

What are you Expecting to Happen at the Lord's Supper?

Class VII

Introduction/Review

1. This is our final session. As we noted last time, we will spend the bulk of this session taking up questions that the class wishes to entertain.
2. We have spent a fair amount of time looking at various places in the NT that give teaching on the subject of the Lord's Supper.
3. Again we have noted that with:
 - a. Mk, we have associated the Supper as both the place where the bread and cup is a sign that God has come among us and where we renew our pledge to keep covenant commitments.
 - b. Lk, it is a meal anticipating the banquet and the blessings in God's new world.
 - c. Matt, it is a place to express thanks for Christ who became the ransom on our behalf.
 - d. John, Jesus is the real presence who is with us at our meals and facilitates our reconciliation with the divine life.

Issues of What is Appropriate

1. N.T. Wright notes that you will not want to listen to Beethoven played on a mouth organ. Good music demands appropriate orchestration.
2. True, the Lord's Supper is a meal. But it is the royal meal. Here we celebrate the joyous anticipation of the coming of the kingdom tinged with the sense that it comes with the cost of the life of the flesh and blood Son of God. So I conclude that just as there is appropriate conduct at a banquet for royalty, so our conduct at the meal should be appropriate for what is taking place.
3. This does not mean that we should engage in something like the practice of the high middle ages with ornate clothing for the clergy, incense, etc. There is something beautiful in unadorned simplicity. This is much closer to the practice of the ancient church. Again, appropriateness is the key.

Question: What is appropriate:

- a. Time to observe the Lord's Supper?
- b. Who may participate?
- c. Manner of participation?

What About Changes In History?

1. Churches of Christ tend to think of themselves as a Restoration Fellowship. The basic plea is to set aside the layers of barnacles that have attached themselves to the ship of Christianity over the centuries. The idea is that by peeling off these barnacles we will once again appreciate the beauty and simplicity of the one church.
2. The development of views about the Lord's Supper has been especially prolific in the history of the church.
3. Let us note a couple of problematic areas.
 - a. One idea that has had great mileage is a very ancient belief that before you enter into the presence of a god you must offer a sacrifice.
 - b. Almost inevitably these ideas permeated the church as early as the second century. Prayers at the Table reflected the idea that bread and wine and other gifts brought to the altar were our sacrifices of Thanksgiving.
 - c. This tendency is often reflected today by some who call the table an "altar" and who raise the bread and the cup liturgically, as if these are our thanksgiving offerings to the Lord. I would argue for the opposite. *Our thanksgiving is not what we can bring to God, but what he has done for us.*
 - d. That should underscore all liturgical action at the table.
4. Another problematic area is in the area of whether the Supper is mere memorial or something else.
 - a. The idea of 'mere memorial' is associated with Zwingli (1484-1531).
 - b. The basic idea is that Christ is present at the Supper only in our remembrance. The statement 'This is my body' means this 'signifies' my body. Christ is no more present at the Supper than in my closet in prayer.
 - c. This seems to be a different view than the ancient church which believed that in rites something happens, viz., baptism.

Question: We claim that in baptism spiritually something happens. Is this the case with the Lord's Supper?