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Habakkuk's Prayer and Praise, pt. 3

Joel Portman

The last portion of Habakkuk fittingly concludes Habakkuk's expressions of concern and God's revelation of His purposes in the early chapters of the book. The evil in his society agitated him and this resulted in his crying to God, "Why?" There is a clear contrast between the prophet's complaint in the opening verses and his song at the close. He had been agitated because of the evil that existed around him and, as we have seen, this is a cry that is often echoed by God's people in view of increasing evil and rampant immorality that is often prevalent in our world. However, God's answer to him only filled his heart with greater consternation, which was answered by God's revelation of the eventual judgment of the Chaldean nation also. His calm at the end is the result of having heard God's voice and casting his confidence on the unfailing mercies of God. (3:2). The conditions of his life had not altered nor was there any promise given that the judgment will not come, yet he was able to lift his voice in song and praise at the end. Oh that this would be the result that we could see when faced with the insurmountable problems of life!

Believers of any day can express their deep concerns and anxieties to God, arriving at the ultimate assurance that our God is over all, His control is genuine as He sits "in His holy temple," (2:20). Many, in extremely trying conditions, have been reassured as they were reminded of the sovereignty of God, and, as they have bowed to His will, they have been comforted and fortified. How important it is, in any day, to recognize that there is nothing too hard for the Lord, and we can rest in Him with the assurance that He will not allow anything to come our way that is not within the scope of His purposes. It is encouraging to us to see how his prayer ends in praise and peace. Doesn't that teach us that the most valuable activity of a believer is to wait on the Lord and trust in Him, with the result that concerns are ended in a calm that comes from resting in the power of our God?

A brother has suggested that Habakkuk's short prophecy can be divided on the basis of his location. Thus, he is in the **Town** in chapter 1, viewing the evil of men; he is on the

Tower in chapter 2, waiting for God's response and listening; and in chapter 3, he is in the **Temple**, resting and praising in view of the greatness of his God.

This last chapter of Habakkuk can be divided into three parts:

1. **Habakkuk's Prayer v. 1-2**
2. **Habakkuk's Praise v. 3-16**
3. **Habakkuk's Peace v. 17-19**

In addition, the central part contains three "selahs" which would indicate further possible divisions in his praise. The first part, 3:3a, turns one's attention to God Himself and the greatness of His coming to deliver His people. The second part, 3:3b to 9a, depicts effects of that coming in its universal impact on the world. The last part from 3:9b to 16 emphasizes His purpose in coming, which is to deliver His people by the working of His mighty power. Again, we see **God in His Majesty of Person** first, **God in His Power of Actions** next, and **God in His Mercy to His People** last.

Habakkuk's Prayer

He had heard God's words. He listened when God foretold the coming judgment on His people in chapter 1. When God unfolded His condemnation and judgment on Babylon in chapter 2, he had listened to His Words. This establishes a simple principle for saints in distress: we must take time and be ready to listen to God's word if we are to receive strength and encouragement in times of distress and anxiety. How often our attention is centered on self or circumstances instead of resting in the Lord. The psalmist could say, "My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him." (Ps. 62:5). His experience is our admonition as well.

Despite his fear, his plea is for a revival of God's work, that once again it might be made known, and that in

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His wrath, He would remember mercy (v. 2). He looks to the Lord to work once again, as He has in the past. How good it is when saints remember that our God has not changed; He is still the same, and His power is undiminished. Conditions may change, but the Lord is He who sitteth upon the flood (Ps. 29:10). The tumults of nations, the rising of evil and evil men, the degeneration of society don't affect our Lord. He is over all, and He is able to work again as He has in the past. And in His judgment on men, He remembers mercy. He will not always chide (Ps. 103:9), and "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations . . ." (2 Pet. 2:9).

Habakkuk's Praise

Some of the "higher" critics have said that the prophet is describing a great storm of overwhelming power and effect. It's sad that the unbelieving critics of Holy Scripture would degrade one of the most wonderful depictions of the Lord's coming in power and glory to the level of a physical storm, though it is true that His coming will be like a powerful, overwhelming storm in that day.

The coming of the Lord that the prophet describes, most assuredly goes far beyond that immediate captivity of the people under Babylon. It rises in its glorious depiction of the yet-future coming of the Lord to deliver Israel from oppression and suffering at the end of the great tribulation. It must be compared with similar passages that deal with the same, glorious event such as Deut. 33:22, Ps. 18:8-50, 68:8, 34; 77:17-20. It also coincides with Isa. 63:1-19 as well as other great passages of the Old Testament. As the Lord rose in the past to move in His mighty power to deliver Israel and bring them into the land, so the prophet anticipates the Lord's coming again in power and glory when they are helplessly at the mercy of their foes. God has not forsaken His people (Rom. 11:1-3) and will restore them one day to the glorious place that He has in mind for them when restored to Himself.

The verbs of this entire passage are not actually in the past, as we see them in the A. V., but rather they are in the future. It is not that "God came from Teman," that that "God cometh" and we learn very quickly that the prophet is envisioning the ultimate deliverance of the nation from their sinfulness and from the power of the overwhelming nations that oppress them. We note that His coming for deliverance will affect the nation, the nations, the physical elements of earth and the faithful believing remnant. We can appreciate the import of this in our own day as we see believers who pass through times of trial and find themselves in the dilemma of not knowing where to turn. It is then that the Lord can and will prove His desire and power to deliver them and to give support and encouragement in the time of trial.

We should notice that the prophet's thoughts are centered entirely on God. The efforts and opposition of enemies are nothing as compared with the omnipotence,

omniscience and omnipresence of God that is depicted in this chapter. It's always a blessing when the Lord's people turn their attention away from the conditions of life and become occupied with the greatness and purposes of God. What difficulty or extremity can compare with Him, who is able to exceed our ability to ask? He is over all and there is none who can stand against Him (Rom. 8:31-32). The final verses of that great chapter in Romans lift a believer to the highest level of assurance that nothing can bring condemnation or separation from the love of Christ or of God. We are "more than conquerors" through Him and we can rest assured of that certainty that is based on His purposes and power.

We notice that the prophet draws attention to the **Portrait of God** in this chapter. He is expressing an understanding of His God as One who far exceeds all others, One with whom there is none to compare. Then he turns our attention in that context to the **Person of God**. He is the Holy One (v. 3) at the beginning and the "God of my salvation" at the end (v. 18). He is the LORD God in v. 19, who will lift the prophet far above all adversity. So we learn something of the greatness of His person.

Then we see the **Power of God** depicted in these verses. It is He who comes in the blazing display of His glory (v. 3-4). His strength is invincible and overcomes all. The elements of creation are moved (possibly symbolizing nations and enemies that are overwhelmed by His coming). We see the strong mountains trembling (v. 10), and the effect on the sun and moon in v. 11. So the prophet learns something of the infinite power of the Almighty and what is available for him to depend on.

We learn something of the **Purpose of God** in v. 13. He is coming for the salvation of His people, a salvation that seems associated with the Messiah as identified with His people. One can see the ultimate wounding of the head, that wicked one of the tribulation who will be destroyed by the "brightness of His coming," (2 Thess. 2:8). Salvation will yet come out of Zion (Ps. 14:7, 53:6), in the Person of Christ coming for the deliverance of Israel.

Habakkuk expresses his **Patience for God** in v. 16, anticipating that there will ultimately be rest for his people, despite the time of Jacob's trouble (Jer. 30:7), after which Jeremiah also expects deliverance and salvation for God's people. Their suffering will be great, but again, "The just shall live by his faith." God will carry out His word, fulfill His promise, and peace will eventually come to that troubled land in God's time.

Habakkuk's Peace

Finally, in 3:17-19, he expresses words that seem beyond the capacity of any mortal to experience, but which give vent to the certain confidence of the saints in their God. More sublime expressions of faith cannot be found elsewhere, but they indicate to us the calm assurance that

rests in God's sovereignty and in His care for His own. Even, Habakkuk says, when there is nothing physically to inspire confidence, nothing to satisfy personal needs, and all seems darkest, he will rejoice, he will depend in God, and he will ascend above the passing conditions of life to walk in the heights in fellowship with his God. Can we not do the same? Worldly conditions degenerate, changes come, sin abounds, departure is a reality, YET, we can do the same, knowing that "the LORD is in his holy temple," (2:20), and we can trust Him fully. May the Lord help each of His people to emulate Habakkuk, and rest in the Lord.

Every joy or trial,
Falleth from above,
Traced upon life's dial,
By the Sun of love:
We may trust Him fully
All for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly
Find Him wholly true.

Stayed upon Jehovah,
Hearts are fully blest;
Finding as He promised,
Perfect peace and rest.

(BHB, #407, F. R. Havergal)

We shall never become established in grace until we credit the Word of God as a self-proving voice of Him who speaks it.

Principles of Eden Applicable to a Local Assembly

Genesis 2:7-17
Larry Steers

There are unchanging principles in the Word of God. These are as unalterable as God is Himself. "For I am the Lord, I change not" (Mal. 3:6). In this article your attention will be drawn to Gen. 2 where a number of these principles will be discovered. Genesis has been called the seed plot of the Bible; therefore, from Genesis 2 several principles will be considered and their consistency throughout scripture. Specifically, we will consider principles relative to the relationship of God to Adam in the Garden of Eden and how these apply to the House of God throughout scripture.

Plan of God – Life for Man

Adam was created after the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:26). From the dust of the ground a body was fashioned by Divine skill with eyes, hands, feet, and internal organs as we have today. God was the unerring Creator, so thus Adam's body was perfect. No human lived on earth before Adam as the scriptures loudly declare "the first man Adam" (1 Cor. 15:45). However Adam lacked life.

A momentous moment occurred when "God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). God is the only source of life. In Adam's instance, it was physical life; today, only God can impart spiritual life.

The sinner is dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1) and is as helpless to serve God in that condition as Adam was. Neither Adam or the sinner can worship God in a lifeless condition.

In Eph. 2:1, the Apostle Paul takes us back to the garden where God imparted physical life to Adam and today to the sinner spiritual life. Paul wrote "And you hath He quickened (made to live) who were dead in trespasses and sins."

Place of Divine Choice

God has a place for those to whom He has imparted life. Eden was not Adam's choice. God chose the place where He would plant a garden. He would chose a city in Deut. 12:5. He will chose a place today for the sinner whom He has quickened. The scriptures do not countenance a place of man's choice or design. The only place found in the New Testament is the Church of God (1 Cor.1:2), an assembly. This place is identified in Matt. 18:20 "where two or three are gathered together in my Name there am I in the midst of them". The one uniting Name is the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. All other names divide believers.

One brother in his prayer at the conclusion of the Lord's supper expressed in a very unique way his appreciation of the precious time around the Lord. While praying he said, "Oh Lord thou knowest there is not any place like this place and since this is the place there is no other place."

Planted by God

God is the husbandman and in verse 8 "the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden". The sense of this implies that the Creator designed and planted the garden in the location of His sovereign choice. Every plant was in its correct location. The garden was a place of beauty designed by God.

This principle is vital for our day. Paul reminds the Corinthians "Ye are God's husbandry" (1Cor. 3:9). God planted a garden and He plants an assembly. The first part of verse 9 is not only interesting but tremendously vital "for we are labourers together with God". Men with a burden for souls laboring for God under His directing hand

are empowered in their labors by the Holy Spirit. Paul was Divinely led to preach Christ at Corinth, a wicked, idolatrous city. The delivering power of the Holy Spirit was manifest in the preaching and souls became trophies of the grace of God. Paul sat down with the new converts and taught them the truth of a New Testament Assembly and the precious moment arrived when the new believers were gathered by the Holy Spirit around the Lord Jesus Christ for the Lord's supper. That first gathering must have touched the heart of Paul. As he looked around the circle knowing the deep evil of Corinth which he had just referred to in 1 Cor. 6:9 and 10 he could write, "and such were some of you but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. 6:11).

A similar work transpired in Philippi (Acts 16) and again in Thessalonica (Acts 17) further illustrating the scriptural planting of an assembly. Missionary brethren carry out this pattern in various lands in our day. One does wonder why so little of this type of work is not being done in North America in 2013. The responsibility of the servant who is laboring for God in a new area is to preach the Gospel, teach the converts the whole council of God and eventually sit with them to remember the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice that God put Adam in the garden (Gen. 2:8,15). Saints are gathered when the Holy Spirit fills a soul with conviction from the Word of God that the local assembly is the place.

Provision to Sustain

Eden means "pleasure, delight, paradise." In the garden there was "every tree" (Variety). The trees were "pleasant to the sight" (Beauty, Attractiveness), and "good for food" (Provision).

The assembly is a place of variety. It is composed of saints with different backgrounds, personalities and education. There is also a variety of spiritual gift. It is a weakness to assume that all can do everything. Some can preach the Gospel and others may minister profitably to the believers while others can contribute in a variety of ways. The scriptures liken the assembly to a body (1 Cor. 12:14-27). We are reminded that "the body (assembly) is not one member but many" (1 Cor. 12:14) and that "God hath tempered the body together" (1 Cor. 12:24) as His masterpiece and the school for angels (1 Cor. 11:10). How good and pleasant when there is the God purposed unity, all working harmoniously together.

Its provision is all of the Word of God profitably presented in ministry meetings or Bible readings. Bible readings must be interesting and profitable. To assure this brethren must spend time in preparation.

But there was further provision. "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden and from thence it was parted and became into four heads" (Gen. 2:10) bringing

great blessing to the surrounding area. This would remind us of an assembly reaching out with the Gospel in rich blessing. A brother with an evident gift to proclaim the unsearchable riches of Christ in the Gospel, and in fellowship with his elder brethren, secures a building for Gospel meetings and works the area. God may bless his efforts. In time the assembly may commend him full time to a work he is already doing.

But that Gospel message is heralded forth from the assembly platform. There is a great danger in forsaking the Lord's Day evening Gospel meeting when sinners could be gloriously saved, saints who love to hear the soul stirring message are warmed in their devotion to Christ, and backsliders restored.

Privilege to Participate

It was an unspeakable privilege for Adam to labor in the garden for God and to enjoy communion with his Creator. He was to dress the garden and to keep it (Gen. 2:15). Other responsibilities had been entrusted to him. God brought the beasts he had created to Adam to name them (Gen. 2:19). Adam saw the mighty works of God in an unspoiled creation.

Those in assembly fellowship have no rights but do enjoy tremendous privileges. There is no place on earth comparable to a scripturally gathered company of believers.

Prescribed Responsibility

In Eden Adam was not only the head of the garden, but had responsibility for God's creation. The solemn charge was two fold: First, he was to "dress" (Gen. 2:15) the garden, that is he was to till and cultivate it. How beautiful this would have been for Adam. There was no curse. It would have been a pleasure to till the ground in such pleasant surroundings. But second, he was to "keep" the garden. There was an enemy, Satan whose purpose was to spoil the wonder of God's handiwork. Adam was to keep the garden from Satanic attack. How would he do this? Not by the arm of his own might nor not by the use of a weapon of war.

God had given Adam permission to eat of all the trees of the garden with one exception. That exception had solemn consequences attached to it. "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17). To disobey meant death and expulsion from Eden. The garden would only be kept by Adam's obedience to the Word of God.

In our day the assembly is a target for the attack of Satan. Paul, with a burden, reminded the Corinthians "Lest Satan should get an advantage of us for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Cor. 2:11). Perhaps we are ignorant of his sinister craftiness. He knew the vulnerable weaknesses of Eve. He chose her as the focus of his Satanic scheme and caused Adam to lose the garden because of disobedience.

Assembly testimony will be preserved not by fleshly activities or new methods but by obedience to the scriptures of truth. How good it would be if the cry of the people in Nehemiah's day would be heard today "Bring the book" (Neh. 8:1).

The people stood from the morning until midday as the book was read "and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book" (Neh. 8:3).

The ancient landmarks are being challenged today as new innovations are introduced. Spiritual worship is weak as the same ground is covered week after week. "How is the gold become dim?" (Lam. 4:1).

Removal from Eden

Adam had violated the clearly stated command of God and the consequences to the human race and to creation were disastrous. But what must Adam personally have sensed when he took his last look at Eden and realized he would never be back? Eden was lost. He would experience again the terrible consequence of his sin as he stood at the grave of Abel.

Some older Christians remember days of earlier assembly testimony, when saints had a burden for perishing souls. Prayer meetings before the Gospel meeting were well attended. Precious souls were saved, baptized and added to the fellowship. The Apostles' doctrine was fervently declared. The need for separation from the world was impressed upon the heart of believers.

When reading the Lord's accurate evaluation of the seven churches of Rev. 2 and 3 one is encouraged that recovery is possible. Conditions that are not honoring to the Lord can be corrected.

In our day there must be much prayerful exercise that the unique character of God's Assembly may be preserved.

Christ descended lower and lower, even to the depths of the Cross; but in God's sight it was a perpetual ascent to the throne of glory.

The Lord's Supper

Acts 2:41-42

Robert Surgenor

2. The Placing of the Supper

"Then they that gladly received His word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

Notice the order. As these Jews listened to Peter's message, they were pricked in their hearts and inquired, "What shall we do?" (vs. 37). They were told to repent and be baptized, which they did. Having received Peter's word they were added to the company of believers in Jerusalem. Being added to the company brought responsibilities and added privileges. "They continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." Steadfastly [proskartereo] means "to adhere to," "to be devoted." I believe the word "epoxy" (glue) would remind us of this word. In other words, they were bonded together as one. No matter what their culture was, or their varied personalities, they were united as one. Only the Spirit of God could effect such a transformation upon a mortal. So, first of all we have the teaching meeting. That would be where they would hear the apostles' doctrine. This is most important, for how else would they know how to function as a New Testament church unless they were taught? This teaching produced a fellowship, which means a joint participation. They shared what they had. That fellowship was expressed by two other meetings, "the breaking of bread," and "prayers." So, the Lord's Supper is sandwiched between the teaching and the prayer meeting. The teaching meeting will instruct one how to scripturally conduct the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper will warm one up for the prayer meeting. The teaching meeting is God speaking to saints. The Lord's Supper is saints offering a sacrifice to God, and the prayer meeting is saints supplicating the face of God.

3. The Practice of the Supper Acts 20:7

"And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" - (Acts 20:7).

Paul was sailing toward Jerusalem and was hastening to get there for the day of Pentecost. The time was precious to him (vs. 16). However, he purposed visiting the assembly at Troas, but arriving there on Monday, he was forced to tarry for seven days if he were to break bread with them. Since he was in such a hurry, why didn't he arrange for the brethren to break bread say on Tuesday or Wednesday, so that he could be on his way? Ah my friend, on the surface the reason is hidden, yet to the careful reader, it is very apparent why he was forced to tarry seven days.

Notice carefully the opening of our verse. "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," The word "when" is in the participle perfect, which means, "having done and doing." It indicates a "permanent result." In other words, from the commencement of the assembly, up to the present time, the assembly had met only on the first day of the week to break bread. This is the only verse in the Bible that indicates, in plain terms, when believers are to meet to carry out the Lord's Supper. Not Saturday or any other day of the week, but exclusively the first day of the week, the Lord's Day.

Many so-called fundamental churches do not recognize this, and will arrange what they term the Lord's Supper any convenient day of the week. Not only this, they do not employ one loaf and one cup, but a multiplicity of cups and wafers. In reality, they are not carrying out the Lord's Supper at all. The early church continued steadfastly in meeting every Lord's Day to carry out the Supper. It was not a once-a-month, or bi-yearly event, but every first day of every week.

As great a man as Paul was, the object of the disciples gathered together was not to hear him, but to break bread. Christ was the center of their attraction, not Paul. In Christendom we find the opposite, it is the presence of an able and prominent man that draws the people together, whether it be a special speaker or their gifted pastor.

At the Supper we noticed that Paul preached until midnight. Some have thought that it was quite a long message to go on until midnight. But, let us ask the question, when time of day did the Supper commence? Most assemblies begin between 9 AM and 11 AM, but most assemblies do not have slaves in the fellowship. In Paul's day many were slaves, and were not free from their masters until later in the evening. That may have been the case at Troas, and if so, that would explain why Paul preached until midnight. The assembly probably did not meet until the evening. "There were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together" (vs. 8).

Making a spiritual application, we can say that the assembly has 66 lights in the upper chamber. These lights are the 66 books of the Bible. By this incident we see that the word of God was read at the Lord's Supper. A good practice in any scriptural assembly of God. Thus we conclude, that the Supper is to be held every Lord's Day at a time of day most convenient for those in the fellowship. If at all possible, giving the Lord the first time of the day, seems the most honorable.

4. The Participation of the Supper - 1 Cor. 10:16-17

"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread."

The first thing we notice is that the word "cup," and the word "bread," are in the singular. This totally eliminates multiple cups and wafers. Someone may cry out, "What about hygiene?" Well, what about it? Honestly, do you think the Lord would institute something that would promote disease among His people carrying out His desire to be remembered? I have been in God's assembly for over 61 years and have partaken of the emblems at least 2,900 times, and yet have never contracted a disease as a result of drinking with many others from one cup.

The cup is termed, "the cup of blessing." That simply means that it is worthy of being well spoken of. The thought of there being something mysterious in the cup to convey some sort of a blessing to those who drink from it, is NOT there. "The cup of blessing" simply means that it is the cup for which we give God thanks. Then is added, "which we bless," which means the cup that we speak well of. In Matthew 26:26 we find the Lord doing the same with the bread. He "took bread, and blessed it." That is, He spoke well of it.

When the worship of the assembly has reached its zenith, a brother led by the Spirit, gives thanks for the bread in a worthy and reverent way. He speaks well of it. This is not worship, this is the giving of thanks for one particular thing – the bread.

I know of an assembly where every single brother worships at the Lord's Supper. When all the brethren have worshipped audibly, one of those brethren rise again to simply give thanks for the bread, and after the bread is partaken by all, another brother gives thanks for the cup. The giving of thanks is simple and short, usually taking less than one minute. We find the same principle in the domestic sphere. At the table at home, how long does it take the brother to thank God for the meal? Long, drawn out prayers when giving thanks for a meal are inappropriate. There is a time and place for everything.

I knew a man who at the dinner table would pray over the meal as long as a cold winter night. Then he would have the family sing a hymn. Following that, he would ask his children to quote from memory the calendar verse for that day. When all this ritual finally ground to a halt, we commenced to eat a half-cold dinner in the face of a disturbed-looking cook, his patient wife. What nonsense!

Notice, "which we bless." Why the plural instead of the singular, seeing it is only one brother audibly giving the thanks? Well, you see, when that brother rises to give thanks, he is representing you. He is speaking on your behalf. He is the spokesman for the assembly on that occasion. That is why you are to listen very carefully to what he is saying to God, for he is supposedly expressing your thoughts to the Father. That is why, if you agree to what he has said, when he is finished, you are to say, "Amen" at his giving of thanks (1 Cor. 14:16).

"The bread which we break." Again we have the plural form, "we". Every person in the assembly breaks the bread. That is, every one that eats the bread must first break off a portion to eat. The brother that goes to the table and breaks open the loaf, is not what is meant by the words, "the breaking of bread." No, no, he only breaks open the loaf so as to make it more convenient for each individual to tear off a piece. Thus everybody breaks the bread.

There are some brethren that think the bread should not be broken to make participation more convenient. Consequently an unopened loaf is passed from one believer

to another, each one digging through the crust to obtain a piece to eat. To me it makes no difference, but I am sure that if I had severe arthritis in my fingers, and the loaf was hard-crust Italian bread, I would deeply appreciate a brother opening the loaf prior to my receiving it, to dig frantically for a portion.

The cup and the bread are spoken of as the communion of the blood and body of Christ. The word “communion” is *koinonia*, which means, “joint participation” The same word is rendered “partakers” in verse 18, and “fellowship” in verse 20. This indicates unity on the part of the assembly of fellowship with Christ, and with one another.

Notice also that the cup is mentioned before the bread, even though the bread was to be partaken of first. Why is this? It is what we term, a moral order. The cup is mentioned first in order to convey a vital spiritual truth, and that is, that the cup which represents the blood, forms the basis of all our blessing, worship, and approach unto God the Father. We are justified by His blood (Rom. 5:9). We have redemption through His blood (Eph. 1:7). We are made nigh by the blood of Christ (Eph. 2:13). He has made peace through the blood of His cross (Col. 1:20). We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus (Heb. 10:19).

The one bread in 1 Corinthians 10:17 declares the oneness of the believers in a local assembly, that they are one bread, and one body. If one loaf of bread declares the unity of the believers in an assembly, then in like manner, many wafers would declare that there was no unity among the believers in that particular assembly.

I seriously question whether the Lord’s Supper and the Lord’s table in verse 21 are the same. “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils. The Lord’s table is basically an Old Testament expression and is found in Malachi 1:7, 12. The Lord speaks of His table in the kingdom age in Luke 22:30. At that point the Church will no longer be on earth, and the Lord’s Supper will be a thing of the past.

The Lord’s table in our age involves a much wider sphere than the partaking of the bread and cup at the Lord’s Supper. It includes all the blessings that we possess in Christ. Just as the table of demons represents the entire system of idolatry, so the table of the Lord involves all that we are and have in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our daily fellowship with God. The Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 11 gives corporate and public expression of that fellowship and is confined to an event only on the first day of every week during the Church’s presence on earth.

Let it be our habit to feed daily upon Christ in secret; thus shall we eat and drink, discerning the Lord’s body, in the assembly for the supper of the Lord.

The Incomparable Christ

The Perfection of His Life

Never has there been, nor ever will there be, anyone to compare with Christ. Regardless of how He is seen or with whom He is compared, He is clearly “the chiefest among ten thousand,” (Song 5:10). To every believer, He and He alone occupies the place of preeminence, standing out from all others, and drawing one’s heart and soul in ever-fresh appreciation that is the motivation of all service and devotion to His person.

Looking at His perfect life and trying to arrive at an appropriate evaluation of its unparalleled worth and beauty, we can say that His life was a

Life of Fullness

“In Him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily,” (Col. 1:19, 2:9) which is to say that everything that defined and expressed the essence of true Deity was perfectly content and satisfied to dwell in Him, including during the days of His flesh in this world. He never ceased to be all that He always was, the eternal God manifest in flesh, and the entirety of that essence which was His as Son was always pleased to be at home in Him. He never laid aside His glory, but we can possibly say that it was veiled when He moved here in humanity, only glimpsed by those like John who were nearest to Him (John 1:14). Words like these exceed our ability to grasp, but we bow with wonder to think that in this world, seen by men in His outward lowliness and unattractiveness, there was a Man, genuine in His humanity, sin apart, but in every respect expressing all that God was in His person. He was indeed God manifest in flesh.

He was also full of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1) which indicates that into this world came a Man who was so completely yielded to the Spirit’s control that there was not even one minute part of His being or person that was unusable or uncontrollable by the Spirit of God. He went about in the power of the Holy Spirit, demonstrating a character that set Him apart from and above all who have ever known the Spirit using them or indwelling them. That relationship was symbolized by the Dove sent from the ark by Noah, finding no resting place for the sole of its foot until there was a place that was clean and free of contamination. Over all the years of man’s history, there never was one upon whom the Spirit could rest and assume complete control without hindrance, until He came in obedience to the will of God.

He was full of grace and truth (John 1:14, 17). Every aspect of grace as well as truth was centered and expressed in Him. In contrast to the law of Moses, during which truth seemed emphasized more than grace (though grace was expressed as well), in Christ a perfect balance of

both existed, was upheld, subsisted in Him and He manifested every aspect of it. We notice that with all men, our Lord dealt with them graciously and on the ground that would attract them to Himself, but as hearts were hardened, He always ended by declaring unto them the truth. Grace in Him served to attract and draw men to Him so that the truth would be known to bring conviction and conversion. We see an example of this in His dealings with the woman in John 4, first grace but ultimately the truth to reveal who He really was and that He knew all about her. In John we see a seven-fold expression of grace in His deeds of mercy, and in the seven "I AM" statements, we learn the truth in Jesus. No man has ever been perfectly balanced in every attribute; some lean toward grace at the expense of truth. Others incline toward truth at the expense of grace. We look upon Him with wonder that there was no imbalance in any aspect of His person or character. He was completely FULL of grace and truth.

Life of Fruitfulness

His life was full of every expression of the fruit of the Spirit. The Spirit-control will always produce the fruit that gives evidence of that control, and this was seen in a life that was full of faith, love, goodness, patience, longsuffering, control of self, joy, peace, etc. Not one expression of that fruit was missing from His life, nor was there any limitation on its expression. Every quality that pleased God was seen in Him, and in abundance, no matter where He was found or what work He was doing. These expressions of that fruit for which we long, were seen in their unlimited expression in Him, who was perfectly subject to the control of the Holy Spirit of God.

Fruit for the glory of God and the blessing of mankind was constantly expressed in His life of holy purity and devotion to His God. "Who went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil; for God was with Him." (Acts 10:38). We have received the blessing of that fruitful life that was laid down as a perfect sacrifice for us on the cross, and the richness of eternal blessing in Him has come to us who know Him. We rejoice in the fruit that resulted in His life that was free from sin or any restraint on the work of the Spirit.

Life of Fragrance

His life was typified by the holy incense whose aroma filled the holy place of God's sanctuary in the Old Testament (Exo. 30:34-38). There was a unique, spiritual fragrance that arose to God's heart and which gave evidence of His character that was expressed in His humanity. The perfect blending of the ingredients of that incense speak of the balanced display of all that brought delight to the heart of God, and God's voice twice expressed His approval (Mt. 3:17, 17:5). His perfect submission, His delight to do the Father's will (Heb. 10:5-8, Ps. 40:6-8), His meekness and

lowliness (Mt. 11:29), His sinless perfection (1 Pet. 2:23, 1 Jn. 3:5, 2 Cor. 5:21), and every other attribute brought unending delight to the heart of the Father. All that He was in His lovely life was concentrated most fully in the perfection of His sacrificial work on the cross, even as the fragrance of the incense in the tabernacle was converted into the smoke that arose in the sanctuary by the action of the coals from the brazen altar. He expressed continually a

Life of Faithfulness

"Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find? (Prov. 20:6). This was spoken by the wise man and is true of almost all, but we turn our attention to the One who was always faithful. We learn from 2 Tim. 2:13 that, even if we are unfaithful, He abideth faithful. That faithfulness is not something that has recently begun to characterize our Lord; He has always been and always will be faithful. We read that "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, (1 Jn. 1:9). Faithful to His God and faithful, absolutely dependable, toward man in every way. He can be trusted for "He abideth faithful."

He entered a world and came unto a people who had proven their unfaithfulness in their history and in their present condition. Often departing from the Lord despite many fervent promises to obey Him, they were often found rebelling against Him and refusing to walk in His ways. Not so our Lord! He moved with sure, unswerving step, departing not to the right hand nor to the left from the pathway of perfect obedience to God. He truly loved the Lord His God with all His heart and soul and mind, and his neighbor as himself. He fulfilled all the law to such a degree that not one part was left abandoned. Every step He took and every day that He lived was marked by unflinching obedience to the will of God. The familiar hymn by James G. Deck expresses this so well:

Faithful amidst unfaithfulness,
Midst darkness only light;
Thou didst Thy Father's Name confess,
And in His will delight.
(#202, "Believer's Hymn Book")

We learn in Rev. 1:5, 3:14 that He was called the Faithful Witness. All that He did and spoke gave witness to who He was and from whence He came. He bore witness to the Father. He testified against man's wickedness. He witnessed to the purposes that God would unfold in future events. He was, above all others, the faithful witness to the truth of God, His character, and man's true condition.

Heb. 2:17 and 3:2 tell us that He became a merciful and faithful high priest, one who far exceeded Moses, though Moses was faithful in all God's house. Much more faithful than Aaron or any other priest under the law. As a merciful high priest, He is able to sympathize with the

needs and failures of His people (Heb. 4:15) and since He is faithful, He can be trusted in His entire sufficiency to meet the needs of His beloved people without fail (Heb. 2:18, 4:16). He is faithful to the One Who constituted Him high priest, fulfilling His every purpose; He is also faithful to those who trust Him and come to Him for refuge and help. Let us constantly depend on Him in every need, flee to Him in every trouble.

Life of Freshness

Every portion of His lovely life was marked by freshness. He was never “stale” in words, walk or attitude. His life exuded the vitality of Life, for “In Him was Life,” (Jn. 1:4), and in all that He did, He displayed the reality of One who sprang up in living reality from the dry ground, a green shoot from the dry stem of Jesse (Isa. 53:2). There was no dull, incipient, repetitious round of activities, performed in a rote manner, without delight in what He was doing for God’s glory and for man’s blessing. Every day was entered with the consciousness of moving forward to accomplish the will of God, ultimately to arrive at dark Calvary. We find that even in the darkness of unbelief that surrounded Him, He could rejoice in spirit and give thanks to God (Lk. 10:21). He was the Perfect Servant, who would not fail nor be discouraged until the will of God was fulfilled (Isa. 42:4), so that His meat and drink was to do the will of Him who sent Him (Jn. 4:34). What a Servant He was, always delighting in every commandment of His God and constantly serving with genuine love to all. No, He was like the green olive tree that flourished in the house of the Lord (Ps. 52:8), and as the man of Ps. 1, who was continually green and fresh, bringing forth fruit in His season and prospering.

Well might we say with deepest reverence and admiration, “ **What manner of Man is this ... ?**” (Mk. 4:41).

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5). He could not sink lower than His Cross: we can no more fathom the depths of His humiliation than comprehend the glory of His Godhead. His exaltation answers to His Cross. He cannot rise higher than the right hand of God, nor find sweeter resting-place from His sufferings and His toil than the bosom of the Father. His rest and exaltation we must share, being joint-heirs with Christ; nor will He be satisfied until His members be seated with Him on His throne. Then let this mind rule and reign in us which reigned in Christ Jesus (see Phil. 2:5-15); and since the humble mind, so hard of attainment, must needs go before honour from God, let us be thankful for all God’s discipline, however bitter, without which pride will not stoop, nor vain man come to knowledge of himself.

R. C. Chapman

Becoming Accustomed to Evil

W. J. Driller, New Zealand

How careful we, the saints of God, should be lest we become accustomed to evil. Evil, or unscriptural practices introduced into the Assembly will result in our own consciences becoming dull, defiled and seared, and eventually we are found guilty in contending for that, which we once rightly judged to be unscriptural.

“Whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). “Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17). So whatever is done for which there is no scriptural warrant is therefore not of faith and so is sin. As the Lord's people we should have a purpose of heart by His grace to please the Lord throughout life by “Esteeming all God’s precepts concerning all things to be right and to “hate every false way” (Psa. 119:128), and not to lose our hatred for false ways—ways that have not a “thus saith the Lord” for. What a blessed example we have in our Lord Jesus Christ who could say, “For I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). How many there are who start thus, how many go on thus for a time, perhaps for a few years, walking in obedience to God’s Word, living in separation from all that is not of Himself (Neh. 10:28) and the Lord knows how many these are who, throughout life, amidst much failure, continue to hate every false way, tremble at the Word (Isa. 66:2), seek to be obedient to the Word in its every detail and decline not to the right hand or to the left (2 Chron. 34:3) but make straight paths for their feet (Heb. 12:13). May it be your portion and mine to continue this till traveling days on earth are done.

Those who don’t continue are often spoken of by men as being gracious or of becoming large-hearted and that according to the measure in which they leave God's pathway of separation, yes separation, from evil, from what is not of faith, from what is not found written in the Word, from all that is not right and cease to hate every false way. How different is God’s judgment of all such. In His Word in 2 Cor. 6 He speaks of such as being straitened in their own bowels and exhorts them to be enlarged by not being unequally yoked together with unbelievers in any sphere in life, to come out and be separate from every amalgamation of saved and unsaved, and not to touch the unclean. Separation is from evil in its every form to a Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, and this is God’s desire for His own.

One of the greatest snares the saint desiring to continue in the “ways of the Lord” has to contend with is that of becoming accustomed to unscriptural and therefore sinful practices brought into the Assembly through continual association with such practices. At first the voice is raised against them but getting accustomed. to their presence and practice, the voice of condemnation is no longer heard, and so the evil, the sin, unchallenged, remains. Some, to make their pathway easy,

content themselves by saying, "I spoke against it when it was brought in and now I'm finished with it." What? Finished with striving against sin? Thus saints get accustomed to it and soon contend for it. Thus we have the three stages:-

1. Opposition to its introduction.
2. Getting accustomed to its presence or practice.
3. Contending for it and that perhaps by our voices remaining silent.

Are you, am I, guilty of this?

In His review of His Church through the Dispensation of Grace in Rev. 2 and 3, we read in Ephesus that they hated the deeds—evil deeds, a false way (Psa. 119:128) of the Nicolaitanes—clerisy, a dominant priesthood, a ruling class of which we cannot now speak particularly (Heb. 9:5), it not being the subject dealt with—and He Himself adds, "which I also hate." The saints here hated what He hated. The Church later passed through dreadful persecution (Smyrna) until at last the Church which had endured the world's frown, the world's opposition, the world's hatred and the world's torture now received the world's smile, the world's approbation and the world's patronage, and what were deeds in Ephesus now became a doctrine in Pergamos. What an advance evil had made and always does make when the saints become worldly. But how sad to contemplate that the saints now became accustomed to this evil. There is now no further record of their hated for it, even in its advanced stage, but He has not changed and so says again, "Which I hate" (Rev. 2:15).

What was once hated by the saints became a doctrine to be contended for. All around us, on every hand, are to be found those who once hated every false way (Psa. 119: 128) and earnestly contended for the faith once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) now having lost their hatred as the pathway of separation from the false ways of the world and to Himself has been abandoned. The Lord knows how many have been discouraged and the way of the Lord been evil spoken of through their disobedient example.

How few there seem to be Mordecai-like who would not become accustomed to the rule of an Amalekite (Esther) but remained steadfast and unmoveable against that wicked Haman until he was overcome; or Daniel-like who purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself (Dan. 1) ; or like Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego who could face the greatest Gentile monarch, Nebuchadnezzar, that ever ruled, and say "Be it known unto thee, O King, that we will not serve thy gods nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (Dan. 3:18), although it meant for them the burning fiery furnace heated seven times more than it was wont to be heated (verse 19) ; or like Jeremiah sitting ALONE because of God's hand (Jer. 15:17); or Nehemiah-like who would not be turned aside from building the wall, to remove reproach (Neh. 2:17) although bitter opposition came

from without (Neh. 6:1-9) and within (Neh. 6:10-13) by the prophets including a woman.

"Am I becoming accustomed to any unscriptural practice?" is a question to put to oneself. The Lord preserve us from sinking into such a low spiritual condition and enable us by His grace to remain steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58) and not to be double-tongued (1 Tim. 3:8), double-minded (Jas. 1:8; 4:8) nor a waverer (James 1:6).

Far better to stand **alone**, be reproached, despised, misjudged and remain loyal to our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and His Word than conform to evil, which will mean loss at the Judgment Seat of Christ (1 Cor. 3). Popularity, being highly esteemed among men, yet walking unfaithfully and disobediently to the Word of God, is a very short-sighted pathway to pursue. If the experience of a believer when young in the faith were the experience of more of the Lord's people, how differently many would walk. He weighed up before the Lord in the light of God's Word and the Judgment Seat of Christ and Eternity, the brief and uncertain pathway of popularity with its man-pleasing devices, its smoothness and smiles of approbation of the carnally-minded, etc., with the pathway of the Lord for His own, thus pleasing God and what it would mean to tread this pathway as revealed in God's Holy Word. The man-pleaser has his reward upon earth from those whom he sought to please, but the one whose choice is to please the Lord will have his reward in heaven, not from men but from God, from the One whom he sought to please as he trod this scene of sorrows and tears.

The Lord then, for his Name's sake, preserve us from becoming accustomed to evil, from ceasing to hate what He hates.

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**"Oh for the grace that knows to suit
The outward sound to inward fruit;
That knows how well the music blends
When lips confess and life commends;
That, though with boldness coming brings
No reckless touch to holy things,
But hems the priestly garment well
With a pomegranate and a bell,
A pomegranate and a bell."**

James Tait