

THE LORD'S SUPPER

by John Angell James

My dear friends, I propose in this address to make some remarks on the Lord's Supper, and to lay down some rules for the right observance of this solemn and affecting ordinance. You cannot fail to be struck with the truly spiritual nature of the Christian religion, and the contrast to Judaism, which, in this view of it, is presented to the careful observer. Speaking of the law of Moses, the apostle says, "They are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings--external regulations applying until the time of the new order." Hebrews 9:10. Hence also the terms of depreciation in which he speaks of the ceremonial law, calling it the "flesh," "the elements of this world," "beggarly elements," "the letter," and other designations of similar import, 2 Cor. 3; Gal. 4:5. These rites and ceremonies, with all the visible pomp and splendor of the legal worship, were solemnly obligatory upon the Jews, because enjoined by God, and were proper for the church at that time, for it was then in a state of infancy and childhood, Gal. 4:1-3, and was not prepared for the full and clear revelation of unveiled truth it was taught by these shadows—as by a kind of hieroglyphic Bible in the hands of a schoolmaster.

But when Christ came, who was the substance of this shadowy system, truth was no longer to be principally taught by ceremony—but by doctrine; not by rites, which, however gorgeous, were still obscure—but by explicit and plain declaration. This is the true distinction between Judaism and Christianity; the truths taught are the same in both—but the manner of teaching is essentially different. This is the meaning of the expression, "The law was given by Moses—but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," John 1:17. The word, "truth," here stands opposed, not to falsehood—but to shadow. So again, our Lord in his discourse with the woman of Samaria, tells her that the hour was coming when 'sanctity of place', as the seat of Divine worship, would be abolished—and men would every where worship God, who is a Spirit, "*in Spirit and in truth*," John

4:23, 24; that is, he would be worshiped not only in sincerity with the heart, for such worship God required under the law—but with *spiritual offerings of truth*, instead of ceremonial and shadowy ones.

Hence a disposition to multiply, or to exalt ceremonies in religious worship now, is to misunderstand the nature of the Christian dispensation, and to go back again to Judaism—to go down from our high standing as the disciples of Jesus, the Great Teacher of a spiritual system, and become again the pupils of Moses as our schoolmaster in the 'preparatory school of rites and ceremonies'. This is one of the errors of Popery, which is in this respect the Jewish form of Christianity. It lays great stress on the external circumstances, and tangible instrumentality of religion. Unlike the apostles, it makes 'things of time, and place, and manner', essential to godliness; it aims to hold the soul in subjection, not so much by faith in invisible realities, which are directed exclusively to the judgment, as by the aid of objects which appeal to the senses and the imagination—it thrusts 'man' between the soul and God; hides the priesthood of Christ behind a *human* priesthood; and makes the communication of grace inseparable from external rites and ceremonies.

These external rites and ceremonies are the soul of Popery, which is not content with a worship of spirit and truth—but must have fuming incense, beautiful paintings, exquisite music, and a gorgeous and imposing ceremonial. And this, its advocates tell us, is to render their worship worthy the Great God to whom it is offered. Worthy of God! As if he who is Spirit, could take peculiar pleasure in silver and gold, purple and fine linen. But did he not ordain these things, or something like them, under the law? Yes; but not under the gospel—and under the law, not because he delighted in them on their own account, as if they were worthy of his magnificent nature, or could convey adequate ideas of himself—but simply because they were a *shadow* of good things to come, and intended, as being considered the most glorious of earthly things, to convey an impressive idea of the excellence of spiritual things under the gospel. Amid all the grandeur of the Jewish temple and its worship, this very glory was a confession of the weakness and unprofitableness

thereof. And what is all that contention going on in our day, by many who are not Papists, for the efficacy of sacraments; for altars with lighted candles upon them; for crucifixes and bowings; for saints' days; for rites, ceremonies, and outward observances? What is it, I say—but a substitution of the flesh for the spirit; bodily exercises for the living spiritualities of the heart; and which teaches men to be externally religious, without being godly!

Never forget, my dear friends, that you are placed under an eminently spiritual economy, and that the religion which God demands of you, and delights in and will accept, is a religion of the heart; a religion of penitence and faith in Christ, love to God, hope of heaven, hatred of sin, charity to man—all existing in the soul as so many godly affections, called forth in the actions of a holy life, and rendered vocal in words of prayer and praise.

For the support of these, he has instituted the ordinances of his house and the other means of grace. These ordinances, and these only, we are to observe in such manner, and for such purposes, as he himself has prescribed. We have no more right to enlarge the design of God's ordinances, than we have to multiply their number. We must take them as they are delivered to us, and use them for the ends laid down, without investing them with any new character, or directing them to any new purpose; and ever recollecting that their object is defeated, when they are rested in as ultimate ends, and not used as means to holy affections, and a godly life. As tests of our submission to the will of God; as adapted to suggest godly reflection, and promote spiritual feeling; as calculated to bring before our minds the great objects of faith and hope; as intended to quicken our love, which is the principle of all acceptable obedience; and in these views of them, as ordinances with which God has promised, when they are rightly observed, to connect the communications of his grace, they are of inestimable worth! But when raised above this, and made channels exclusive, and essential to the communication of grace from the Divine fountain, they are exalted beyond measure, and instead of leading the soul on to God, detain it from him. How inferior even the sacraments are, in some views of them, to the preaching of the gospel, may be learned from the conduct of

our Lord, John 4:2, and of the apostle, 1 Cor. 1:14-17.

I now go on to consider the LORD'S SUPPER, and a due observance of it. To a right attendance on this blessed ordinance, it is indispensable you should have a clear understanding of **its nature and design**. Perhaps a few lines may be well devoted to an explanation of the terms by which it is designated. In the New Testament it is called the "Lord's Supper," 1 Cor. 11:20; because instituted by Christ, and in commemoration of him—"Breaking of Bread," Acts 2:42; as expressive of one of its principal acts—"the communion of the body and blood of Christ," 1 Cor. 10:16; which signifies that those who thus commune together are spiritual partakers of the body and blood of Christ. To these have been added, by men uninspired, other terms, such as "the Eucharist," which comes from a Greek term signifying "thanksgiving," because, like Christ, we give thanks in receiving it, 1 Cor. 10:16—the cup of blessing, for which we give thanks.

"The **sacrament**," which comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, and meant the military oath of fidelity, which the Roman soldiers took to their general. This term, so much used, is thus borrowed from Paganism, and is no great favorite with those who in their phraseology wish to keep close to Scripture. Much less proper is it to call the communion table "the **altar**." This is Popish. An altar supposes a sacrifice; it was designed for this purpose, and had no other use. Now it is very consistent for the Roman Catholics to call the communion table an altar, because they believe that a true and proper, though unbloody sacrifice, is offered up every time mass is celebrated. But for Protestants, who profess to reject this Popish notion, to speak of "*the altar*," is improper and inconsistent. Let us, then, confine ourselves, as much as possible, to the phraseology of the Scriptures, and call it the Lord's Supper, or the Communion.

The Lord's Supper serves various uses. It is, like baptism, a standing witness for the authenticity of the Christian history—it was instituted at the time of our Lord's death, has been continued in uninterrupted observance ever since, and could not have been palmed upon the world by imposture,

at any subsequent period.

It is a permanent and strong proof to all Christians of the Divinity and atonement of Christ—of his Divinity, for if he is not God, the Deity is excluded from this prominent Christian observance, which would be therefore on this account a species of idolatry paid to a creature. It is an announcement of the atonement exhibited by his blood as the means of the remission of sins, and it exhibits the unity of the Christian church. "We being many," says the apostle, "are one loaf"—many parts of one loaf. 1 Cor. 10: 17

But the more specific design of the Lord's Supper, *is to commemorate by the assembled church*, the death of Christ as a sacrifice of atonement for sin. It is of importance here to ascertain the precise view we are to take of what we actually receive, when we partake of what are called the *elements*, that is, the bread and the wine. The **Papists** contend that by the prayer of consecration offered by the priest, the bread and the wine are *transubstantiated*, that is, their substance is changed into the true body, soul, and Divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ—so that the receiver of the bread and wine, truly eats the body, soul, and Divinity of Christ. This astounding absurdity is called *transubstantiation*.

The **Lutheran** church rejects this—but adopts another absurdity almost as great, called *consubstantiation*, by which is meant that the true nature of bread and wine remains—but that *with* it, is the true nature of Christ in some way or other united.

Then come those Christians, who contend for what is called the **Real Presence**; by which is intended, that Christ is mystically present in, or with the bread and wine. But it is in their souls, and not in the bread and wine; it is with their minds, and wills, and hearts, as they receive the bread and wine, to render the reception thereof strengthening, comforting, edifying; to strengthen their faith in the thing signified, as they receive the sign. This is sacramental grace, and sacramental efficacy; grace from God the Holy Spirit, accompanying the reception of the elements, and blessing to the soul this appeal to the faith of the Christian through the

medium of his senses. The emblems of bread and wine, then, are **emblematic** and **commemorative**; the whole of their design and benefit, as to themselves, is to remind us of Christ; and their efficiency for this purpose, is the work of Divine grace. They are nothing, however duly administered, apart from the state of mind of the receiver. They are 'truth in emblem', and as truth alone, thus presented to us, they do us any good.

The *gospel* is truth in significant words; and the *sacraments*, as they are called, are truth in significant emblems. In both cases, it is *the truth*, whether in words or signs, that is blessed by the Spirit of God to the soul. It is not as a sacrament having some mystical efficacy in itself, some spiritual power in the bread and the wine, that the Lord's Supper is a benefit to the soul; but it is as a significant emblem of the body and blood of Christ, offered in sacrifice for sin, that it does any good to the soul of the receiver. Thus the same exercises of mind must be carried on in partaking of the Lord's Supper as in hearing the gospel. We must, at the time, attend to the truth conveyed; this we must understand; by this we must be instructed, comforted, and edified, through faith; the bread and the wine can do us no more good, with whatever superstitious reverence received, if our minds are not directed by them in faith to Christ crucified, than the words of Scripture upon the tongue, can do us good without any intelligent notions of their meaning in the mind.

When we meet at the Lord's table, then, it is to eat bread and drink wine in **remembrance** of Christ; to be put in penitent, believing, loving, grateful, obedient remembrance of *him*. In this state of mind we are to go to the table of the Lord—not to expect grace in some mystical way and manner, because an 'ordained minister' says to us, "Receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ." We receive grace by understanding and believing the truth of Christ's death for sinners, so impressively set forth by the broken bread and poured out wine. This is what the apostle calls "*discerning the Lord's body.*"

There can be no doubt that the participation of the Lord's Supper was designed, not only to be an act of communion in

Christ's body and blood with his chosen and redeemed flock—but **an act of personal communion also between the individual recipient and our crucified Lord.** Then does the soul of the believer seem to have all its inlets opened for the flowing in from the Divine source of the fullness that is in Christ Jesus. It is then the attention is arrested with peculiar powers, the judgment made clear for the perception of truth, and the heart softened to receive its deepest impression. It is at his table that Jesus makes himself known in the breaking of bread, and leads the astonished and delighted disciple to exclaim in glad surprise, "It is the Lord!" What streams of grace have then descended, at the solicitation of believing prayer, from the Holy Spirit! And in the simple acts of receiving the significant emblems of bread and wine, the intelligent Christian has entered deeply and joyfully into the meaning of those wondrous, but much abused words, "those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them at the last day. For my flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink." John 6:54, 55. The glorious truth of a body broken, and its blood shed, as a sacrifice for sins, with all the grace to render it a means of light, life, and joy—came on, and spread through the soul, as the lips received the symbols of the sacred realities.

There needed no such mystery as any incorporation of the presence of Christ with the bread and wine—that impossible blending of what is spiritual with what is material; much less, if possible, of any such absurdity as the transmutation of the elements into the person of the Savior. The soul realized in itself the vitalizing presence of its Divine Lord, in a manner far above all the apprehensions of unenlightened, unsanctified reason—but not opposed to all its powers of analysis and sober conclusions. Were it possible to conceive of such a thing as eating the body and blood, soul and Divinity, of Christ, and such an intercommunion between the material and spiritual part of our nature as that what is received into the stomach shall benefit the soul, what could it do more for the believer in the way of personal and religious benefit, that is, in the way of holiness, love, and joy, than he is conscious of in the reception of bread and wine, viewed as the mere symbols of the body and blood of the Savior?

This view may be too plain and simple for those who wish to exalt the ministry into a priesthood; and it may be too intelligible and low for those people who have a love for the mystical and the marvelous; whose piety is rather a thing of the imagination, than of the judgment, heart, and conscience; and who are more pleased with the alternate 'awe and ecstasy of superstition', than with the intelligible and tranquil peace of simple faith. But for the spiritually-minded Christian, who walks by faith, and desires to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, its simplicity is, next to its scriptural authority, its highest commendation. All beyond it savors more of the Old Testament patriarchs—than of the apostles; and presents the accumulating corruptions of traditional and ecclesiastical authority—rather than the purity of the faith once delivered to the saints.

Observe, then, my dear friends, what you have to do when you assemble to partake of the Lord's Supper—TO REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST. And what concerning him should you remember? What should you *forget*? Remember his Divine nature, as the brightness of his Father's glory, and as God over all—his incarnation, as the Word made flesh—his various and complicated sufferings in body and soul—his agony in the garden—his atoning death upon the cross—his resurrection for our justification—his ascension into heaven—his sitting at the right hand of his Father—his perpetual and prevailing intercession—his second advent to raise the dead, judge the world, and receive his people to himself. Blessed topics! Delightful employment to think of them! Approach the table at each time of access, with new and deeper penitence for sin; livelier faith in Christ; more fervent gratitude; more intense love—with more entire self-consecration to God; and, at the same time, with more charity to the world, and more brotherly kindness to the church.

Do not seek, nor covet the mere exercises of imagination; as if you could derive no benefit unless Christ was seen by *the eye of the imagination*, as hanging, bleeding, and expiring on the cross. The Catholics have crucifixes for the bodily eye, and many Protestants covet something like them

for the eye of the imagination. But the proper exercise of the mind at the time of receiving the Lord's Supper, is *faith*, not *fancy*; faith in the doctrine of a Savior crucified for the sins of the world. It is not the emotion that is produced by a tragedy, which is appropriate at that solemn scene—but the affection awakened by believing the report of some act of suffering love on our account. There should be a sweet mixture of sorrow and joy; love and gratitude; faith and hope. All the elements of true piety should be called into active and harmonious operation. Superstitious awe and dread, mystical and unintelligible raptures, are inappropriate at that scene, where **faith** looks back to the first advent of Christ, when he paid the price of our redemption; and **hope** anticipates his second appearance, when "he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him." Hebrews 9:28.

Follow the apostolic **directions**, and tremble at the apostolic **warnings**. "Whoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily," that is, ignorant of its design; from improper motives; in an irreverent manner; living in the commission of known and unrepented sin, or in the neglect of known duty; holding anger to a brother, or malice to any other, "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord," that is, shall be guilty of profaning the signs of the body and blood of Christ, and treating with contempt the crucified body itself. "But let a man examine himself." Let him at his first and every subsequent approach, inquire into his object, motives, and general state of mind in coming to the Lord's table; let him pause and ask himself, whether he understands what he is about to do, why he does it, and whether he is doing it in a right state of mind—in penitence, faith, holiness, and love.

Let examination precede every approach to the table—set apart some time on the Saturday evening, or Sabbath morning, when a solemn survey of the conduct since the last observance of the Supper took place, and an inquisitive scrutiny of the present state of the heart, shall be instituted, that with due knowledge of your sins, deep penitence on account of them, lively faith in the blood of Jesus for renewed forgiveness, and fresh application for the Spirit's aid in newness of life, you might take and eat. Do not rush

thoughtlessly and irreverently to the table of the Lord. A Christian, I know, *should be always* prepared—but *is* he? Alas! no—then let him, by solemn meditation, examination, and prayer, prepare for the sacred observance. "For he who eats and drinks unworthily, eats and drinks damnation," that is, judgment or condemnation, "to himself," brings down upon himself the displeasure of the Lord. Yes, if he is in a state of sin, or ignorance, and continues therein, and repents not, he does eat and drink *damnation*, in the fullest and most awful sense of the term. Every sin brings condemnation upon the soul, if not repented of, and unworthily receiving the Lord's Supper. None will more certainly perish, and none more awfully, than the sinful observers of this ordinance. Such people do "not discern the Lord's body," that is, they do not distinguish the design for which Christ died, and do not therefore either truly believe it, or practically comply with it—but go on in sin, notwithstanding they comply outwardly with an institute, which, as it represents the death of Christ *for* sin, binds them to depart *from* sin. Fearful idea! To prostitute the Lord's Supper by receiving it, while living in known sin; and thus to oppose the design of Christ's giving his body to be broken, while outwardly observing that ordinance in which his death for sin is set forth.

My dear friends, at each approach to the table, blend in the state of your mind, a joyful celebration of the means by which you are delivered from the guilt of all past sin, and as joyful and hearty a celebration of the means by which you are to be delivered from the power and dominion of all future sin. Enter into the full meaning of the word *redemption*, as including not only deliverance from the punishment of sin in hell—but from the present tyranny of sin on earth. As you take the cup, realize in it the solemn pledge which every receiver gives, of a life of holy devotedness to Christ.

Nor let your remembrance of Christ be confined to that scene of devout commemoration. That act is not to be regarded as releasing you *from* every other remembrance of Jesus—but as binding you *to* every other kind of remembrance. Remember Jesus Christ *habitually* as your Savior—for your comfort. Remember him as your

example—for your guidance. When, through the power of temptation and the lack of watchfulness, you have fallen into sin, remember him with compunction and contrition, and yet with faith, as willing to receive the penitent backslider. Remember him in solitude—as a companion ever near. Remember him amid the death and inconstancy of relatives or acquaintances—as a Friend that sticks closer than a brother. Remember him in the dark hour of sorrow—as a Divine Comforter. Remember him when tempted—as your support and shield. And in the last hour of mortal conflict, fix your mind upon him—as the Conqueror of death, the Destroyer of the grave, and the Lord of eternity! Never let a day pass in which you have not some thoughts of Christ to comfort, quicken, and edify your soul.

Among the rules for his daily conduct which the godly Lavater suspended in his study, and seriously read every night and morning, the following is far from being the least important, "I will not do or design anything which I would omit, if Jesus Christ were standing visibly before me, or which I suppose he would not perform, if he were in my situation. I will, with the assistance of God, accustom myself to do everything in the name of Jesus Christ; and as his disciple, to sigh every hour to God for the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and be always disposed to prayer."

Happy the believer who thus remembers Jesus Christ. This is spiritual religion, and for this purpose we approach the table of the Lord—not to confine our recollection of him to that one scene and season—but that we may there gain strength and grace to remember him habitually!

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