

CHAPTER V.

THE SUPPER A CHURCH ORDINANCE.

Definition of church ordinance.—The Supper demonstrated to be a church ordinance. 1. Each church absolutely independent under Christ; 2. Each church is made the guardian of the ordinances, and enjoined to prevent the disqualified from partaking of them; 3. The symbolism of the Supper determine it beyond question to be a church ordinance, since it symbolizes church relations with the body celebrating the rite.—Christ appointed it as a church ordinance—could not have allowed his churches the right to contravene it.—The churches of the first ages observed it as a church ordinance.

WE have seen that the Supper can only be enjoyed by one—I. Who has been scripturally baptized; and thus, 2. Has become a member of a scriptural church; and 3. Is in hearty fellowship with its doctrines; and 4. Is walking in gospel order. I come now to notice further: **That the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, and, as such, can only be observed by a church, as such, and by a person in the church of which he is a member.**

This statement indicates an observance of the Supper generally disregarded by our churches, as are other important matters connected with the sacred feast, as the character of bread and the kind of wine used, and it will, therefore, demand an investigation in spirit so unfettered by the prejudices of long usage and uninfluenced by the opinions of their powerful advocates, that comparatively few will be able to command; but, these few belong to the class of witnesses who have, through all ages, been the conservators of “the truth as it is in Jesus,” and to whom the world is indebted for a pure gospel and scriptural ordinances. The truth of the proposition, as a whole, depends upon the truth of its first clause, *i. e.*, that the Supper is a **church** ordinance. It becomes me to define a church, from a denominational and social ordinance. There is no denominational ordinance of divine appointment—because such a thing as a denomination, in the sense of an organized body, embracing all the churches of a province or nation, was unknown in the first ages. I have denominated the Lord's Supper a denominational ordinance whenever it is opened to the members of any and all Baptist churches present. We do not allow a brother not a member, in however good standing, the right to vote in our Conventions, Associations, Presbyteries, Councils, or church conference, but we do confer upon him the rights of a member, without the knowledge of his character, when we observe the Lord's Supper, the most sacred of all ordinances!

A social ordinance or act is one that may be enjoyed anywhere by any number of Christians, as individuals, baptized or unbaptized—as singing, prayer, exhortation and religious conversation.

But, the essential qualities of a church ordinance are,—

I. That it is a rite, the duty of perpetuating which is committed to the visible churches, as such.

2. The qualifications of its recipients must be decided by the members of the churches as such.

3. Any rite which symbolizes church relations can only be participated in by the members of the church celebrating, and is pre-eminently a church ordinance.

A church act or privilege is one that can be transacted or enjoyed by the constituent members of one particular church. Voting upon all questions relating to the choice of officers, the fellowship and government of the church, is a church privilege, or act, which, from the very nature and constitution of a gospel church, belongs to the members of that particular church alone, and can not be extended beyond its limits without peril to its very existence.

Baptism and the Lord's Supper are universally admitted to be church ordinances, and yet few seem to apprehend **why** they are, or why they can not be administered by an officer of a local church without the action or presence of the church.

Of the Lord's Supper, especially few seem to understand why it ceases to be a church ordinance when administered to those without and beyond its jurisdiction, or when those without and beyond the jurisdiction of a local church are associated in its celebration. It is my conviction that misapprehension of the true nature and limitations of a church ordinance has given rise to all the discussions, misunderstandings, all the misrepresentations, and bitter prejudices excited against us by other denominations, as well as to all the present disagreement among Baptists. If all parties could understand clearly why the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, and why it must, from its very nature and in every instance, be observed by the constituent membership of each local church alone, it must be that all this unpleasant and harmful misunderstanding, and antagonism would be settled and pacified: and certainly this would be a consummation devoutly to be wished by every true child of God in every denomination.

In the not vain hope, I trust, of contributing something toward this so desirable a result, I submit this and the following chapters.

My first argument to show why the Lord's Supper is a church ordinance, and can not be scripturally observed only by the members of one particular church, is—

I. That each church under Christ is absolutely independent.

The first church organized by Christ was a complete and perfect church, and yet it existed for years before other churches were formed. There were no new ecclesiastical relations originated, nor the slightest modification of the character of this church made, by the multiplication of churches. During the apostolic age, nor for ages after, was there the shadow of any confederation or con-association or constitution *inter-dependence* recognized, any more than between the families of children of a common parentage. Love for the brotherhood and active charity for all in distress, and the doing of good, especially to the household of faith, was only enjoined. The idea of a constitutional interdependence, which is now imperceptibly taking root in the minds of the cultured leaders of our people, in the fourth century begot confederations and con-associations of churches, and these soon brought forth the centralized ecclesiastical hierarchism under the auspices of Constantine—which is known as the “Great Apostasy.”

[A. D. 100-193]. “All congregations were independent of each other,” etc. (Gieseler, chap. iii: p. 53.)

“All the churches in those primitive times were independent bodies, and none of them subject to the jurisdiction of any other. It is as clear as noonday that all Christian churches had equal rights, and were in all respects on a footing of equality.” (Mosheim, A. D. 100).

[A. D. 200.] “During a great part of this century all the churches continued to be, as at first, independent of each other, or were connected by no con-associations or confederations; each church was a kind of little independent republic, governed by its own laws.”

[A. D. 300-400.] “Although the ancient mode of church government seemed, in general, to remain unaltered, yet there was a gradual deflection from its rules, and an approximation toward the form of monarchy. This change in the form of government was followed by a corrupt state of the clergy.”

This was the vile offspring begotten by the idea of the inter-dependency of churches, which is finding strong advocates in our day. They sink the idea of churches into that of a Denomination.

The learned Dr. Owen, of England, asserts:

“That, in no approved writer, for two hundred years after Christ, is mention made of any organized visible professing church, except a **local organization**.”—*Crowell’s Church Manual*, p. 36.

Each church being absolutely independent, it must, from the very nature of the case, absolutely control its own acts; and can be responsible to no authority save Christ. It can not constitutionally allow the members of other communities to share its prerogatives, since such license would endanger its own independency and responsibility.

Should a church so far forget its trust as to fall into the general practice of inviting, as an act of courtesy (which implies a discourtesy in refusing to do it), the members of all sister churches present to **vote** in the reception and exclusion of members, discipline, and even choice of pastors, as one prominent Baptist author advises, how soon the independency of the churches would be subverted! Usage would soon crystallize into precedent, and custom into law.

The independency of the churches is of Christ’s special appointment, and it is our sacred duty to do nothing tending to imperil or contravene it. No one will presume to claim that Christ invested his churches with the power to contravene, at their pleasure, any one of his appointments. Their powers are all delegated, and delegated powers can not be relegated. A local church can not confer upon members of other communities any privilege or franchise that belongs exclusively to her own members.

But it is further demonstrable that the Supper, as well as baptism, is a local church ordinance, because—

2. To each local church is committed the sole administration and guardianship of the ordinances.

This will not be questioned, save by the few who hold that baptism, at least, was committed to the ministry as such; that they alone are responsible for its proper administration; and they can, therefore, administer it without the presence and voice of the church whenever and wherever they please. This must be settled, not by the will or opinions of men, but by the Scriptures.

Let us see what one apostle thought concerning this issue between a part of our ministry and the churches:

TO THE CHURCH AT CORINTH

“I have received of the Lord Jesus that which I also delivered unto **you**.”—(1 Cor. xi: 23).

All the instructions and directions, both as respects the doctrine and the ordinances, Paul delivered, not to the ministry, but to the churches.

“Now I praise **you**, brethren [not you, **ministers** of the churches], that **ye** remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto **you**.”—(1 Cor. xi: 2.)

Now note his command to this **church**, not to its ministers:

“Be **ye** followers of me, even as I am also of Christ.”—(1 Cor. ii: 1.)

“I beseech **you**, be ye followers of me. For this cause I have sent unto you Timothy, my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways, which be in Christ, as **I** teach everywhere **in every church**.”—(1 Cor. iv: 16, 17.)

TO THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI.

“Brethren, be **ye** followers of me, and mark them who walk so, as **ye** have us for an example.”

He enjoins it upon the church to follow the directions he had given it, as well as to “mark” those who did not.

TO THE CHURCH AT COLOSSE.

“Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and obeying your order, and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him. Beware lest any many spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”—(ii: 5-8).

TO THE CHURCH AT THESSALONICA.

“Therefore, my brethren, stand fast and hold the tradition [which embraces all the instructions and ordinances] which ye have been taught, whether by word or our epistle.—(2 Thess. ii: 15.)

“And we have confidence in the Lord touching **you** [the Church], that **ye** both do and will do the things **we** command you.”—(iii: 4.)

It would be useless to reason with those who could deny, with these Scriptures before their eyes, that the ordinances were not delivered in sacred trust to the churches, as such, and not to their officers; and that they are held responsible for their right observance.

It is further established, with respect to the Supper, by the duties especially enjoined upon each local church, as such. It is commanded to allow only members possessing certain qualifications to come to the Supper.

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves [as a Church] from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the traditions [instructions] which he received of us.”¹ “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, not that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.”—(2 Thess. iii: 6, 14.)

This withdrawing and having no company with the disobedient and disorderly, certainly involved exclusion from the Lord’s table.

¹And what ingenuous mind will deny that this command equally excludes all such from the pulpit as well?

“But now I have written unto **you** not to keep company, if any man 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.**”

The apostolic churches were peremptorily commanded to prohibit the table to all these, and such like characters—to allow no leaven to be mingled in the feast. For this purpose, each church is made the sole guardian of the Supper. It can not alienate the responsibility. It can not, under any plea, contravene the law. To execute it with fidelity, it must keep the feast within its jurisdiction; its permission to partake can not be extended beyond the limits of the Supper, since all who can be entitled to the Supper must be subject to its discipline.

It is conceded by all that members of other communities have no scriptural or any other right to eat the Supper in any church save their own. No one claims that it is the duty of any local church to offer the Supper to any but its own members. What, then, do I conclude?—

1. That Christ has not given me the right to commune in any church save the one which has the watch and care over me, and that my privileges are limited to my church.

2. That Christ has not made it the duty of any church to open the doors to this ordinance to any not subject to its discipline; but, by making it a practice, since, by the act, the participant declares he is a member of the church with which he communes—“we are one loaf,” *i.e.*, one **church**.

3. And it may be safely affirmed that those churches that stately offer and invite to their tables all the members of sister churches who may chance to be present in the congregation, openly violate the command of Paul—to allow no disqualified persons to participate in this ordinance—since it is morally certain that such are **often**, if not ever, present, and are the most certain to accept.

But the Lord’s supper is unquestionably a church ordinance, because—

4. **It symbolizes church relations, *i.e.*, that all who jointly partake are members of the one and self-same church.**

I only assert this fact here, and submit an eminent authority, that of Prof. Curtis, who has treated this subject with unsurpassed ability, and reserve the discussion and proof of it when I treat of the symbolism of the elements in the next Part. That the Supper is a church ordinance in the sense that it can be worthily celebrated by only one church and participated in by the members of only one church, Prof. Curtis argues most conclusively from the symbolism of the Supper, as well as from the fact that it is under the sole guardianship of the churches.

He says, in “Communion,” page 85:

“We desire to show that this is the true view of the Lord’s Supper [*i.e.*, that it is a church ordinance, and a symbol of church relationship]. ‘When ye come together therefore into one place,’ says the apostle, ‘this is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating every one taketh before other, etc....Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.’ (1 Cor. xi: 21-23.) The apostle here clearly alludes to it as the universally current opinion that the Lord’s Supper was a church ordinance, so far as this, that it was completely celebrated in **one place**, by **one church**....When he bids them ‘tarry one for another’ he clearly intimates that the regulation of the Supper, as far as time and place are concerned, is lodged in each particular church; **that it expresses the relations of the members of the church to each other, as such.**”

“That the Lord’s Supper is a symbol of church relationship, subsisting between those who unite together in the participation of it, can be shown in various ways.”

“Admission to the Lord’s table, therefore, implies admission to it by a particular church, and this in fact settles the question that the Lord’s Supper is a church ordinance.”

The Lord's Supper, then, being a church ordinance, indicates church relations as subsisting between the parties who unite together in its celebration.

"It must be conceded that the Lord's Supper is ever the symbol of particular, visible church relations."—Page 138.

"It expresses the relations of the members of **that church** to each other, **as such**."

"A fellowship in church relations, professed with these Christians with whom we visibly celebrate."

If the Lord's Supper is a **church** ordinance, as must be admitted, and a symbol, among other things, of our visible church relations in the same particular church with which we celebrate it, then it is a violation of the truth symbolized to invite members of other Baptist churches to participate in it.

When Baptists, in reasoning with affusionists, urge the symbolism of Baptism, *i.e.*, that it represents a burial – as conclusive that the **act** must be an **immersion**—they think candid Pedobaptists should see and admit so evident an argument. Will not all candid Baptists admit this?

4. **It was instituted by Christ to be observed as a church ordinance.**

I claim it as an—

AXIOM,

That a church ordinance must be instituted by Christ.

AND

That the symbolism of the ordinances was instituted by Christ.

Should we observe ordinances originated by man, our worship would be unacceptable to Christ, and as **vain** as it would be sinful. Christ has said—

"In vain do they worship me who teach for doctrines the commandments of men."

Should we change the symbol of an ordinance by the slightest modification, we would vitiate it; and to vitiate the symbolism of an ordinance in the least, is to vitiate the ordinance.

"Ye do make the commandment of God of none effect through your traditions."—*Christ*.

That Christ did institute the Supper to be rigidly observed as a church ordinance, Prof. Curtis declares:

"So when our blessed Savior instituted the Supper, as he did, upon one of those Paschal occasions, it was, we say, as a **church ordinance** that he ordained it."

And he justly says, to claim the right to change it in the least, is to claim the right to **legislate**. If it is ever a symbol of particular church relations professed with those Christians with whom we visibly celebrate, as he declares, then to celebrate it with those not members of the same church, is to vitiate the symbol and change what Christ hath appointed.

5. **The Lord's Supper was observed by the apostolic churches (A. D. 100) as a church ordinance; *i.e.*, as a symbol of church relations.**

Paul, we have seen, could not have delivered this ordinance unto the churches as he had received it from Christ, unless he had delivered it unto them as a church ordinance; for it is admitted that Christ ordained it as a church ordinance. (Curtis and others.)

The apostolic churches could not have observed this ordinance as Paul delivered it unto them unless they had observed it as a church ordinance, *i.e.*, by one church only, and with the members of one church only.

But the churches did observe this, as well as the other ordinances, as Paul delivered them, because he praised them for so doing.

To the church at Corinth he wrote,—

“I praise you, brethren, because you keep the ordinances as I delivered them unto you.” (1 Cor. xi:2.)

To the church at Colosse he could say,—

“I rejoice, beholding your **order** and the stability of your faith.”

The churches at Thessalonica he only exhorts:

“So, then, brethren, stand firm and hold fast the ordinances you were taught, whether by our word or letter.”

Which clearly implies they had been, and still were, faithful in their observance.

The church at Corinth for a season perverted the design of the Supper, and Paul promptly rebuked it [not its pastor or elders], and again set it in order, and we must believe that he corrected every departure from his instructions.

But suppose I grant that he did not deliver it to the churches as symbolizing the relations of all the participants to one and the same church, still I claim that the positive instructions Paul gave to the churches forbade them from inviting to their tables the members of all existing churches, without personal knowledge of their faith or character, as is the practice of this age. He placed the Supper under the **sole custody of each church**, and commanded it to purge away from its table all leaven of malice or wickedness. He taught them that **false doctrine** of all description, and all ungodly conduct (1 Cor. v.), and all works of the flesh (Gal. v.), was **leaven** that must not be allowed to defile the feast.

“Now we charge you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw from **every brother** who walks disorderly, and not according to the instruction which you have received from us.” (2 Thess. iii:6)

If it is said “that this was spoken to the church with reference to her own members,” I will grant it, and demand if it does not equally teach that it should equally withdraw from those not members walking disorderly? That there might be no doubt, read the fourteenth verse: “But if **any one** obey not our word, signify that man by an epistle [the most approved rendering], and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.” All will admit that this command forbade them to invite all false teachers, as well as unsound and disorderly brethren, to the Lord’s Supper.

Now the false teachers and heretical brethren abounded in Paul’s day, all members of sister churches in good standing, and thousands of these belonged to the church at Jerusalem; and had it been the custom of the church at Corinth to invite “all members of sister churches” to its

table, would it not have violated the instructions of Paul? But this feature will be more fully developed in a future Chapter. But finally—

For centuries after the ascension of Christ, the Lord's Supper was rigidly observed as a church ordinance.

I care little for the argument from post-apostolic history. It is enough for my purpose—and it must be quite enough for every conscientious Bible Christian—to learn that Christ appointed the Supper to be observed as a **church** ordinance, and that the apostles so delivered it to the churches, and the churches all observed it as such while they had the personal instructions of the apostles. Suppose, from the day the last apostle died, every church ceased to observe it as a church ordinance; how should that fact affect our present practice? Would it warrant a church to observe it, even once, in some other way, that would vitiate its symbolism? The fact granted would in no way vitiate the claim that there have been Baptist churches from the day of the defection. The church at Corinth had for years utterly perverted the Supper, and yet Paul addressed it as a church of Christ. It was disorderly in this respect, but a perversion of the Supper did not forfeit its existence.

My space does not allow me to treat this question historically. Let the statements of so cautious and eminent a scholar as Prof. Curtis suffice in support of my proposition. He says:

“There is sufficient proof to convince any close student of church history of the first three centuries, that in the very earliest ages, the Lord's Supper was regarded as strictly a **church ordinance**, as we have defined the phrase.”—*Communion*, p. 88.

“The records of church history plainly show that originally the Lord's Supper was everywhere regarded as a church ordinance.”—*Communion*, p. 137.

I will add the remarks of Dr. D. Spencer, in his treatise on “Invitations to the Supper,” after showing that no invitations were given by the first churches, nor yet in the days of Justin Martyr, in the second century:

“How, then, did invitations originate? The answer is plain. **They originated with the perversion of the ordinance.** When the ordinance came to take the place of Christ, the churches began to invite to it, as they had formerly invited to Christ. Hence in Romish churches today you hear plenty of invitations to ordinances, but none to Christ.”

I have not granted, in this discussion, that the unapostate churches, whom we account our ancestors, deflected at an early day into denominational Communion. It is my impression that this **laxity** is a late practice.

CONCLUSIONS FROM THIS ARGUMENT.

I think I have conclusively shown,—

1. That Christ appointed his Supper to be a church ordinance.
2. That any rational definition of church ordinance or privilege limits the enjoyment of it to the membership of, or to those approved for membership by a local church.
3. That when an ordinance or act symbolizes or implies **church relations**, it is pre-eminently a church ordinance, and must be confined to the members of a particular church only.
4. That the Lord's Supper, among other things, specially symbolizes church relations, as all standard writers admit, and, therefore, it can be scripturally observed by the members of one church only.

5. That for the members of various churches to participate in it joint observance, even though upon the invitation of a local church, as Associations and Conventions are wont in some places to do, would be to vitiate the symbolism, and consequently to render the ordinance, **null**.

The only issue now before Baptists is fairly stated by Dr. A. P. Williams:

“If he [a member of one church] ever has a right anywhere else, it must be either by a transfer or membership or by **courtesy**,” etc.—*Lord’s Supper*, p. 94.

In his “Tract on Communion,” as though he would correct, in part, at least, the admission made in his book on Communion, he says:

“But this courtesy cannot be exercised in violation of church discipline or of **divine authority**.”

It is demonstrable that it is in palpable violation of **both**:

I. It is always done at the expense of good **discipline**; for when a church invites to her table the members of all other Baptist churches present, she inevitably will invite those she would feel herself bound to exclude, if her own members; and she would often invite those whom she considers unbaptized, and would refuse their application for membership; and **oftentimes** she would invite back to her Communion persons she herself excluded, who are now members of other churches, in good standing. Can this be called good discipline?

2. Such a courtesy can never be extended and accepted, except in violation of divine authority, since Christ appointed the Supper to symbolize the organic unity of the body partaking—*i.e.*, particular church relations of all the participants within that one church.

It is claimed that the churches have the right to extend such invitations through courtesy. I answer that such a claim is not even supposable; for—

I. It can not be supposed that Christ would allow his churches to adopt any practice that would contravene any one of his own appointments—even if we can suppose he sometimes allows it to exercise legislative powers—by adding to, or modifying, the form of one of his ordinances.

2. But invitations to all Baptists present to partake of the Supper with the local church celebrating it, does manifestly contravene Christ’s appointment of the Supper as a **church** ordinance.

3. Therefore it can not be supposed that Christ has allowed his churches to extend invitations to all Baptists present to partake of the Supper with them.

From the considerations submitted in this chapter, the reader will see that I have done what I have been called upon to do—proved that all those brethren who admit that the Supper is a church ordinance, do yield the question at issue between us, and, to be consistent, they must admit that Intercommunion of Baptists of different churches is unscriptural and inconsistent.

A Baptist Historical Resource
Published by the Center for Theological Research
at www.BaptistTheology.org

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The Center for Theological Research
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Fort Worth, Texas
Malcolm B. Yarnell, III, Director