



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

“The Lord’s Supper; Its Place in the Church”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well our subject this evening is The Lord’s Supper; Its Place in the Life of the Church, and so we’re turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and reading the most significant passage in the epistles verse 17 through verse 34 of this important chapter, so if you have your Bibles, your New Testaments particularly verse 17 of 1 Corinthians chapter 11. And I want to tell you that I am not going to expound all of this section tonight. In view of the fact that when I was asked by the elders to do this I thought that this was a one time thing, and it’s essentially that, and so I thought I would really just share, I don’t like the word share, but say a few things about the Lord’s supper in a more devotional way, and so that’s essentially what I would like to do. But verse 17 of chapter 11,

“Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you since you come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and in part I believe it. For there must be also factions among you, that they, whose are approved, may be made recognized among you.

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating one takes his own supper ahead of the others: and one is hungry, and another is drunk. What? Do you not have houses to eat and to drink in? or do you despise the

church of God, and shame those who have nothing? what shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. For I have receive from the Lord that which also I delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: do this in remembrance of me. (The term broken here is probably not genuine, and so we’ll translate it as simply which is for you. I don’t mean by any way to suggest that the idea is not Scriptural because it’s simply a reference to the death of our Lord. Verse 25,) In the same manner also he took the cup, after supper saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood: this do as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and drink of the cup. For he that eats and drinks unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat wait one for another. But if any one is hungry let him eat at home; lest you come together for judgment. And the rest will I set in order when I come.”

We often make the statement particularly at the baptismal service that the Christian church has been given two ordnances to observe until the Lord comes. And one of them is water baptism, and we have usually said in connection with it that water baptism emphasizes one’s entrance into the church. And after a profession faith we are baptized in water, and that is ideally done once for all because it recognizes that fact that there is a

once and for all entrance into the body of Christ. We don’t come out of the body. Go back in, out of the body and back in.

Now of course there are some churches that have believed that, but generally speaking even they who believe that they can lose salvation and regain it do not re-baptize. Which it might seem the logical thing for them to do? So the Christian church has in its general teaching thought of baptism as a once and for all experience. The Lord’s supper however emphasizes our continuance in the life in Christ or our life in Christ itself, and so consequently it’s something that Scripture set forth us as continuing. That is we continually observe the Lord’s supper. We call these ordinances. Sometimes they are called sacraments. In certain churches a bit more liturgical sacrament is the kind of word that they prefer. But ordinance is the word preferred by those that generally speaking do not have much liturgy. Everybody has some liturgy in the sense that we do go through certain motions to have a service of the Lord’s supper or even a preaching service for that matter, but we are calling them ordinances, and in generally speaking the belief of freer churches, the two ordinances are the two that are observed by the evangelical church? And ordinance is a symbolic rite that sets forth primary facts of the Christian faith, and is universally obligatory among believers. Generally speaking it must be something also authorized by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Now it is for believers of course because it is something that must be understood. If a person who had no acquaintance with the Christian faith at all were come into our Sunday evening Lord’s supper service and see us passing plates with small pieces of bread upon them and then a plate in which there was a small bit of liquid there would be very little understanding communicated by that. In fact a person may leave and say it’s a rather strange meeting. They sit around. They are quiet. They sing hymns, and then they have a bit of food at the end, but they wouldn’t understand at all, the Lord’s supper as well as the baptism. I can understand that an individual coming into a baptismal service might think that it was all fun to see people plunged under the water, and would be even

more puzzled I guess if had water just sprinkled on them or even someone putting their hand in a dish and then putting upon the hand of a baby, and then hearing a baby cry. It’s the environment in which I grew up, but that might seem very strange too if it were not explained, so the ordinances are for believers because one must be a believer to understand what an ordinance really is.

The Roman Catholic Church has seven ordinances and so they have five more than evangelical churches. There is the ordinance of ordination or the sacrament of ordination, the sacrament of confirmation, the sacrament of matrimony, the sacrament of extreme unction and the sacrament of penance, but Protestants and evangelicals have not accorded these so-called ordinances that rank as an ordinance. When we think of the Lord's supper we can think of different terms for the Lord's supper, and you have probably heard people use different terms even among evangelicals. It's very common for example to speak of the Lord's supper as the communion, and I don't really know whether it's justified to speak about taking communion, but the service itself is called communion, and one finds that term in 1 Corinthians chapter 10, in verse 16. It is called the Lord's table in 1 Corinthians 10 in verse 21. It is called the breaking of bread in Acts chapter 2 in verse 42, and then it is and in think surprisingly to some evangelicals because I find the many of them do not really understand the term Eucharist, but Eucharist is also a term that is found in 1 Corinthians 11:24 in this sense that the term eucharista means thanksgiving and the verb means to thank, and Paul does use the expression thanksgiving, and so when you see the Eucharist referred to as term for the Lord's supper it's a term that means the thanksgiving.

To my mind the Lord's supper seems to communicate a bit more to me because in the Lord's supper I conceive of the Lord as the host and we are guests and therefore the Lord's supper is very suitable there is one point that I think would interesting to make right here, and that is that the term that is used for supper is a term really that in the original text means what we would call dinner.

Now I have said this before a number of times to you, and there are some maybe who haven’t heard me say it, so I’ll say it again, but when I grew up in Charleston, South Carolina, we had dinner in the middle of the day and we had supper at night. The major meal of the day was the dinner and in Charleston it was around 2:00 in the afternoon, which always create a lot of confusion with the salesmen traveling salesman who came to call on businessmen, because they would eat from 12:00 to 1:00 and then at 1:00 or so call on the business men, and they were just getting ready to go to dinner. So they always had to adjust their business appointments in Charleston because of that, but dinner was around 2:00 and the men came home, and then went back to work at 3:30, and in understand though I have never been in Spain that that’s something of the style that exists in Spain. At any rate dinner is the main meal.

Now to call the Lord's supper I think in one sense decreases the significance of biblically. We would in Charleston have a light supper in the evening, and we called it supper. The main meal was that dinner around 2:00. Well in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, when Paul refers to the Lord's supper he uses the term that means a dinner. The Lord’s [indistinct] which I think at least creates the impression that the apostle regards it as extremely important. It’s the dinner. It’s not simply a supper. It’s a dinner. It’s that important and given that important term or name.

Now it’s my opinion, and I understand that I am going to give you my opinion on some things because we don’t have absolutely knowledge about some things concerning the practice of the early church. It would be nice if we did, but we don’t. To my mind the Lord's supper should be the highlight of the corporate worship of the church. Today in evangelical life the thing that is predominate is either the sermon or else it is the liturgy, and in the churches that are most evangelical generally speaking it is the sermon, and so you think of coming to hear a sermon. In fact in the office, in Believer's Chapel I think it’s true to say that we often have people call in on Sunday morning, and ask who is preaching today. They think of the service as being primarily a preaching service.

In Acts chapter 20 in verse 7, when Luke is talking about the church at Troas he says this, “Now on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread.” In other words the thing that apparently was regarded as even more significant than the preaching was the breaking of bread, they came together to break bread.

Now the preaching followed because we go on to read about the apostle who was getting ready to leave spoke to them and continued his message until midnight, so perhaps that is what we ought to do on Sunday. We ought to emphasize the Lord's supper, but let the preacher preach from the meeting in the early evening until midnight, three or four hours. That would be wonderful wouldn't it? But at any rate the point I am making is that in early church this was the highlight of the corporate worship of the church. Incidentally that's why in Believer's Chapel we call the Sunday morning meetings at 8:30 and 11:0, the Ministry of the Word service because that's the point of it. We minister the Word. That is God through the Holy Spirit is ideally speaking to us through the individual who is giving the message. And so if you want to represent it, you would represent it by an arrow coming down from heaven. But around the Lord's table characteristic of the Lord's table is worship, and so you would turn the arrow and point it toward heaven. If you can think of that it might give you some idea of the relative significance of the meeting, the first God speaking to us through a servant. And then in the other meeting worship going upward toward God as we reflect on what the elements in the Lord's supper really mean.

Now the apostles, was they set forth the facts concerning the Lord's supper as it was exercised in the New Testament did not restrict it to worship, and there is ministry of the word, and we do have that in the local church, if it attempts to have a meeting like the New Testament church did should of course give that freedom, but significant for it, is the observance of the element, the ordinance and then the worship through the ceremony of the bread and the wine.

I think it’s interesting that this is the only act of worship for which the Lord gave special direction. That in itself may suggest the significance of the Lord's supper, but then if you will reflect on the fact that in the Gospel of Matthew, the Gospel of Mark, the Gospel of Luke, we have the Lord's supper set forth in its connection with the last Passover. We have the last Passover described together with the first Lord's supper together so that the synoptic gospel writers regarded the Lord's supper as important, and then the apostle has given us this lengthy section which has to do also with the Lord's supper. I think you can see how important it is. The roots of the Lord's supper go all the way back of course to the Old Testament Passover service, and what the Passover service represented was the redemption of the children of Israel out of the bondage in Egypt, and consequently when the church observes the breaking of bread service or the Lord's supper what it represents due to the connection between them is the redemption from sin that has taken place through the ministry of the Lord Jesus and Holy Spirit and the Father in the life of the believers, so the Passover celebrated the redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt. The Lord's supper celebrates the redemption of the children of God from the bondage of sin.

It’s very interesting too I think that according to some tradition at the observance of the Passover there was always an extra cup on the table which was supposed to be the cup for the Messiah in case he should come while the Passover service was being carried on, which would fit in very well with what Paul says here because we are to observe the Lord's supper until he comes. Incidentally that statement is rather important for some of the polemics that have taken place in the Christian church. There are bodies of professing Christian believers who do not believe in observing the Lord's supper. The Quakers for example do not observe the Lord's supper I don’t believe. There are those called ultra dispensationalists who do not observe the Lord's supper. Some observe baptism but do not observe the Lord's supper. Some observe the Lord's supper do not observe baptism. There are differences among them, but there are a large body of them

that do not observe the Lord's supper, but Paul's statement here would seem to indicate that it would be very difficult to square that with the word of God because he says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup ye proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.” So that would seem to suggest that the apostle regarded this as the observance of remembrance until the time that the Lord Jesus should come.

Now there's another point, I think that we ought to make in connection with this. When we say that the Passover service and the Lord's supper are related, incidentally there are a number of things about it that point out that fact. For example there is bread used in the case of the Passover. There is bread used in the case of the Lord's supper. There is the blood of the animal in connection with the Passover and there is the wine that suggests that the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of course wine has a specific place in the Passover service. For there were four cups of wine that were taken in general in the Passover services and the Lord's supper was instituted within the Passover with the third cup probably. In other words when our Lord takes the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.” That was the third cup of the Passover service, which he by divine authority is now transferring to the Lord's supper service, and so this connection that exists between them is a very significant connection. Both are services that celebrate redemption, and in the case of Lord's supper we have a celebration of course that is much more significant and we of course underline it for that reason. For example the Lord Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.” And so we have the old covenant in the Old Testament but now we have a new covenant that is inaugurated by the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. In pre death he speaks of it as this the cup is new covenant in my blood. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.”

Now I think it needs emphasis that when we talk about the Lord's supper as being that by means of which the new covenant is ratified we must look a little more carefully at the sacrifice itself, the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are some elements about

it that we ought to always keep in mind it seems to me as we sit around the Lord’s table and observe the Lord’s supper. For example the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ is a voluntary sacrifice. The New Testament stresses that in a number of places. He loved me. He gave himself for me a voluntary sacrifice, and so when we think of our Lord’s death we think of it as a voluntary sacrifice, and furthermore we think of it also as sacrifice to pay the penalty of sin. We think of it as a penal sacrifice. “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many for the redemption of sin.” So it’s a penal sacrifice. It’s something necessary to cover ones debt. And we also think of it as a sacrifice, and by that I mean it’s something, which our Lord undergoes voluntarily in order to carry out the will of the Father in the payment of sin. He himself sacrifices himself.

To put in other terms he offers a propitiation. And the propitiation in his death, he sacrifices himself, and that propitiatory sacrifice is the means by which our debts are paid. There is one other thing about it that needs stress I think in evangelicalism. It is an effectual sacrifice. In other words when our Lord offers himself as a sacrifice on Calvary’s cross, and we say it’s voluntary. It’s penal. It’s a propitiation of God’s holiness and righteousness, paying the debt that we have before God, satisfying all of the claims the God has against us we ought to go on and say always it’s an effectual sacrifice. It really does what we say it does, which means of course that the debt is paid and therefore there is no way by which the individual for whom Christ has died can possibly suffer for those sins.

It would be just as ridiculous to imagine as if the lost dying thief has our Lord pay the penalty right by his side. If we believed in universal redemption the Lord Jesus pays the penalty, so universal redemptionists tell us, for every single individual soul right by the side of the dying thief, and then a few moments later after he too now must suffer the penalty that the Lord Jesus has just paid for. Can you imagine that? So when we talk about universal redemption, we are not talking about what the Bible talks about when it talks about redemption. The redemption of the New Testament as an effectual particular

redemption, and it is something that is accomplished by the Lord Jesus for his sheep, for his people, and for the children of God, and so on. Otherwise we have double jeopardy. We have the Lord suffering, and we have lost individuals suffering as well, so we need to keep those things in mind as we think about this, and to my mind it increases my worship around the Lord’s table to realize that that atoning sacrifice was a definite atoning sacrifice for individual people all of whom are in the eternal determining will of God upon his heart from eternity past.

When the decree was made by the Lord God in heaven there we all were, every single individual on the heart of the Lord God. No surprises in heaven. They’re all brought to the knowledge of the Lord God when Christ came to die for them, for those whom as he says in his great prayer in John 17, “They ones that the Father had given to him.” Isn’t that magnificent? Think about it. All the ages past moving toward that climactic event and then everything there after moving on in the future as we look forward to what Paul says is him coming. So in the Old Testament Israel looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. We look forward to the coming of the Messiah. They didn’t understand what we understand now. Evidently at least the vast majority of them, so when we say the roots of the Lord’s supper extend back into the Old Testament to the Passover there are some interesting parallels for it. The Passover is a memorial of the physical deliverance by a sacrifice. The supper is spiritual deliverance through a greater sacrifice. The Passover is the anticipation of the future fulfillment. It’s done until he comes. The supper is of a future fulfillment too, for as we read in the accounts in Mark and Matthew the Lord Jesus said, “But I say unto you I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on till that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

Now I would like to say a few words this evening also about something that is a bit upon my heart with reference to the Lord’s supper. I confess that as I think about the evangelical church it seems to me that the Lord’s supper is accorded at least an outward accord of importance, but when it really comes down to it, the Christian church today

does not really regard the Lord's supper very highly. The evidence of it is this. We don't observe the Lord's supper as the early church did. Evidently they observed the Lord's supper weekly. In fact in the earlier days there's some possibility that they observed it daily, but at least weekly and shortly after the close of the New Testament there is historical evidence that it was characteristic of the churches to observe the Lord's supper weekly.

Now there are some evidences of this in the Christian church today in the Roman Catholic Church. We surely agree the oldest of the churches, and in the observance of the mass every Sunday, sometimes more than once on Sunday as you know in the Roman Catholic Churches you have a recognition of something that went back to the early church, and that tradition of the observance of the mass, which is the sacrifice and the thanksgiving or the supper, is reflective of the historical place of the Lord's supper in the church. Then you read the literature shortly after the New Testament and in the description of the meetings that we do have reference is made to the fact that the Lord's supper was observed every Sunday in the [indistinct] for example, and that about thirty years or so after the writing of the last book of the New Testament, so the idea then of the Lord's supper was very strong in the early church, and there's a passage I read in acts 20 in verse 7, “On the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread.” It's evident that the early church regarded the Lord's supper extremely highly, and thought of it as extremely important.

I don't want you to think for one moment that I think that we are not subject to the same neglect. We are. In Believers Chapel we have two Ministry of the Word services Sunday morning, but we can easily get into the meeting Sunday night. Those who wish to come. In other words there are many people who attend Believer's Chapel who never attend the Lord's supper service or if they do attend it they attend it very infrequently. I don't always blame them. I don't want to be too hard or harsh because the customs that are built up in our society in the religious world are very hard to break. But

we know of course in churches generally today occasionally you will find churches that observe the Lord's supper once a month, and then you will find more that observe the Lord's supper in a quarterly way. Some do not even observe the Lord's supper but once a year. That's striking isn't it when the Lord Jesus said, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” So it would seem then that the Christian church today is not really doing what you might think that they should be doing in the light of the importance evidentially that the early church accorded it.

I've often said this in Believers Chapel but some of you have not been there in the past, and I don't think I've said it in a long time, but it's striking to me that for example Mr. Charles Haddon Spurgeon, perhaps the greatest if not best known Baptist preacher of the 19th century, made the statement that he believed that the Lord's supper should be observed every Sunday, and there is some indication that they did observe it frequently in the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London. I even saw one place where it said they observed it every Sunday, but I don't think that is really true generally speaking. They did not observe it that way because the way in which he phrased it indicated that it was something he was saying that wasn't practiced.

John Calvin in the institutes of the Christian religion says that in his opinion the Lord's supper should be observed weekly. That's interesting isn't it in the light of the Presbyterian church. I don't know of a single Presbyterian church that observes the Lord's supper weekly or even monthly for that matter, and I am sure there probably are some, but when you mention Calvin, well all of us who have a reformed background or appreciation do a little bit of inward albescence when we hear the name Calvin because we think a lot of him. John Wesley it is reported observed with the early supporters of the Methodist movement, he was of course still an Anglican, they observed the Lord's supper every Sunday. So we have here the Anglican church, the Methodist church, the Presbyterian church, and the Baptist churches acknowledging in some of their leadership

the fact that the Lord's supper is something that might with good reason be observed with good reason weekly.

I ran across this statement by I. Howard Marshall. Professor Marshall is professor of New Testament at the University of Aberdeen and is well known among evangelicals. He's well known upon evangelical Calvinists as a very strong Armenian, and has written on the topic as well as written on the interpretation of books of the New Testament, a fine scholar of the New Testament, but he comments in a book that he wrote a few years ago called *The Last Supper and The Lord's Supper*. In line with what to appears have been the practice of the early church and the New Testament the Lord's supper should be celebrated frequently in the church and there is good reason for doing so on each Lord's day. I thought that was very interesting because his church in Britain does not do that, and in fact outside of the Christian Brethren I don't know of any others in Britain who do, so there is a kind of general attitude that the Bible teaches that the early church did, and that we are called upon to observe the Lord's supper frequently and some even think we ought to do it every Sunday. Historically the church evidently did that.

Now there are lots of reasons that have been given for not doing that, and I'd like to mention some of them. Incidentally the [indistinct] says, and I didn't cite this but it says, “On the Lord's day of the Lord come together, break bread, and hold Eucharist for thanksgiving.” So very shortly afterwards those were instructions that were given concerning the church meeting.

Some of the reasons that people have given in answer to, why do you not observe the Lord's supper every Sunday are, “The Bible doesn't say we should remember the Lord every Sunday in this way.” Of course one might say, “Well the Bible doesn't say we are not to either for that matter.” We know the apostles observe the Lord's supper evidently frequently, and perhaps it's best to leave it at that, and say the observe the Lord's supper frequently, and they themselves appear to have observed it, we say the church observed it frequently, but the apostles themselves and the others so far as we can tell interpreted

frequently as being weekly. We have to remember that we don’t really have Scripture for that, and so I think it’s true in Believers Chapel the elders have never regarded it as essential that we be here every Sunday to observe the Lord's supper, and if we are not here, then we have sinned. We’d never take that position so far as I know. The position has been that it is normal for the believers in the Lord to want to observe the Lord's supper and to be frequently at the Lord’s table, and the frequently should be left at that because the apostle says, “As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death till he come.” I think it’s generally true to say too that apostolic practice may be regarded generally as apostolic teaching or precept. For example in 1 Corinthians 4 in verse 17, when Paul is talking he says, “For this reason I have sent Timothy to you who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord who will remind you of my ways in Christ as I teach everywhere in every church.”

Now let me point out what Paul is saying. He said he is going to send Timothy, his servant to the church, and that Timothy will remind them of his ways in Christ. How Paul lives as a Christian believer, and then he says, “As I teach everywhere in every church.” In other words his ways his life his activities the things that he does, they represent what he teaches. We say that about individuals too. You know we say about individuals that you can tell what a man believes by the way he lives, and you know that there are lots of people who make professions. I imagine all of us in this auditorium would say we fall into that category. That we have not lived up, and very frequently we catch ourselves doing that. We catch ourselves saying we ought to be doing such and such, but we are not doing it ourselves, and so we are really teaching it’s not very important, at least so far as we are concerned. So the Bible doesn’t say we are not to remember the Lord every Sunday. It doesn't say that we are not to. The apostles observed the Lord's supper frequently. Apparently every Lord’s day if Acts 27 is a guide. And that would be their interpretation of, “This do,” this go on doing its present tense “in remembrance of me.” The Bible does say that the meeting of the early church were Spirit

lead meetings, in other words they were not arranged with individuals appointed to give thanks for the bread, appointed to give thanks for the wine, appointed to give a meditation, and the other things that make for an organized meeting. They were Spirit controlled meetings.

Now that exposes you to some possibilities of difficulty, and we’ve had a share of them in Believers Chapel. We sit around sometimes and talk about some of the amusing things that have happened in our meetings and know that the elders, and I and some others who have been here a long time can probably talk of at least five or ten things that have been amusing that have happened in our meetings, one man standing up one time for example a young man many many years ago when we were still in the school house, and who said that the Lord had given him a song, and so we were astonished enough to sit back and listen to his song. Do you remember that? And go ahead and sing your song, and he sang his song, but I think almost everybody that I talked to afterwards, I know the elders were, they were convinced that the Lord hadn’t given him that song. He may have had a song, but the Lord hadn’t given him that one. And we’ve had some other amusing things, and so you lay yourself open to the possibility of that.

But nevertheless if you will turn over and read 1 Corinthians 14, you’ll realize that that’s the kind of meeting that the early church in which the apostles found themselves carried on. It was a meeting, which was free for gifted individuals to teach the word of God and for the priests, and there was a limitation, the men were to participate not the ladies. The priests were free to offer prayer and praise to do the work that priests do in that meeting. And that’s what we have tried to follow in our meetings, and that’s why we have the kinds of meetings that we do have, and the elders responsible for the meetings being conducted in a way that will be in order as the apostle puts it at the end of that chapter decently and in order, spiritly in meetings. Incidentally when we have the statement in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, “Quench not the Spirit.” That was a reference to the local church meeting, because the very next instruction is, “Despise not prophesyings,

but hold fast of that which is good.” Something like that, so the point was there was freedom in the meetings. “Quench not the Spirit” was Paul's own statement that we are not to stop individuals from participating in the meeting, to offer prayer, read Scripture to pray, to do the work of a priest and the men who have gift to expound the Scriptures, to read and expound them.

Sometimes it’s said, “Well that’s legalism.” Well I think that’s a misunderstanding of legalism, if we say that the ideal thing is for the Christian church to observe the Lord's supper frequently. Legalism is something of an attitude by which you gain something by the merit of what you do, but to obey Scripture is not legalism. The attitude of doing for merit is legalism but not doing out of gratitude the things that God has urged us in the word of God to do. It surely is not legalistic to obey the Lord. It’s licensed to permit disobedience, and if the elders were to say, “Well that’s what the Bible says, but we don’t seek to follow that.” That would not be freedom, the kind of freedom the Bible approves of it would be disobedience or disobedient approval or freedom.

You might ask in response to that’s legalism is to be baptized legalistic, or the testimony of the catacombs is that baptism is not legalistic, the Lord's supper is not legalistic, and the testimonies of the individuals who have spoken about the importance of the Lord's supper would bear that point out. I sometimes hear say with reference to the common observance of the Lord's supper. It makes the Lord's supper too common if we observe it so frequently. I have heard that criticism, and I finally after hearing it a number of times, I think I have the kind of answer that has usually stopped the discussion at least because I usually say and others too, “Does the privilege of frequent prayer also increase or cause an individual to think that prayer is a common thing, so in other words if were to say, “If you observe the Lord's supper so much it becomes common.” The same kind of criticism could be said about prayer, and prayer we are told is something that we are to do without ceasing, that is at frequent intervals, so the criticism really does not hold water at all. It does not make the supper too common.

Now when we sit around the Lord's table, and to my mind that's the most significant thing we do on the Lord's day is to sit around the Lord's table and reflect on what Christ has done for us. What the elements that we are going to take, what they really signify the bread that we partake of, the wine that we partake of, what is really signified by that. That's important, but also to realize that this is one of the means of graces that are found in the word of God. The Scriptures are a means of grace. We read the Scriptures and we are told faith cometh by hearing, hearing by the word of God and we believe that. If we will continue to read the word of God you will be amazed at how faith grows. We all know that from our experience. The more we read the word of God the more our faith grows. We don't get down upon our knees and say, "Oh God increase my faith." I don't think that's a mistake mind you, but it's not the best thing. The best thing is to open up the Bible in the light of what Scripture says, "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." And to read the word of God and then you'll have occasion to get on your knees and thank God for the increase of faith that he has granted to you, so around the Lord's table I reflect upon what Christ has done for me, but I also remember something else. The evangelical church, ahs from the time of the reformation argued these points, and let me just mention briefly.

The Roman Catholic Church has believed in the doctrine of transubstantiation that is that the bread is transformed into the body of Christ, the wine into the blood of Christ, and when we partake of the elements we are partaking of Christ in that physical way. The Lutherans sought to avoid that properly, and so they thought that it should be understood as what they call or what has been called for them, consubstantiation. That is with the bread and wine the Lord Jesus is in with and under the elements. That's very hard to grasp, but that was Luther's idea, and he differed with Zwingli, another Reformer over that point.

The Calvinists have been of two kinds, Zwingli, Ulrich Zwingli, thought that the Lord's supper was essentially a memorial service, and that what we did was to come

together and we remembered, meditated upon what Christ had done for us, just as Israel at the Passover meditated upon the deliverance that God accomplished and bringing them out of Egypt so we meditate upon the great deliverance that we have by virtue of the cross at Calvary and the salvation that is now ours.

Calvin looked at it slightly differently and he regarded the Lord Jesus as being spiritually present in the Lord’s service, and so when we took the elements we were actually having fellowship spiritually with the Lord Jesus Christ. Perhaps it’s better to combine something of those two views because the Bible does speak about remembrance, and so we do. We remember what Christ has done, but we also through the means of the elements have fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ who we are told by Scripture is present with us in our meetings, and so it’s a time for us to reflect on what Christ has done for us, what he is doing for us, and to enjoy the personal communion with him that we may enjoy personally and as a body of believers in our meeting, and so that kind of meeting becomes the meeting in which we meet to meet him, to meet him. That’s the most important thing, to truly meet the Lord in our meetings and fellowship with him.

Well what I wanted to say to you is about up. The feast then is a kind of act with divine authentication traced to a historical inauguration and followed by apostolic corroboration and in the light of our Lord’s moving words, “This do in remembrance of me.” Who would not give supremacy to the service in which we worship and communicate over that, and in which we listen to a man’s voice. I don’t want to say anything negative about listening to a man’s voice. It’s necessary. It’s important. It’s set forth in the word of God but I think it’s important for us to put things in their proper perspective. It’s important for us to hear the ministry of the word of God. It’s important for us to read the word of God, but it is even more important for us to meet and remember him in the meeting of the saints around the Lord’s table. And for me, I think

that our church would become much more significantly deeper if that is our experience, a practice and our experience.

I might say just one thing by way of personal testimony. I have been a Christian now for fifty years, amazing. Fifty years. I read a book once called Fifty Years in Christ or something like that in the Church of God, the Church of Rome Forty Years in Christ. He wrote two books. Well fifty years in Christ I have managed to exceed Father Chiniquy that was his name. Father Chiniquy, and I must say from personal experience that I have been greatly privileged as a Christian man to be given the task of expounding the Scriptures, to teach the word of God from the original text for so many years, forty years, still do for that matter, and then to have the opportunity of expounding the word of God that’s a great privilege. I could never thank God enough for that, but I want to say that the thing that has meant more to me than almost anything else is the privilege of sitting around the Lord’s table with the saints, and enjoying fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ as I listen to the saints comment, and then as the elements are passed and I reflect upon what has happened almost two thousand years ago and then what happened fifty years ago, and think of the blessing of God and what lies in the future. What richness that gives to a person’s Christian experience.

And I hope that all of us in Believers Chapel will truly take advantage of what we have of the observance of the Lord’s supper Sunday after Sunday. I am sure there are things that will happen in our meetings that will disturb us from time to time, but after all that’s the kind of people we are, aren’t we? We are sinners. We are still sinners. The sin principle still dwells within us, and so it’s not surprising. But as we look to the Lord, I feel that it’s an opportunity for us to truly grow in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Let’s bow together in a closing word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father we are so thankful to Thee for the privilege that is ours to hear the word of God, to have the Scriptures in our hands, to read them, to have the Holy Spirit as

our teacher, and we are also Lord, so thankful that Thou hast devised the Lord's supper by which we are constantly brought back to the fundamental sacrifice on which we stand through which we have life, and which is the means by which we enjoy the relationship of fellowship and communion with the Lord God in heaven. We worship Thee oh Lord. We praise Thy name. We desire Lord to know Thee better. Work mightily in our hearts to that end. For Jesus' sake. Amen.