

Our Greatest Devotional Aid: The Lord's Supper

A deeper devotion to God should be an obvious goal for every Christian. The devout life is not an option or a luxury, but a necessity. Yet a deeper devotion to God will not be ours if we don't avail ourselves of the means that God has designed to produce that result. It does not happen by accident, nor is there any shortcut to spiritual purity and strength — either we do the things that *produce* growth or we don't grow. It's just that simple.

But what are the means to spiritual growth? We could make a long list of activities, disciplines, and aids that are good for us. Most of these relate to prayer or Bible study in one way or another. But the most powerful aid to greater devotion is one that we often overlook: *the Lord's Supper*.

The importance of the Lord's Supper. The cross is the heart of the gospel. Many other truths shine out from the cross, but the story of Christ's atoning death is the heart of the matter. So Paul could say, "I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2). And again, "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

It is no exaggeration to say that the story of the cross is the most powerful story ever told. When it is presented clearly, it moves the human heart in a way that nothing else can. When Paul, for example, heard that the Galatians were defecting from the gospel, he marveled that such could be the case: "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" How could anyone who has ever "seen" Christ crucified not obey the gospel, or having obeyed it, ever go backwards and become unfaithful?

If we are among those who have obeyed the gospel but are wavering in our faith, there can be only one reason for that: *we have taken our eyes away from the cross and have quit contemplating what it means*. The regular remembrance of what we saw when we saw the cross for the first time is so essential to our faithfulness that God requires us think about it at least once a week. Many are the acts of God in history that it might be helpful for us to remember, but only one is of such importance that a ritual was commanded for its remembrance every seven days. The Lord's Supper is where we are reminded of the cross — lest we forget and become unfaithful.

Yet for all our talk, we often fail to observe the Lord's Supper as we should, and we don't receive the inward benefit that God intends. Yes, we pay lip service to its importance, but on many Sundays we partake of the Lord's Supper and go away unmoved and unimproved in our devotion to God. As far as our spiritual growth is concerned, the Lord's Supper is, for many of us, an untapped resource.

Two suggestions. For one thing, it would help us to *prepare* for the Lord's Supper more than we do. If we stay up late Saturday night pursuing social and recreational activities, sleep in until the last minute Sunday morning, and then arrive at the assembly having given no thought to the Lord's death until that moment, the Lord's Supper is probably going to mean less to us than it should. Wouldn't it help to begin thinking and praying about the Lord's Supper on Saturday, arise early enough on Sunday morning to spend some time alone with the Lord, and then arrive at the assembly with hearts eagerly prepared to commune?

But second, we need to *participate* in the Lord's Supper more fully. For too many of us, the Lord's Supper is a passive event, something that just "washes over us" as we sit in the pew. But if the power of the cross is going to help us grow in devotion, we must engage our minds in the Supper as active participants. Paul warns us to think consciously about the meaning of the Lord's death as we partake: "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:27-29). As we commune, we need to pray and to pay sober attention to the one who said, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (Jn. 1:29).

Paul was not wasting words when, after noting the Corinthian's neglect and abuse of the Lord's Supper, he said "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor. 11:30). There is more than a coincidental connection between the Lord's Supper and the hearts of the Lord's people. Let the cross be truly contemplated and spiritual growth will not be far behind . . . but let the cross *not* be contemplated and death will be lurking at the door.

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