

SHALL I GO TO THE LORD'S SUPPER?

WHEN our Lord was eating the last passover with his twelve apostles, and but a few hours before he was betrayed, he saw fit to institute a service which should remind his people of his sufferings and death, in such a manner as no precept alone could possibly have done. Separating two simple elements, which were before them on the table—the bread to represent his body broken, and the wine to represent his blood poured forth—he distributed them to his disciples, saying of the bread, “This is my body;” and of the cup, “This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many;” and then giving it in solemn charge, “This do in remembrance of me.” It was a permanent ordinance, so given and so understood; for more than twenty years afterwards, Paul enjoined its observance on the Corinthian church as a well known institution, saying, “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you; that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread,” &c. 1 Cor. ii. 23—26.

Conscientious Christians have to this day, by almost universal consent, observed the Lord's supper. It is an ordinance peculiar to the church of Christ, and to be stately observed there until “He shall appear the

second time, without sin unto salvation." Notwithstanding this general admission of the obligation to observe this sacrament, there are those who neglect it. Those who do thus are of two kinds; some disregard it altogether, living without prayer, and contemning not only this, but every other divine institution, and caring for none of these things; while others are serious persons, exhibiting some degree of evidence that they are Christians, and at times having a hope for themselves that they have passed from death unto life, but still neglecting to come to the Lord's table, from a supposed want of the proper qualifications. With the first of these classes we have at present nothing to do. God calls them to himself, but they stop their ears; he lifts up his hand to invite, but they shut their eyes; his Spirit hovers over them, but they harden their hearts. To their own master they stand or fall. But we have now in view the other class; those serious and perhaps pious people, who would gladly know their duty, that they might perform it, and who hesitate about making a public profession of religion by uniting with the visible church, and thus taking a seat at the Lord's table, not from a want of love to God or his ordinances, but from a fear that they are destitute of the proper qualifications. We shall endeavour, therefore, to remove these difficulties, and show both the duty and the privilege of God's people to render obedience to him in this particular duty, as well as in all others.

1. Coming acceptably to the Lord's table does not necessarily demand entire innocence of character. If it were so, no mortal could sit down there. There is

no such thing on earth as innocence of character. Every child of Adam is a guilty sinner, naturally destitute of holiness, and inclined to evil. "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head, there is no soundness in it." Such is man, a sinner by nature, an entire sinner. But this admitted truth should deter no one from taking a seat at the table of the Lord. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; and all such, repenting of their sins and believing on him, may freely come to his table.

2. The want of full assurance of being in a state of grace, is no insurmountable obstacle to a worthy partaking of the Lord's supper. The highest degrees of evidence of being in a state of grace are desirable, and should be sought by all; neither should any be content with low degrees of the witness of the Spirit, that they are children of God and heirs with Christ, and we should constantly aim at making progress in the divine life. "Forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before," we should "press toward the mark for the prize of our high calling of God in Christ Jesus." There doubtless is such a thing as assurance of God's love, and we should labour for its attainment, and hope for its possession, but the want of it, as yet, is not to be considered as an obstacle to the performance of any duty which is plainly commanded.

3. None should refrain from an open profession of religion, and consequently from taking a seat at the Lord's table, on account of a supposed want of joy and delight in the things of God. "I am gloomy and

melancholy," says the objector; "I have no joy and peace in believing, and therefore scarce dare to indulge any hope of pardon and acceptance with God. In this state of mind, can I believe that I am a child of God, and as such entitled to a seat at his table?" To this it may be answered, that the reality of vital religion is to be ascertained, not by the measure of joy and delight afforded, but by the existence in the soul of the substantial graces of the Spirit, such as *faith*, or trust in Christ; *repentance*, or deep self-loathing for sin; and *humility*, or self-abasement before God. These graces are characteristic of the Christian, while joy and delight are not. A self-deceived hypocrite may be very joyful, but he can neither trust in Christ, nor lie in humble abasement at the foot of the cross. These substantial graces, as characteristic of true piety, may be seen in holy men of old. The piety of Job will not be questioned, and while all was dark around him, and he did not see his way, yet his faith and trust in God was a strong and active principle within him. Listen to his language: "For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth." "Though he slay me, yet will I trust him." But "O that I knew where I might find him." "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him." So dark and gloomy was the mind of this holy man, notwithstanding his firm trust in God. Were Job with us at this day, should we exclude him from the Lord's table, because he walked in

darkness, and had no joy? Certainly not. And there was David also. Look at the occasional state of his mind, and hear his agonizing cries: "I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters where the floods overflow me. I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God." "In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord: my sore ran in the night, and ceased not: my soul refused to be comforted." Shall David be excluded from the Lord's table because instead of joy and delight he is covered with a cloud, and because his evidences of grace are for the moment obscured to his own mind? No one will admit it. And what are we to think of Jeremiah, who said, "When I cry and shout, God shutteth out my prayer?" Or, what are we to think of Paul, as we hear him exclaim in bitterness of soul: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" Shall Paul keep aloof from the table of the Lord, because there may have been a cloud over his mind at that moment? If the argument is a sound one, which keeps the desponding soul away from his privilege, merely from the want of joy and delight, then the holy men of old while walking in darkness, as they sometimes did, should have refrained from the discharge of religious obligations, until the cloud passed over, and joy again filled their souls. But if they were not to be excluded from participating in divine ordinances while under the cloud, we are not to exclude ourselves on the same ground.

4. None should refrain from taking a seat at the Lord's table on account of a supposed weakness of

faith, and a fear of unworthiness. This is often urged. Let such as indulge it consider that it is the *quality* of the grace, and not the *measure* of it to which we are to look. For example: water is as truly water in a single drop, as in the whole ocean; it differs only in quantity. So real faith of the very weakest kind, hesitating, trembling, and fearing, it may be, is truly faith, notwithstanding—and as surely unites the soul to Christ unto justification of life as absolute assurance. And as to legal worthiness, there is no such thing. All men are utterly unworthy of the least favour, and deserve eternal banishment from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; and we are accepted in attending upon divine ordinances, not because we are worthy, but because God is merciful, and condescends to the lowly.

5. It will doubtless be asked whether there are not some positive qualifications in those who worthily partake of the Lord's supper. There are such, and they are principally these three, viz: Faith in Christ, Repentance for sin, and Love to God and to his commandments.

Faith in Christ is the renunciation of our own righteousness, and a heartfelt trust in him to save us. It is easy to see that this may be found in great purity where there is very little comfort. Let the man be asked whether he has evidence of being renewed in the spirit of his mind, and he may be very doubtful; but ask him on what he relies for salvation, and he will tell you that he relies on Christ alone to save him, if he is ever saved. Thus he exercises faith, and trusts his salvation with the great Redeemer. He has

no hope at all in himself, but with great tenderness of spirit his eyes rest on Christ, and although he may walk in much darkness, yet Christ is all his salvation, and all his desire. Such a man has faith, and will come acceptably to the Lord's table.

Repentance for sin is a deep self-loathing on account of the depravity of nature, the want of conformity to God, and actual transgressions of his law. The fear of punishment does not enter into this grace, for it probably is never more sincere than when sin is viewed as forgiven, and when Christ is seen by faith, taking away sin by the sacrifice of himself. Then the truly penitent soul sinks down in self abasement before God, and the streams of godly sorrow will flow from the eyes. The penitent looks to him whom his sins have pierced, and mourns most unfeignedly. It is the pollution of sin which troubles him. It is the plague of his heart that he feels, and he seeks to put away sin, not as he would fire because it burns him, but as he would some filthy thing because it defiles him. A feeling like this is an evidence of repentance, and those who exercise it may come freely to the Lord's table, gathering assuredly that they are welcome there.

Love to God and to his commandments becomes manifest, much as love to other things is manifested. When we love a person we think of him, we speak of him, we love what he loves, and hate what he hates, and we seek to please him in all that we do. So it is if we truly love God. He will dwell in our thoughts, and our meditation of him will be sweet. We shall love to maintain intercourse with him by prayer, and

our best affections will turn upon him, and upon all that whereby he makes himself known.

These three things, faith, repentance, and love, comprehend everything which is absolutely demanded in the worthy receiving of the Lord's supper; and those who can discern these graces in themselves need not fear to make an open profession of the name of Christ, by enrolling themselves among his visible people, and partaking of the sacraments of the New Testament, as God in his providence may give them the opportunity.

AN ANXIOUS INQUIRY.

'Tis a point I long to know,
 Oft it causes anxious thought;
 Do I love the Lord or no?
 Am I his or am I not?

Could my heart so hard remain,
 Prayer a task and burden prove,
 Every trifle give me pain,
 If I knew a Saviour's love?

Yet I mourn my stubborn will,
 Find my sin a grief and thrall;
 Should I grieve for what I feel,
 If I did not love at all?

Could I joy his saints to meet,
 Choose the ways I once abhorred,
 Find at times the promise sweet,
 If I did not love the Lord?

Lord, decide the doubtful case,
 Thou who art thy people's Sun:
 Shine upon thy work of grace,
 If it be indeed begun.