

The Lord's Supper – (Part 4) – by Rev. Tom Aicken

Here are three things we should keep before us in the administration and celebration of the Lord's Supper:

(1) The Lord's Supper is not more sacred than our other duties. It is always an awesome thing to come into the presence of the living God, and it should on every occasion therefore be done with the utmost reverence. This is something to keep in mind whenever we employ any of the means of grace, whether public or private, and we ought not to think that it calls for any special attention in the Supper above and beyond our manner of approaching the Lord in these other disciplines of service.

(2) The Bible does not attach any exceptional grace to the Lord's Supper. What I mean by that is simply this, that there is no sanctifying grace in the Supper which is not already present in the preaching of the Word. The Supper is meant merely to assist the ministry of the Word, to provide an action picture, particularly for weak believers – and who of us is not weak? – as well as for those who struggle with a lack of assurance. Like baptism, the Supper serves as God's signature which He adds to preaching to help authenticate and drive home His exceedingly great and precious promises. It is meant to confirm that He means what He tells us.

(3) In light of the above, the Reformers were always very strict in maintaining the simplicity of the Supper – partaking of the elements, the bread and the wine, in a straightforward manner – never adding to it or trying to turn it into a special man-made event. Some might say that this was a reaction to the Roman Catholic practice of turning the sacrament into sacramentalism, making it a supernatural power in the hands of the priests. But I believe that the Reformers came to understand very well what the Supper is really about, and they saw, too, just how easily the simple Supper can be transformed, even if well intended, into a new and unnecessarily complex invention, as if we could somehow improve it.

The Old Testament tabernacle (and later the temple) was very ornate and so, too, many of the ceremonial laws which were enacted within it were deliberately symbolic actions. This was all to serve as a magnificent painting, filled with intricate detail, and intended to portray the Person and work of the coming Christ. All that played a useful part in an age when the Church had only symbols, types and shadows of this Redeemer who had yet to appear among us. New Testament churches, on the other hand, the buildings and the ordinances, are to be kept plain and simple, especially now that Christ has come, so as not to distract from His Person and work. Eating the bread and drinking the wine should not be encumbered with dramatic effects, or with prolonged explanation and endless appeals, which can only detract from the ordained purpose of these actions.