

THE RELATIVE POSITION
OF THE
LORD'S SUPPER:
A DISCOURSE

BY

J. A. CHAMBLISS,

*Pastor of the Citadel Square Baptist Church, Charleston,
S. C.*

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NOTE—It has been nearly two years since the delivery of the discourse which is here presented. The publication of it seemed to be expected then, and, indeed, has been several times requested; but there was so much on the Communion question already in print, and more appearing every day, that the author shrank from offering to the public, so slight a contribution to the literature of the subject. He gives it now to the printer with the hope, prevailing at last, that a brief, simple, scriptural inquiry, which approaches the question as if it were a new one, takes up in chronological order all the passages bearing upon it, moves the case forward only as the testimony advances, and leaves it just where the testimony stops, may be more satisfactory to some minds than other methods more commonly employed.

It must be added, that the personal allusions, in the opening, would not have been retained in publishing the discourse, but for the supposition that the experience there indicated, might not be without value to one here and there into whose hands the paper may fall.

J. A. C.

Charleston, April 13, 1876.

DISCOURSE.

You are invited this evening to hear what we hold to be the teaching of God's word as to the Relative Position of the Lord's Supper among Christian Institutes. There seems to be a demand for such a discussion, upon two grounds. The first is personal, and I must beg you to pardon the necessary reference to myself. The fact is known in this community, that a few years ago my views upon the subject of Communion, as declared to the church of which I was then pastor, in the city of Richmond, were not in harmony with those of our denomination generally, in the United States; and that this difference between my brethren and myself, led to the dissolution of very strong and tender ties. It is known also, to this church at least, that at a later period a statement of my opinions as modified and corrected by further study and reflection, was approved and accepted in the denomination as not un-scriptural or unsafe. That statement simply acknowledged what I had formerly questioned—the obligation of churches in our day to be governed by the example of churches in the apostolic day, in call-

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ing to the Lord's Supper only those who had previously been baptized. I had never doubted that in the first churches only immersed believers communed, but had taken the position that their practice in this regard was not binding upon us, surrounded as we are, and as they were not, by Christian brethren who have conscientiously professed their faith in some other way than by scriptural baptism. From this position I was compelled by subsequent reflection and investigation to withdraw, and place myself squarely upon the ground, that the path lighted by apostolic example is the only one in which we can tread with perfect assurance of safety and the Divine approval. Afterwards, when I became the pastor of this church, it was distinctly understood that I did not approve of the immersed communing with unimmersed Christians, however their sincerity might be respected or their piety revered. It has, therefore, been matter of surprise to learn that not a few persons in this city have been pleased to commend the pastor of this church as more liberal than his brethren on the Communion question. The fact might be of small consequence to him as an individual, but standing before the community as the representative and exponent of the faith and practice of this church, it is eminently proper that

he should remove any false impression that may exist as to his own views of church order.

But the subject before us requires discussion upon much more important grounds. In Charleston, Baptists are a small minority of the Christian population, while the adherents of other forms of church order are a vast host, comprising an overwhelming proportion of the elements of social strength and influence. It happens, therefore, that upon every point of denominational peculiarity we are obliged to sustain a powerful outside pressure—not the pressure of direct assault, much less of malignant aspersion—we delight to acknowledge the uniform courtesy of all our brethren of every name—but of a quiet, ponderous, completely enveloping public sentiment. Now, to withstand this pressure, it is absolutely requisite that we all, men and women, older and younger, should possess a strength of conviction as to the scripturalness of our principles and practices, such as it is impossible to obtain without at least occasional examination of the foundation on which we stand. And as our *strictness* or *closeness*, so termed, with reference to the Communion, is clearly the head and front of our offending against the sentiment of other Christians and of the general public, as this is the point upon which the pressure

bears most heavily; this, the supposed error, which some regard with pity for our weakness, some with contempt for our self-righteousness, and some with abhorrence of our bigotry; it is especially important with reference to *this* matter that we should be familiar, not with the utterances of Fathers or Councils, not with the labored and profound arguments of modern times, not with man's thought at all, but with the teachings of the Divine Word upon which our practice is based. Let it be understood, then, that we approach this question unfettered by any church creed, uncontrolled by any human opinion. We acknowledge the authority of the Bible, and no other authority in whatever pertains to Christian doctrine. If it should appear that, according to the Bible, the Communion is not an ordinance placed by the authority of Christ within the circle of baptized discipleship, but that it is a purely spiritual service, like prayer, or speaking for Jesus, which any one who will may perform—if this can be shown from the Scriptures—we are ready to act accordingly; to commune at any time, whether daily or monthly, in any place, whether dining-room or church, with anybody, whether baptized or unbaptized, who may choose to join us out of a common love for Christ.

But if we must believe that the Bible requires us to restrict ourselves in the Communion to participation with those only who are baptized and orderly-walking believers in Christ, we will do it without fear and without shame.

We come, then, to this Divine Book, and we will search it for ourselves. If its teachings on the subject are not plain enough for us to learn them without the aid of ecclesiastical experts, we may be sure that nothing is involved essential to the honor of Christ and the progress of his kingdom.

Turning to the record of the Christian dispensation, we read through the Gospel of Matthew or Mark or Luke, almost to the last page, and we find no allusion to what we call the Communion. Jesus is born, grows up, is baptized, enters on his work, calls his Apostles, passes up and down through the land for three or four years, winning the faith and love of men, and introducing them by baptism into his service; but so far there is no such thing as the Communion. At length, the record brings us to the night before the crucifixion. We see the Master surrounded by a little company of his followers in an upper-room in Jerusalem. They are eating the Passover of the Jews. There on the table is the paschal lamb with bitter herbs, the unleav-

ened bread, and “the fruit of the vine.” The sacred meal progresses and is finished; but the Master does not rise. See! He takes bread in his hands, lifts his voice to Heaven a moment in words of thanksgiving and blessing, breaks the bread, and distributes the particles to his disciples, uttering these remarkable words, “Take, eat; This is my body which is given for you; this do in remembrance of me.” Half in wonder, half in sorrow, they receive the affecting emblem, and wait his further will. He takes the cup now; again his voice is heard in praise or prayer, and then he passes the cup also to his disciples saying, “Drink ye all of it: This is the new covenant in my blood, shed for many, for the remission of sins: This do ye as oft as ye drink it in remembrance of me.” Now, what is all this? It is something entirely new. Nothing like it has ever been done or said by the Master before. Repentance is old, faith is old, baptism even is old—all the disciples have repented, believed, and been baptized; but here is another thing, which they—(mark, which *they*, not other people, not everybody—which they, Christ’s regenerated and baptized disciples)—are to do, not once, but often, not before his death, but after his departure from the world—a lasting obligation, therefore, for it is to be done in remembrance of him.

What more Jesus said to the Apostles on this occasion, by way of acquainting them more fully with the meaning and purpose of his solemn words and actions, we do not know. Perhaps we shall see as we advance how they understood him; whether under his divine teaching they learned that a *new ordinance* was now instituted for their observance henceforth; and if so, whether it was, like repentance, faith, and baptism, a duty to be discharged by men in their individual capacity, upon their individual responsibility; or like the Passover, was an ordinance requiring congregation and fellowship. And if Jesus taught them to regard this new thing as a sacred, perpetual ordinance, an ordinance to be observed by them, not individually or socially, but collectively and ecclesiastically, we shall hope furthermore to see whether the company so observing this ordinance was to be of a particular description, or just such as the circumstances and impulses of the people might bring together. As to all these points we are so far in the dark. Let us go on then.

We turn a page or two further and reach the end of the evangelical record. The Saviour dies, is buried, rises the third day, appears again and again to his disciples during forty days, and then ascends to Heaven. Within this period, there

is no repetition of the scene which we witnessed in the upper-room: for truly the time had not come to *remember* Jesus—he was still with his people. Nor does he, so far as we know, again mention the subject. When about to take his heavenward flight, he bids his disciples go forth into all the world, win all men to his service, and baptize them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all things commanded; but he says nothing of any other ordinance to be observed. He may include another among the “all things” commanded, but, so far, we can only be *certain*, first, that Jesus would have all men brought to believe on him; second, that he would have them baptized; third, that he would have them instructed as to their duty in all things—to walk in the path which he himself had pointed out. If the sacred canon closed here, we could not even be sure that another ordinance besides baptism had been instituted, much less would it have entered the mind of any man to suppose that another ordinance might be thrust in between the act of faith and the act of baptism.

So much, then, for the testimony of the Gospels. The Lord Jesus has performed certain acts, accompanied by certain words, which appear to be designed to lay upon his followers—all of whom,

unquestionably, for the three years of his ministry, were baptized believers—a new duty; a rite, a ceremony such as they had never practiced or heard of before. Whether such is really his design, we can *know* only by attending to the future course of those whom he has taught and sent forth to build his Church. Just as they do and teach, we are bound to conclude the Saviour directed them to do and teach—and nothing more will be needful for those who are content to walk only where the way is perfectly light.

The next step we take brings us to the Acts of the Apostles—a summary account of the planting and earliest progress of the Church as an organized power in the world. When the Lord Christ has disappeared from the upturned, wondering, longing gaze of his friends, they return to Jerusalem, there to wait in faith and prayer, until, according to the promise of their ascended Saviour, they should be endued with power from on high. Ten days they wait, until the day of Pentecost, and then, all suddenly and gloriously the blessing comes. Power indeed, power from on high is given them. How they praise! How they pray! How they preach the word—proclaiming the good news of salvation by a crucified but risen and ascended Redeemer! And how the people hear and tremble, repent and

believe and are baptized,—*three thousand* in that single day are added to the church, the congregation of Christ's disciples! Not yet, however, do we find any other ordinance observed except baptism.

But the narrative proceeds—the narrative of this amazing work of grace in Jerusalem: “And they continued”—who? The previous verse has indicated them plainly—that rejoicing congregation of baptized disciples, now grown so great by the wonderful outpouring of the Holy Spirit—“*they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and prayers.*” Here, then, the light begins to stream in upon us. This “*breaking of bread,*” occurring in a list of religious duties—what can it be but that simple affecting ceremony which Jesus first performed “that same night on which he was betrayed,” and concerning which he said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” They *did*, then, understand him as instituting a new ordinance—an ordinance additional to what they had previously received; an ordinance further on in the Christian course than faith, further on than baptism, and further on than actual connection with a congregation of his followers. For, those who now observe it have gladly received the word of salvation, have been baptized, and have

been added to the body of disciples—the Christian *ekklesia* in Jerusalem.

We go forward again. The word of the Lord grows. Laborers go out into the harvest. Churches are multiplied, composed of the penitent, believing, baptized hearers of the word. Their organization is simple, but thorough and effective. Their relationship to each other is only that of fellowship and equality. They act independently, but harmoniously; ready to help one another in love, but acknowledging allegiance to Christ alone. Their officers are few, and chosen by themselves, and their worship is praise and prayer and instruction in the truth of God. But the new ordinance, the “breaking of bread,” which we saw steadfastly observed by the rejoicing congregation of baptized believers at Jerusalem, is it still practiced—practiced among the Gentiles as well as in Judea, and practiced by an assembled church? Let us see. Among the churches planted by Paul in his missionary journeys was one at Troas, on the Hellespont. We have in the 20th chapter of the Acts an account of a visit of a week which the Apostle made to the brethren at Troas. The notice is very brief, but it contains one passage of utmost value to us in our present inquiry: “And upon the first day of the week, *when the disciples came together to break bread,*

Paul preached unto them." It is then, unquestionable, the disciples in Troas even, away here upon the shores of the Aegean, the believing, baptized, organized followers of Christ, observe the ceremony of the Supper, and not separately, individually, in their homes, but collectively, in their place of worship, at a stated time. Paul is with them a week, mingling with them in their family circles, but he sees nothing of the Communion, until the Lord's day arrives; then the church assembles, "the disciples come together," and as Jesus had bid them, so they do, in remembrance of him.

We turn now to the Apostolic Epistles. Shall we find anything in this section of God's word to confirm the truth which we have already ascertained? In the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, we meet the only remaining references to the subject in hand which the Scriptures contain. And here, it is worth while to notice, for the first time occur the terms "Communion," "the Lord's Supper," and the "Lord's table." The church at Corinth, which, after eighteen months of missionary labor, Paul had left numerous and flourishing, and carefully instructed in the way of the Lord, in a few years had become in large measure disorderly and corrupt. A portion of the church were carrying their views of Christian

liberty to such an extreme of license as to tolerate notorious immorality, and to attend feasts in idol temples. In the 10th chapter, Paul is rebuking their sin and folly, and these are some of his burning words: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the Communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the Communion of the body of Christ? * * * Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the table of devils." Now, whatever else this language may show, it certainly demonstrates that the disciples in Corinth had observed the ordinance of the Supper, and that they observed it not separately as individual Christians, but as a church feast, of which they partook in common.

In the 11th Chapter we find a passage still more explicit, and leaving us nothing to desire, if our object is only to learn the practice of the holy Apostles and the churches which they founded. The passage is long, and so familiar that I need not quote it now. It declares in plain terms that the Apostle Paul had received by direct revelation a knowledge of the will of the Lord Jesus as to this ordinance, the precise manner of its observance, and the fact of its perpetual obligation, to "shew the Lord's death un-

til he come;" that the church at Corinth had enjoyed the benefit of this direct revelation, the Apostle having delivered unto them the Institution just as he had received it from the Lord; and that the church so instructed, under such direct light from Heaven, were accustomed to "come together in one place," "to eat the Lord's Supper." It is true, they grossly and sacrilegiously abused the holy feast. But with this at present we have no concern. The points enumerated stand out so prominently and unmistakably, that if we had no other inspired testimony but this alone we might well be satisfied.

Now, my brethren, we have made a candid examination of the Scripture testimony with reference to this whole question. And I ask, to what conclusion are we inevitably led? Do not the plain, undistorted facts of New Testament history fix indisputably the relative position of the Lord's Supper among Christian institutes—that it is after repentance and faith, after baptism, after church organization; and for those who would partake of it, after connection with a local church?

One thing only remains to be settled, if indeed that can be undetermined in any of our hearts—I say *hearts*, because it pertains not to the intellect, but to the affections: Are we *will-*

ing to restrict ourselves within the limits indicated by apostolic precedent? Can we consent, in the absence of any positive precept, to be governed by the mere example of those to whom the Lord Jesus personally revealed his will? Is each one of us ready to say: "So far as I can see, the Lord's death was commemorated in this ordinance only by churches, in their collective capacity—churches composed exclusively of those who had professed faith in Jesus, and been immersed in the name of the Holy Trinity; and though there are now, as there were not then, multitudes of Christians who have never been immersed, yet I can neither go in with them, nor call them in with me to the celebration of this ordinance, because in so doing I should act without Divine authority; because in so doing I should have to follow only my own judgment or my own feelings, unsupported by either precept or example in the word of God?" Further than this, I, at least, do not ask you to go. I will never maintain, nor will I endeavor to persuade you, that whoever does not thus hold and practice is a destructive heretic, who must be unto us as a heathen man and a publican. There are devout Christians and noble Baptists who venture to set aside the examples of apostolic times, with reference to the

point in question, conscientiously holding that whoever loves the Saviour, though unbaptized, may lawfully partake of the supper. It is not for me to judge my brother. But this I do maintain, and this I do urge upon you—we are certainly safe, and certainly wise, so long as we walk, step by step, in the foot-prints of inspired Apostles, with reference to this sacred ordinance; and we are neither certainly safe, nor certainly wise, if we turn from that path to the right hand or to the left.

Here then, my friends, we stand as Baptists—upon the plain and simple principle, that according to all the light the New Testament affords, the Lord's Supper is an ordinance placed by the hands of Jesus within the circle of regenerated, baptized, organized discipleship. Is it weakness, Phariseism, bigotry, to maintain such a principle? Do not our Christian brethren of other denominations, with almost unvarying uniformity, hold and practice likewise? They invite us to their Communion, because they acknowledge our baptism to be scriptural. If we invite them to our Communion, we must tacitly, at least, acknowledge their baptism to be scriptural, or they will not come. There is not a Presbyterian or Methodist or Episcopalian or Lutheran in this city who would commune with you, or desire you to

commune with him, if you declared unequivocally at the time that you considered him an unbaptized person. But you do so consider him, or you are not a Baptist. There are Baptists in England especially, and some also in this country, who offer and receive the Communion with all denominations; but it is upon a principle which other denominations cannot recognize without compromising their own consistency—the principle, namely, that baptism is not prerequisite to Communion.

Let *us* be honest then, and *let others* be just. It is not our doctrine of Communion, it is our doctrine of baptism which separates us from other denominations. If anybody pleases to denounce us as bigoted, because we hold that immersion alone was the baptism of the New Testament times, we can afford to bear it, for the scholarship of the world, outside of our own denomination, has pronounced positively in support of our position. And if anybody pleases to reproach us as sticklers for non-essentials, making schism in the body of Christ about a miserable question of much or little water, cleaving to the letter which killeth, instead of to the Spirit which quickeneth, we can afford to bear that too, for conscience sake. My brethren, it is better to be sure of displeasing the whole world, than to incur even the

smallest risk of displeasing the Master ; not because we slavishly fear him, but because we tenderly love him. The faintest hint of our dear Lord's will ought to have more weight with us, than the absolute command of all the combined authority enforced by all the combined powers upon earth.