

Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit.

FENCING THE TABLE.

A Sermon

PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JANUARY 7TH, 1904,

DELIVERED BY

C. H. SPURGEON,

AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON,

On Lord's-day Evening, January 2nd, 1876.

“But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of the cup.”—1 Cor. xi. 28.

THERE are two symbolical ordinances in the Christian Church, and only two,—Believers' Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These have been so misinterpreted, perverted, and abused, that the wish has sometimes crossed the mind of spiritual persons that they had never been instituted. We do not wonder that there should be a denomination of Christians who have given them up, though we think that, in this matter, they have not acted according to the Word of God. We ourselves retain them, for this reason only, because we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ ordained them; and we desire to observe them exactly as Christ ordained them; and thus only shall we find them instructive and helpful to our souls.

Baptism, the immersion of the believer in water, is the token of his death, burial, and resurrection with Christ. It sets forth the fellowship which he has with his Lord, as the apostle tells us: “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him;”—not that the plunge into the water confers any grace upon the person who is baptized, but it is the type, the emblem, the instructive symbol of the new birth, which new birth consists in passing, by death and resurrection, into newness of life. You all know that we are only born once. A thing can only have one true beginning. Hence, baptism is never to be repeated. Once done, it is done for ever.

The other ordinance is the Lord's Supper; and, as baptism sets forth, typifies, (mark you, nothing more than typifies,) and is the emblem of the new birth, so the Lord's Supper is the emblem of the spiritual feeding of that new life. Now, though a man is born only once, he eats a great many more times than once, and drinks a great many more times than once. Indeed, to eat and to drink often, are necessary to the maintenance of our life. If we neglected to do so, we should soon find ourselves in an ill case. Hence, the

Supper of the Lord, representing, as it does, the spiritual feeding of the new-born life upon the body and blood of Christ, (and only representing it, mark you,—not really doing it in any carnal sense,) is oftentimes to be repeated. We find that the early Christians very frequently broke bread together; I think they did so almost every day. It is recorded, by some of the early fathers, that the first Christians seldom met together, on any day of the week, without commemorating the death of Christ. Augustine mentions this; and he seems to have taught that, at least once in the week, on that blessed day which celebrates the resurrection of our Lord, Christians should meet for the breaking of bread. I think that, the oftener we meet for this purpose, the better it is for us. The Holy Spirit specifies no particular time; we are not under a law which binds us to this period or to that. Our Lord leaves it very much to our own loving hearts; but the words that Paul quotes, "This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me," certainly imply that we should often "do this" in remembrance of our dear Lord and Saviour.

A simple feast, even of bread and wine, a feast often celebrated, would be liable to be trifled with and misapplied. Hence, as paradise of old was guarded by cherubim, with a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life, so stands this simple Supper of the Lord guarded with a flaming sword, of which my text is a portion: "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup."

Now, with this thought upon our minds, let us go to the text itself, and observe how we are bidden to examine ourselves before we come to the table of the Lord. We will speak, first, concerning *the necessity for this examination*; next, *the person who is to perform it*; then, *the vital points of the examination*; and, lastly, *the spirit in which we should come to the table after we have examined ourselves*.

I. First, then, THE NECESSITY FOR THIS EXAMINATION.

The sense of that necessity will be very strongly impressed upon us if we remember that *many have profaned the table of the Lord*. Hence it is incumbent upon us to examine ourselves lest we should do the same. Years ago,—our grandfathers recollect it well,—men had to "take the sacrament," as it was called, before they could be made mayors of towns, or hold certain offices in the municipalities; and, in that way, the communion table became a passport to secular office. I tremble as I think how the laws of this land compelled men—though they ought never to have yielded obedience to such laws,—to eat and drink judgment or condemnation to themselves as they profaned this holy ordinance. Others have made it, as I fear that some still make it, a means of obtaining alms; coming to the communion table because those who are members of the church are helped in the time of their poverty, or there is a distribution of alms-money among the needy communicants. Ah, dear friends, however poor you may be, it would be better for you even to starve than to get help in this way if you are not really the Lord's people. If any of you have acted thus, I charge you, before

Almighty God, to do so no more. If we have any suspicions that we have ever done such a thing, we may well examine ourselves concerning that matter, and sincerely repent if we have so sinned against the Lord.

Others come to the communion as a piece of sheer superstition, really believing, poor deluded souls, that, when they take the wafer into their mouths, they actually eat the flesh of Christ. Such a monstrous doctrine as that is only fit for cannibals; it is not a doctrine of Christianity. What a profanation of the ordinance it is to come to it with such a notion as that! If any of us have the slightest idea that, to partake of what is called "the sacrament"—though there is no such name as that for it anywhere in Scripture,—confers grace, let all such thoughts be banished from our minds at once.

It is not a converting ordinance, nor a saving ordinance; it is an establishing ordinance and a comforting ordinance for those who are saved. But it never was intended to save souls, neither is it adapted to that end; and if it be so misrepresented, it is apt rather to be the means of damning than of saving the soul, for he that so eats and drinks may, in very deed, be eating and drinking damnation to himself.

I fear that there are others who come to the communion table out of mere form. I find that it is the custom of certain persons to do this always on Christmas day and on Good Friday, though what particular sanctity there can be about those two days, I am sure I cannot tell. I see little enough of holiness about them, and a great deal of sheer superstition. But let all of us be careful that we never come to the communion simply because it is the first Sabbath in the month, or even because it is the day of our Lord's resurrection, and because, as church-members, we feel that we ought to come there. I mention these things—although I hope, to the most of you, they are unnecessary,—because they are necessary to a certain class of persons who, in one or other of these ways, thoughtlessly profane the table of the Lord.

But, brethren and sisters in Christ, we need to examine ourselves, because it may be that, though free from these evils which I have mentioned, we have come to this solemn feast without due solemnity, without serious thought, without the proper preparation of heart or the right observance of the ordinance. We have come very often to the communion table, yet there has been but little real heart-fellowship with Jesus. There has been bread upon the table, and in our mouths, but we have not discerned the Lord's body. There has been wine there, but we have not looked through the sign to the blood of which it is only the symbol. If it has been so with any of us, we have, to that extent, eaten and drunk unworthily, and I know not how much of deserved chastisement God may have laid upon us on that account. but the apostle's words have often been fulfilled since his day, "For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

This examination is necessary, next, *because the purpose of this ordinance requires that we should be in a fit condition for its*

observance. What is the object of this ordinance? "This do in remembrance of me," says the Lord Jesus; but you cannot remember what you do not know. Then, how can you remember an unknown Christ? By coming to the communion table, you are supposed to let men see, as they look on at this ordinance, that you believe that Christ lived and died to save sinners. But suppose that you do not believe it,—that you do not, at any rate, in your heart savingly believe it; then, you are not a fit person to proclaim that truth to others by means of this ordinance. The Lord Jesus Christ does not want his enemies to be his remembrancers; he wants his friends to cherish his memory, and to keep the fact of his death prominently and permanently before the eyes of the world. It must be his friends who must do this. Besides, this ordinance is one special means of communion between Christ and his people, but what communion can there be between you and Christ if you are a son of Belial? If you love sin, and continue to live in sin, what possible fellowship can you have with the holy Christ? Will he have communion with a man who even comes to his table drunk,—or who comes from dishonest actions all the week,—or who has been singing a lascivious song, but now turns to join with those who laud and magnify the name of the thrice-holy God? Imagine not that Jesus Christ will welcome such as you are to his table. If you do come, it will be at your most imminent peril. It can do you no good; it must be a curse rather than a blessing to you. So, let us examine ourselves, because those, who come to the table of the Lord, ought to be of such a sort that the purposes and objects, for which the ordinance was instituted, may be realized in them.

But let us specially examine ourselves, *because, if we come not aright, we shall incur very severe penalties*,—the penalties which I have already mentioned to you. Let me again read to you these solemn words: "Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." And then follows the sure penalty upon true believers who, nevertheless, come in an unfit state to the table. I have read it to you before, but I will read it again: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh condemnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Put off thy shoes from thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Rush not in to the sacred place, but come with that gracious timorousness—nay, rather, with that holy boldness—which becomes a sinner who has been washed in the blood of Jesus Christ, and is robed in his spotless righteousness.

And, dear friends, once more, there is a necessity for us to examine ourselves, *because we must know that there are, among us, some who are, doubtless, partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily.* We have known, to our great sorrow, of some who have been harbouring an unforgiving spirit, yet who have dared to come to the communion table. When I have really known that this has been the case, I have prevented the wrongdoer from sitting down with us; but, unknown to me, and to other ministers, it must often have

happened that persons have come, professing to be Christians, yet all the while not manifesting the true spirit of Christianity toward some offending brother or sister. You remember how even the loving apostle John writes, "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?"

Then, alas! there are some, who, by coming to the communion, profess to be Christians, yet who, nevertheless, are all the while living in shameful sin which they dare not have discovered? This is one of the greatest sources of sorrow to true ministers of Christ, and it has made us often wring our hands with agony, and weep bitter tears before the Lord, when we have seen trees looking fair and green, but which, inwardly, as Bunyan said, were "so rotten that they were only fit to be tinder for the devil's tinder-box." Their profession was a false one; for, all the while, their moral character was unsound. There was a rottenness about them which no one discovered till, upon some fatal day,—fatal to their own reputation, but good for the church's purification,—they were exposed, and driven out with shame. Judas was found out at last; Ananias and Sapphira were at last found out, and cut off from amongst the people of God, and the unclean and unholy among the early Christians were excommunicated from the assembly of the saints.

Now, brethren and sisters, if, to your own personal knowledge, this has been the case with others, forgive me when I ask,—Is there not at least the possibility that it may also be the case with you? At any rate, you will do well to examine yourselves; and if, after having honestly examined, you can say, "No, that is not the case with me," then bless God that you can truthfully say so. Take no credit to yourselves, but give to God's grace the whole of the praise. Still, do look thoroughly to this matter. "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith." I, as a minister, am bound to examine myself, because there have been eminent preachers of the gospel who, nevertheless, have lived unhallowed lives. No preacher may dare to say, "My office screens me from this test." Deacons and elders of the church, you must examine yourselves, because you have known church-officers who have brought disgrace upon the offices that they have filled. And you, Sunday-school teachers, open-air preachers, tract-distributors, and the like,—and you, members of the church,—however useful you may be, and however highly you may be respected by your fellow-members, I beseech you, nevertheless, shirk not this duty, but let each one examine himself ere he comes to sit down at the table of the Lord.

II. Now, secondly, I am to speak about THE PERSON WHO IS TO PERFORM THIS EXAMINATION: "Let a man examine *himself*."

Let not anyone say, "I was examined by the proper officers of the church, before I was admitted into church-membership, so I do not need any further examination." Now, mark, it is the duty of every church, in receiving members, to judge all applicants by their fruits. "By their fruits shall ye know them," is our Lord's own test. We must have a credible profession of faith, supported by a

life that is consistent therewith, but that is all upon which we can form a judgment. We cannot examine the heart, and we cannot infallibly judge the life. How very often have we been deceived in these matters! If anyone were to suppose that a certificate of church-membership is to excuse him from the duty of personal self-examination, he is grievously mistaken. No, dear friend, you know what your secret thoughts are, and what your private actions are; and therefore it is to yourself that this duty is committed: "Let a man examine *himself*."

"Well, but," someone may say, "my friends—my private friends—are quite satisfied concerning my spiritual condition. I have been talking to my godly mother; I have been conversing with my praying father; I have had sweet fellowship, just lately, with a good old Christian friend; and they all seem perfectly satisfied with me." I am glad they are; but Paul says, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "Let a man examine *himself*." There is no greater error under heaven than to try to shift the responsibility of our own personal religion on to friends or to so-called "priests." There can be no more gigantic imposture than the supposed sponsorship of infants. It amazes me that anybody can dare to say, on any child's behalf, that it shall renounce the pomps and vanities of this world, and all else that is mentioned in the Church Catechism. But it would be an equally gigantic imposture if we were to establish a sponsorship for grown-up people. Both of them are wicked, and neither of them can be carried out; we cannot guarantee the Christian character of other people, the apostolic rule must remain: "Let a man examine *himself*." Look ye well to the state of your own souls; and, to this end, go to God in prayer, and say, as David did, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

III. Now, thirdly, WHAT ARE THE VITAL POINTS IN THIS EXAMINATION? There are a good many, but I have arranged them under five heads for the sake of brevity, and to help your memories.

First, my dear friends, *examine yourselves concerning your knowledge*. There are some who are too ignorant to come to the table of the Lord. They may have taken their M.A. degree at Oxford or Cambridge, they may even be Doctors of Divinity, and yet be too ignorant to come to the Lord's table. What knowledge is necessary for coming aright to the table? I answer,—Saving knowledge—a living knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "This do in remembrance of me." You cannot remember a person you never knew; so you must be acquainted with the Lord Jesus Christ if you would observe this ordinance as he instituted it. There is the bread upon the table. Have you ever known what it was to be spiritually hungry? Do you know that Jesus Christ is the only food that can relieve the hunger of your spirit? Have you learned to know him through feeding upon him by faith? Then, you are a fit person to partake of the bread on the communion table, because you are a person who understands what it signifies, you who have been satisfied by feeding upon Christ. There is also the wine-cup

upon the table. Were you ever spiritually thirsty? Did you then see how the Lord Jesus Christ, by his atoning sacrifice, has fully met all the needs of your soul? Have you really partaken of Jesus Christ, and has your heart been refreshed, and revived, and cheered by the application to it of the precious blood of Jesus? If so, you understand the meaning of that communion cup, and you are a fit and proper person to partake of it. But if you have never known this spiritual hunger and thirst,—if you have never realized your own spiritual needs, and if you have not known what it is for Christ to supply those needs, I charge you to keep away from this table until you do know these things. Otherwise, you will be eating and drinking in utter ignorance; and the mere physical acts will be of no service whatsoever to you. May the Lord give you to know him whom to know is life eternal; and when you do know him, then come to his table, for you will not then eat and drink unworthily.

Then, next, *examine yourselves concerning your faith*. Knowledge is all in vain without faith; and the knowledge, of which I have been speaking, is a knowledge that is closely allied with faith. Are you trusting alone in the merits of the Lord Jesus Christ? I have asked myself that question many scores of times, and I do not recollect that I ever had any hesitancy about how to answer it. I know that I am trusting in Jesus. If I am really living,—if there is any truth in my own consciousness,—I am sure that I have trusted my soul, for time and for eternity, wholly to the keeping of that Saviour who lived, and died, and rose again for sinners. Well, that being so, I have a right to come to the communion. Christ wants believers at his table; they are his own children. If you are believing in him, he invites you to come, and you will be welcome if you do come. You will not eat and drink unworthily, dear friend, if you apprehend, by faith, that Christ's flesh is meat indeed, and his blood is drink indeed. You will come to the table in the right manner.

In the third place, I want you to *examine yourselves concerning your repentance*. In the emblems upon the communion table, I can see something of what it cost your Lord to redeem you from sin, and death, and hell. The bread, representing the flesh of Jesus, is separate from the wine, which represents his blood, and the separation of the blood from the flesh indicates death,—a bleeding away of life in the most acute anguish. It cost your Lord untold agony to redeem you from going down into the pit, so can you ever imagine that any man is a fit person to participate in the emblems which set forth that agony if he has never felt, in his own soul, any agony on account of sin? What right has an impenitent person to come where the death of Christ, on account of sin, is specially set forth? A heart that has never been broken, because of sin,—shall it come and remember the broken body and broken heart of Jesus? A heart of stone, that has never been melted,—shall it come and remember his precious flesh that was melted in the agonies of Calvary? If your eyes have wept no tears of repentance, how can you properly remember him whose veins wept blood to redeem his

people from their sins? It is a contrite heart and a broken spirit that Christ wants here. Only with such persons will God deign to dwell, and only with such will Christ commune, either at his table or anywhere else. See to it, then, that you have genuine repentance.

The next vital point for self-examination is love. *Examine yourselves concerning your love.* I think, brethren, that none of us can worthily eat of this bread, and drink of this cup, unless we truly love our Lord; so I venture to put the question to each one of you here. I know not your names, but the name that is used by our Lord Jesus will do for you. He says, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" You answer, "Yes," do you? Then I will put the question again: "Simon, son of Jonas, Jesus says to thee, 'Lovest thou me?'" And yet a third time I may put it: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" 'Tis Jesus with the pierced hand, and with the pierced feet, who speaks, and he says, "Lovest thou me?" This is the test of whether you may come to his table, or not. Can you answer, "'Yea, Lord; thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.' Sometimes, my friends hardly know it, for I am not always as consistent as I should be. Sometimes, Lord, I have even to question it myself, but THOU knowest that, deep down in my heart, notwithstanding all my coldness and forgetfulness, all my wanderings, and all my faults, thou knowest that I do love thee." Come along, brother; come along, sister; you will not eat and drink unworthily if this is true concerning your love to your Lord.

There is one other matter which is vital, and that concerns obedience. *Examine yourselves concerning your obedience;* for, unless a man obeys the commands of Christ, he does not prove that he really loves Christ. If we truly love him, we shall keep his commandments. If Paul had said that no one had a right to come to the communion unless he was perfect, I certainly could not come, and I feel sure that there is no one in the whole world who would have the right to come. Perfect? Ah, perfect weakness; and if anybody says he is perfect in any other sense than that, he must be possessed of perfect folly. But the obedience that we must have is of this sort. Dost thou desire to be perfectly obedient to thy Lord? Dost thou, in thy heart, desire to be rid of every sin, and to forsake every false way? Is there any sin that thou wouldst fain harbour and indulge? Then, thou art not truly obedient; but canst thou, on the other hand, say, "Lord, I would be purged from every evil of every kind, and I desire to obey thee in all things. No matter how it may grate upon my feelings, or how contrary it may be to my wishes, where thou biddest me, I will go, and what thou commandest me, I will do,—thy grace helping me"? Is that what you say? Then, you may come to the communion, for Jesus himself welcomes you. But if you will not give up sin, if you have even one pet sin that you still determine to keep, you are a traitor to Christ, and you have no more right to come to his table than Judas Iscariot had.

IV. Now, in closing, I want to speak a few words concerning THE SPIRIT IN WHICH, AFTER THIS SELF-EXAMINATION, WE OUGHT TO COME TO THE COMMUNION.

Ought we not to come, dear friends, each one of us, *in the spirit of holy wonder?* This is the Lord's table, and I am coming, with the Lord's redeemed people, to eat and drink at it; what a wonder that I am here! I never come to the communion without being astonished at the amazing grace of God to me, and especially as I think of this great church which God has been graciously pleased to gather in this place. How much I owe to him! How constantly am I struck with the marvels of his mercy to me! And each one of you, my fellow-believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, has some peculiar reason for feeling the same kind of wonder in your own case.

Next, we ought to come to the communion *with a sense of self-abasement.* Brethren, we ought to think little of ourselves everywhere; but when we come to the table of our Lord, we ought to shrink to nothing,—yea, to less than nothing. In the wilderness, man did eat angels' food, but angels never ate such food as this; yet we are permitted to come and partake of it. So, let us sink, and sink, and sink, and sink, and sink, and sink, till we are lost in wonder, love, and praise that we should ever be permitted to come to this sacred feast.

Let us come, at the same time, *in a spirit of strong desire.* I believe that, in a sermon, people always get good when they come desiring to get it. A hungry congregation will be sure to be fed; and if we come to the communion table feeling, "My Lord and Master, I desire to meet with thee. The bread alone will not satisfy me; I want to feed spiritually upon thy flesh. The wine will not quench my soul's thirst; I want spiritually to receive thy blood into my inmost soul. I desire, with all passionateness of holy ardour, to put my finger into the print of the nails, and to thrust my hand into thy side;"—if you come to the communion in this spirit, longing for Christ, you shall have him. Open your mouths and pant for him, and the living waters shall quench your soul's thirst.

Then come to the table *with a believing hope.* Perhaps you have not seen your Master's face lately, you have been sorrowfully walking in darkness. Come to the communion hoping that he will look through the lattice, and reveal himself to you. Do you not know that the two ordinances are windows of agate and of carbuncle to the opened eyes of his people? Mayhap, your loving Lord will look again through one of those windows while you are sitting at his table. So, come expecting him; come with your heart wide open to receive its rightful Lord and Master, and with your eyes of love looking up to him; and, surely, if the eyes of your love look up to him, the eyes of his love will look down upon you. If you come to his table, singing, "My Beloved is mine, and I am his; he feedeth among the lilies;"—if you come passionately desiring to enjoy his company;—then you may also come with the full confidence that his company will be given to you.

I have only one thing more to say. Come to the communion table resolved that if, in the ordinance, you do not find your Lord;—if, in the breaking of bread, he is not manifested to you; and if, in the pouring forth of the wine, you get no taste of his love;—*you will still trust in him.* Do not depend on outward signs and visible

evidences, but say, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him;" and if his table should yield me no spiritual meat, I will still cleave to my Master; and if he will only let me be as a dog beneath his table, I will eat the crumbs that fall there, and so shall I live, for in every crumb of his mercy there is life everlasting."

As for you, who perhaps have never thought upon this subject, I have to say just this to you, and then I have done. Remember that religion does not begin with ordinances. While I have been speaking to professing Christians concerning the communion, I hope that none of you have been thinking of it as a saving ordinance. You, as sinners, have to exercise faith in Christ before you have anything to do with believers' baptism; you have to come to Christ himself before you are qualified to come to the Lord's table. As soon as you have, by faith, received Jesus Christ himself as your Saviour, the tokens and emblems of his death will become instructive to you; but until Jesus Christ is wholly yours, hands off all these holy things! For, as uncircumcised Philistines would have had no right to be at the Paschal supper, so have those, who are not renewed in heart with that circumcision that is made without hands, no right to come to the feast of Christian love which is reserved for the followers of the Crucified. Come ye to Jesus, to Jesus only, and put your trust in him. God grant that you may do so, for Christ's sake! Amen.

Exposition by C. H. Spurgeon.

MATTHEW XXVI. 17—30; AND 1 CORINTHIANS XI. 18—34.

Matthew xxvi. Verses 17—26. Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover? And he said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve. And as they did eat, he said, Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him, Lord, is it I? And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it,

So the Jewish Passover melted away into the Lord's Supper. Indeed, so gently did the one dissolve into the other that we scarcely know whether this incident, relating to Judas Iscariot, occurred during the Passover or the Supper. According to one account, it would seem to be one; and according to another account, the other; but, indeed, the one ordinance was almost imperceptibly merged into the other.

I want you carefully to notice, as we read this narrative through, whether you can see here any trace of an altar. Look with both your eyes, and see whether you can find any trace of a priest offering a sacrifice. Watch diligently to see whether you can perceive anything about kneeling down, or about the elevation or the adoration of "the host." Why, even