

**THE LORD'S SUPPER: ITS
NATURE, ENDS, AND
OBLIGATIONS, AND MODE
OF ADMINISTRATION**

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The Lord's Supper: Its Nature, Ends, and Obligations, and Mode of Administration by Thomas Houston

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THOMAS HOUSTON

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BY

THOMAS HOUSTON, D.D.



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ERRATA.

For Chapter VIII., p. 232, *read* Chapter X.

For Chapter IX., p. 239, *read* Chapter XI.

Some other slight *Errata*, which have occurred through the Author's distance from the press, can be easily corrected.

INTRODUCTION.

THE necessity of full instructions on the nature of the Lord's Supper, the doctrines and duties connected with its observance, and the great ends which its institution contemplate, has been felt and acknowledged in the church in all past ages. This appears from the numerous works, both ancient and modern, theological, controversial and practical, that have been emitted concerning it. The catechisms and directories on the sacrament of the Supper—of greater or less size, would of themselves form a considerable library of pastoral teaching; and not a few of them will always be of permanent value to the youth of the church in leading them to make due preparation for sealing a public profession of Christianity; while from the proper use of such manuals, even advanced Christians may derive edification and comfort.

It is not to be wondered at that there should be in existence such a multitude and variety of works on the great ordinance which was appointed by the Founder of Christianity, in the most solemn and affecting circumstances, to perpetuate the remembrance of His death, until the time of His second coming and glorious appearance. None of the institutions of our holy religion bring more vividly into view the glory of the Saviour's person—the perfection of His atoning work, and the preciousness of His offices—His matchless condescension, and the endearing relations which He sustains to His redeemed people. There is none in which are more fully displayed the church's high and honourable privileges, and in which are enforced, by more powerful and constraining motives, our obligation to cultivate with the whole household of faith the fellowship of brethren—to shine as lights in the world—and to live as heirs and expectants of the heavenly glory.

As the ordinance, moreover, is designed to be the great standing monument to attest the fundamental *fact* of Christianity—the death of Christ for the redemption of the world—to present in embodied action an epitome of the chief doctrines of the religion of Christ—and to be the means of conferring eminent spiritual blessings upon the faithful, it is of the last importance that its distinctive character should be clearly

exhibited—the obligations to observe it taught and enforced by scriptural motives—the due qualifications for approaching to it, diligently inculcated, and the privileges to be enjoyed in connexion with its faithful administration fully set forth.

The perversions and corruptions of the Lord's Supper, arising from the enmity of Satan, the old Serpent, against the Saviour and His truth—the pride and ambition of ministers of the church—and the ignorance, unbelief, and ungodliness of the world began early, and have continued in various forms till our own day. Justly has it been observed, that there is no ordinance that has been so marred and perverted in apostate and backsliding churches, so as to present the vilest caricature of Christ's original institution, or that is more liable to be dispensed and observed for low unworthy ends. Yet is there cause for abundant praise and rejoicing, that, through the singular favour of the church's glorious Head, the sacrament of the Supper is still administered, in many instances, with as much simplicity and purity as in the apostolic age, and is accompanied with like evident tokens of blessing.

The chief object of the following Treatise is to present a clear scriptural, though not exhaustive view of the Lord's Supper in its diversified aspects—as a testimony of great value for precious truths—as the means of enjoying distinguishing privileges, and as in its faithful and diligent observance, designed in coming ages to promote in a much higher degree than in the past, the revival of true religion, the church's unity and faith and love, and the universal prosperity of the church of Christ. During a somewhat lengthened ministry, in which he has sought, and to some extent realized, the blessing from above in the administration of sealing ordinances, and in which he has regarded as his highest privilege on earth, the enjoyment of near fellowship in such ordinances with brethren in Christ—many of whom are now in glory, he aimed to study with some care, guided by the light of the Word, the nature of the ordinance in all its parts—to give special instruction to those who were admitted to it—to vindicate it against prevailing abuses and perversions—and to urge continually upon the members of the church their solemn responsibility to exhibit in fruits of righteousness the salutary effects of spiritual dedication. A number of the most godly elders and members of the flock to which it was the privilege of the author to minister, urged him to give to the public some

portions of the instructions which he tendered in connexion with the administration of the seal of the covenant. Several distinguished brethren also in the ministry, in whose judgment he had all confidence, a considerable number of years ago, concurred in recommending him to prepare and issue a work on the Lord's Supper, somewhat after the manner of the author's *Practical Treatise on Baptism*; which, while setting forth fully the scriptural *doctrine* of the institution, would contain suitable *practical directions* for its administration, and be adapted to give expression to the experience of faithful witnesses for truth, and of believers, who have the seal and earnest of the heavenly inheritance. For a number of years, these requests from brethren, who had peculiar claims to be heard with high respect, were revolved occasionally in private, without any definite purpose formed to carry them into effect—through a sense of the importance and greatness of the work proposed, and the difficulty of finding leisure from pastoral and other labours for executing it in a becoming manner. Brought now, through the singular favour of that blessed Master, whose he is and whom he desires to serve, to life's evening period—and near the close of half a century of pastoral labour, the author has, after some serious thought, been led to regard it as his duty to issue, among his last works for the exhibition and defence of the Saviour's truth, and the edification of the church, this doctrinal and experimental Treatise on the sacrament of the Supper. The aim which he has sought to keep steadily in view in the preparation of the following Treatise, was to present a comprehensive exhibition of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper, as it appears in its primitive institution and in apostolic practice; and as it is held forth in the symbolic books of the purest Protestant churches.

In a number of important particulars, the ordinance is treated of in aspects in which it is rarely contemplated in modern treatises on the subject—such as when the church is regarded as a covenant-society—and the sacrament is considered a seal of the covenant. The necessity of unity of faith and practice is, besides, insisted on in connexion with its administration and reception; the duty of pastoral training and discipline; and the fruits of sacramental dedication, are, because of their intrinsic and relative importance, discussed with some fulness. Perversions of the sacrament—Romish—Lutheran—and Anglican, have been deemed deserving of special, careful consideration; and abuses

which have of late been spreading throughout various sections of the Protestant churches—arising from the formality, worldliness and relaxed discipline of modern times, appeared to demand specific notice. All care should be taken to dispense the ordinances of the house of God in strictest accordance with scriptural principles. The abundant effusion of the Spirit may alone be expected in connexion with a clear display of truth, and with entire subjection to the supreme authority of the church's exalted Head.

In treating on the perpetual obligation of the Lord's Supper, it has been deemed important, not only to discuss the leading positions of the *Society of Friends* on this subject, but likewise to advert to a practice which, in recent years, has been spreading in Presbyterian churches, especially in America, by which numbers who are connected by profession with the church, and are admitted to other ordinances, refrain habitually from partaking of the sacrament of the Supper. The views advanced in relation to *frequency of communion*—the times devoted to preparatory services—terms of communion—and *simultaneous partaking*, may to some appear novel. While the author offers them—after a somewhat careful examination of scripture testimony, and of the sentiments of many eminent lights in the church, with the conviction that they are deserving of serious consideration, and that their general adoption would be beneficial, he submits them with much diffidence and humility, desiring that, in these and other matters, the unerring guide followed should be the law and testimony left in Israel.

As a chief design of this Treatise is to furnish to ministers, elders, and members of the church, a Scriptural Directory for the administration and observance of an ordinance which so fully reflects the Redeemer's glory, and which is so intimately connected with the increase of faith and hope in the people of God, the author commends it to the prayers of brethren in Christ, throughout the different sections of the church. Should this humble attempt be owned by Zion's King, in any measure, to preserve from neglect and perversion the institution that commemorates His dying love, and to minister direction and spiritual comfort to any of Zion's travellers, he will enjoy an abundant recompense of reward.