the force of it:—

"It is not the act of the minister as by any authority taken to himself, but only as representative of the many."

"We being many are one body"; "We" here means the many or their representatives; the one who gives thanks at the Lord's table, does not give thanks, according to Scripture, and according to the Dean, by any authority in himself, but on the part of the many.

Dean Alford goes on to say: "The figment of sacerdotal consecration of the elements by transmuted power is as alien from the apostolic writings as it is from the spirit of the Gospel."

There with one blow, which is the more remarkable as coming from a dignitary of the National Church, is laid low all professions of priestly position at the table of the Lord.

Having referred to this Church authority, I may call attention also to the Bishop of Oxford who, I believe, denies that there is any transubstantiation or change of the elements, any repetition of the sacrifice or any reservation taught in Scripture.

"We." What do we do? "The cup of blessing which we (all of us together) bless." We must once more point out it is God Whom we bless; so we might read "the cup for which we give thanks" (see Matt. xxvi. 27), for the One to Whom we give thanks the One Whom we bless.

The "cup of blessing" is full of blessing for us, and we should not be at the Lord's Supper at all but for the blood of Christ. We

bless Him because He blesses us. Every one who blesses God for the cup placed in his hands, does so because that cup has proved a cup of blessing to his soul in the blood of Christ. All comes first of all from God; and then having received Divine life, our thanks flow out in a stream of praise back to the God Who gave it; and "we love Him because He first loved us." This is the double stream of blessing—the Divine circulation of eternal life.

God is the One blessed; the cup is not itself blessed, adored or elevated.

"Is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" The communion. What is communion? Communion is an intelligent participation with Christ, first of all in the spiritual blessing we receive by drinking, and then by the spiritual sacrifice of praises we offer to Him. We drink and thus we have materially partaken of the cup; but spiritually with discernment, we have communion, not primarily with one another as all drinking out of one cup, but with Christ as sharing the virtues of His shed blood, and therefore we bless and praise. Drinking is material; blessing is spiritual; the one is partaking of the cup; the other the communion of the blood of Christ, and the two, alas! do not always go together.

Now we turn to the bread. "The bread which we break." Observe again, it is not Christ Who breaks; it is we who do everything, since it is the present action that is here referred to. The word is "break." I think we must insist on the breaking. In the East, as I have shown, it is not a question of a loaf of bread; they had only a biscuit which could not be cut; it had to be broken violently—fractured. Do not shrink from the idea that the body of Christ was broken, because it says "a bone of Him shall not be broken." Though His bones were not broken (the bones of the thieves were broken), His body was broken; it was violently rent by the thrust of the spear and the driving of the nails. His body was broken for us; and this broken bread is His body to those who discern it in the eating of it spiritually. Do not refuse: this particular word "broken," which is found a great many times in Scripture, is specially used for the violent breaking of bread. The literal body was broken, pierced and rent, but the mystic body of Christ can never be broken or rent.

"For we being many are one bread and one body." Why

are we one bread? Because we all partake of the one bread. We, the many, the communicants, who partake of the Lord's Supper, are literally one bread. We were not one bread before communion, though always one body as baptized by the Spirit, but we become one bread when we have all eaten a part of the one bread that is on the Lord's table. This is a material fact; it is no question here of spirituality; it is a fact that the bread which was on the table makes those amongst whom it is divided symbolically one bread. We are one bread because we all have eaten a part of the same loaf. That is the simple word of the Apostle; but it is most beautifully guarded as we shall see. We are one bread thus, by literally partaking, by materially eating; but we are all shown to be one spiritually, because the bread spiritually to us is the body of Christ, not only personally but corporately. "Now ye are Christ's body (the 'the' is omitted) and members in particular" (1 Cor. xii. 27). This then is the deep mystery of the double meaning of the word "body," referring here, as it does, both to Christ and His people.

Observe it does not say only that we are one bread, or that we are one body; but it says: "we . . . are one bread, one body," thereby distinguishing the material act from its spiritual meaning, while connecting the two. In the material act we are one bread at the time because we have all eaten of it; and this recalls the fact that we are all permanently one body and are all partaking spiritually of the one body of Christ. "For as the body is one and hath many members, and all the members of that one body being many are one body; so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body" (1 Cor. xii. 12, 13).¹

One may here point out a fact which is I grant of secondary importance, but is still of great interest—that on this table there is only one loaf. If you had looked at the table in the wilderness, you would have found twelve loaves there because they represented the twelve tribes of Israel; you find two or three in the Jewish Feast in the land; why not have two now on the table as representing Jew and Gentile? Because both are one in the Christ, and this bread represents the one body, the one Christ. Its meaning, as we have seen, is extended in this 10th chapter to represent not only "Christ" but "the Christ," for we being many are one bread and one body,

¹ I do not go here into the deeper development of the thought, in the revelation of the mystery in Ephesians.

all spiritually united in figure in this bread. We must fully understand and enjoy the spiritual reality in the material figure. If we fail in this, there can be very little communion, and there may be none ; we can partake of the Lord's Supper without communion ; without being communicants strictly speaking. There are two words here used—the one is to partake, and the other is to commune ; the former means an outward and material participation, the other an inward and spiritual union. Any one can break the bread, but it is not to them the communion of the body of Christ unless it be partaken of with spiritual discernment ; that is why we read about “ not discerning the Lord's body.” Therefore many people may partake who are not communicants, because *a communicant is one who spiritually realizes the meaning of the material act.*

Therefore also the cup which we bless, “ is it not the communion ? ” Yes, if we receive it spiritually we have communion with Christ in the taking of it ; but not otherwise.

We have noticed there is no “ Jesus ” before us here. It is the blood of Christ, Who is present with us in resurrection life. “ Where two or three are gathered together there am I.” Who is the “ I ” ? Christ, the risen Christ present with those who intelligently commune with Him at the Lord's Supper. There is no word here of eating or drinking ; we bless the cup but it does not ever say we drink of it ; it is “ the bread that we break,” but it does not say we eat of it ; not because this is doubted, but because it is taken for granted, and is done by all. But the communion is not taken for granted, nor as a matter of course ; some may eat and drink without having communion in either the body or the blood of Christ ; so it is the communion, not the eating, that is expressed. Communion is the whole point ; there is not remembrance here, there is no “ showing,” the Scripture is absolutely absorbed by the present individual and corporate blessing, realized to the full in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us in closing just look at the order in the argument in verses 14-21.

We are told in the 14th verse to flee from idolatry, because in the verses 15, 16, and 17, the Christian at the Lord's table is in communion with Christ. In the 18th verse Israel was the same in their sacrifices. So are the heathen in verse 21 in sacrificing ; for though

(v. 19) the idols mean nothing, yet behind the idols (v. 20), are the devils with whom we are in communion if we eat at their table. In other words, those who eat at the table are in communion with what is represented on that table—at the table of the heathen, communion with devils, at the Lord's Supper, communion with Christ.

May He in His love grant that we may all personally realize in taking the Lord's Supper the full joy of that communion of which we have spoken.

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(Next and final article: "The Lord's Supper as Spiritual Food.")

