

WHAT DOES THE LORD'S SUPPER COMMEMORATE?

Habits can become so strong that they may lead us to do or say things without thought. This can even happen to us relative to worship, if we do not take care. We may have sung a certain hymn for so many years that we can sing both words and music without thinking about them. The same is true concerning prayer. Sometimes one who leads prayers in the assembly will fall into a habit of using terminology that he has not really thought through (perhaps borrowed from a prayer he has heard someone else pray).

As I have travelled about over the years, I have heard the following phrase innumerable times in prayers at the Lord's table: "We thank Thee for this bread [or fruit of the vine, or the Lord's supper] which commemorates the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord." But does this statement reflect the teaching of Scripture? Is the supper a memorial of all three of these or only of one or two of them? Just what does the Lord's supper commemorate when Scripturally observed?

Granted, the death, burial, and resurrection of the Son of God are sometimes spoken of together, in the same context. Perhaps the best known such passage is 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 where Paul stated that these three events constitute the very foundation of the Gospel. This trio of Gospel facts serves as the "form [pattern] of doctrine" which one must obey in order to be free from sin (Rom. 6:17-18; 2-5). However, neither in these contexts nor in any others in which the Lord's death, burial, and resurrection are mentioned together, is the Lord's supper under consideration.

Contrariwise, in the passages that give us information concerning the aim of the Lord in establishing His memorial, He unmistakably had in mind His death alone as the object of it. Let us examine the evidence.

The bread and fruit of the vine are (i.e., represent, symbolize) His body and His blood, respectively (Mat. 26:26-28a; Mark 14:22-24a; Luke 22:19-20; 1 Cor. 11:24-25). The Lord distinctly connected the fruit of the vine with the blood which He would (and did) soon shed in His cruel crucifixion (Mat. 26:28b; Mark 14:24b; Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 10:16; 11:25). Can anyone question, therefore, that the symbolism of His body in the bread would likewise relate to the sacrifice of His body in the Calvary execution?

However, that He had His sacrificial death and that alone in mind as the intent of His memorial supper is conclusively seen in Paul's words: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death [not "death, burial, and resurrection"] till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26, emp. DM). While it is impossible for the religion of Christ to exist apart from the resurrection (and the burial from which He arose), the Lord did not have these in mind when He established the supper and said, "This do in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19; 1 cor. 11:24-25).

Let us take care to pray in harmony with the teaching of Scripture, both at the Lord's table and elsewhere.

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