

The Baptist Position on the Lord's Supper

By Chester E. Tulga, D.D.

"Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them unto you." (I Cor. 11:2)

"Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:41-42)

"Since the supper is an ordinance of the church, it must inevitably follow that whatever would debar a man from the church must also debar him from the Lord's table in that church. It is logically inconceivable that one should be deprived of membership in the church and yet not also be deprived of coming to the Lord's Table in that church, since the first privilege is the source and foundation of the second." George W. Truett (The Supper Of Our Lord, p. 19)

"That the local church is the custodian of this ordinance, and must judge of the qualifications of those desiring to partake of it, is shown by the fact that the command to observe it was given, not to individuals, but to a company (Luke 22:29,30). Manifestly, this table is inside and not outside the church. The church alone can, therefore, be charged with the responsibility of its government. The local church is the only body known to the Scriptures which has any competency or jurisdiction in the government of her two ordinances." George W. Truett (The Supper Of Our Lord, pp. 20-21)

New Testament Baptists hold that the New Testament is our sole authority on the nature of the ordinances and the manner of their observance.

We disagree flatly with those who hold fellowship between Christians more important than observing the ordinances according to the Scriptures. This is a principle which has disastrous results in evangelical interdenominationalism, where obedience to the whole Word of God has been subordinated to religious fellowship and activity. The Lord's Supper was not given in order that Christians might commune with each other, but in order that they might commune with the Lord. It is a divine ordinance, not a religious festival.

The Nature of the Lord's Supper

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (I Cor. 10:16)

The Supper is the Lord's Supper. Since this is true, He alone must prescribe the rules regulating and governing it. He alone is to say what and how and why and where concerning it. This He had done in His Word.

God's people have no authority nor option to set aside the Word of God. It is not their table. If it were, then they might invite their friends according to their inclinations. If the table belonged to men they might invite whosoever they would.

Human sentiment does not govern it. Long established customs have no authority apart from the Word of God. The Lord's Supper belongs to the Lord. It is under the administration of the local church. The Church is under the authority of the Word of God. The ordinances are to be administered scripturally, and for hundreds of years the church has considered that it is its duty to administer it according to the Word of God, and even to ex-communicate under some circumstances.

The Lord's Supper is for scripturally baptized disciples within the Local Church

Our Lord gave the Supper to His baptized disciples, not to the world. If this is true, then the first pre-requisite in coming to the Lord's Table is that one must be a baptized Christian, born of the Spirit and baptized in the manner set forth in the Scriptures. In the Scriptures the order of the ordinances is clear. "For they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers." (Acts 2:41 & 42)

D. B. Ray (Baptist Succession, p. 220) says, "And the commission itself fixes baptism as the first duty after believing (Matt. 28:19 & 20); therefore, under the commission no one can commune before baptism. The communion is one of those things which is commanded to be observed after baptism."

Robert C. Walton (The Gathered Community, p. 165) says, "Baptism is the normal means of entrance into the Christian Church and of access to the Lord's Table. Both in the New Testament times and throughout Church History an unbaptized Christian has been, in general, a contradiction in terms. It is ironical to the last degree that Baptists, of all people, should have come increasingly to despise baptism, and to admit to membership unbaptized persons. Whilst we reject Infant Baptism and cling tenaciously to the form of immersion, we are apparently complaisant that church members should not be baptized at all."

The Statement of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland (The Lord's Supper, p. 33) says, "We believe that, although there is no statement on the point in the New Testament, our brethren who belong to 'Closed Communion' Churches are undoubtedly right in maintaining that membership of the Christian Church and therefore presumably participation in the Lord's Supper, seems in the earliest days to have been confined to persons who were baptized upon profession of faith. We honor the sincerity and earnestness of those who have contended for this aspect of the truth, sometimes under very great difficulties. We believe the Church of Christ today would be infinitely had it not been for their witness."

The historic denominations for hundreds of years, the Catholics and Anabaptists before them, have always held to this order: baptism, church membership and then communion. They have always reserved the right to refuse communion to anyone considered heretical or unworthy.

**The Lord's Supper
is only for Christians
who are walking orderly before God**

Paul says, "But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolator, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no not to eat." (I Cor. 5:11 & 13) The obligation here to break company does not rest upon the "conscience" of the disorderly, but upon the believer to break company and walk no more with the disorderly.

Again, Paul said, "But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils." (II Cor. 10:20 & 21) We are sure that Paul would apply this prohibition our day to apostates who have departed from the faith, "giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." (I Tim. 4:1)

Again we are told, "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which ye received of us." (II Thess. 3:6) Here again the separation is not left to the "conscience" of the disorderly, but Paul commands the believer to take the initiative. Such a person is to be disfellowshipped, if all efforts to recover him from his disorder fails.

John, in effect, demands the same, "Whosoever transgresseth and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him godspeed: For he that biddeth him godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds." (II John 9 -11) Here again the initiative is to be taken by the believer in breaking off all relations with those who deny the doctrine of Christ as set forth in the Scriptures. This definitely forbids, among other things, any type of communion with modernists and apostates who deny or pervert the New Testament Christ.

Again, the Lord's Supper is not for churches torn with strife and factions. Later in his first epistle to the Corinthians, after noting that there were "divisions" and "heresies" among them, Paul said, "When ye come together therefore in one place, this is not to eat (literally ye cannot eat) the Lord's Supper." (I Cor. 11:20)

**The Christian
Is To Examine Himself**

The Christian is to examine himself, "and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of that cup." The Statement of the Baptist Union of Great Britain and Ireland says, "So the Lord's Supper must be a service of self-examination and repentance, of confession and judgment. This is the time when, sorrowfully remembering our offences against one another and against God, we should lay our lives unreservedly open to the judgments of Christ, and seek anew His pardon and His peace. Our aim must be not merely to commemorate the death of Christ as a past fact, but so to identify ourselves by faith with our Lord in His death that at all costs we come to share His present mind

about our sin, and are recognized to Him afresh to God. This is the prior and indispensable condition of participation, and it is also the pledge of God's forgiveness and blessing (I John 1:8). Let us search our hearts carefully, confessing our sins, before we sit down to commune with the Savior in His Supper.

**The Lord's Supper
Is To Be Received In Faith by the Faithful**

Anyone may go through the motions of receiving the elements, but if they are not saved by the blood of Christ, they cannot commemorate the death of Christ for their sins. Concerning the unworthy participant, Calvin says, "A sacrament is separated from the reality by the unworthiness of the partaker, so that nothing remains but an empty and useless figure"(Institutes of the Christian Religion). Those who partake of the communion unworthily make a mock of this sacred ceremony and bring additional guilt upon their soul.

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