

## **The Lord's Supper: Preparation**

In my letter in this magazine I have mentioned a change back to the way we distributed the Lord's Supper before COVID. And, I have suggested that you comment on your preference.

It might sound rather arbitrary whether we come forward or remain in our seats and to some extent it is. That is because we are doing the same thing whether we come forward or remain in our seats. We are gathering together at the Lord's Table.

When we come forward, we come to the table dressed with the elements of bread and wine. When we receive them in our seats "The Table" is extended to us by those who serve. The way we come to the table and "The Table" itself is actually quite insignificant.

What is more significant is our preparation for receiving the elements. As a member at the St George's Tron in the 1980s we used to have a "Preparatory Service" on the Friday night, prior to Sunday Communion. I have been invited to preach at Killmallie Free Church in March 2025 and will also have a Preparatory service.

**Why is preparation necessary?:** It may not need an extra service or series of services but the Apostle Paul says we should not eat or drink in "an unworthy manner" and we should therefore "examine" ourselves. The point of that examination is to ensure we are aware of the significance of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11.27-29).

**Robert Bruce** (not the 13<sup>th</sup> century king) a great Scottish minister preached a series of helpful sermons on the Lord's Supper in 1589 in the "Kirk of Edinburgh". **In regard to preparation he said;**

*"Therefore my exhortation concerning the way you come to the Table, is this: Not one of you comes to the Table of the Lord to bring before Him your integrity, justice and uprightness. Whoever goes to the Table ought to go acknowledging and confessing his (or her) need. He ought to go with a sorrowful heart, for the sins wherein he has offended God; he ought to go with a hatred of those sins, not to protest that he is holy, just and upright...And therefore goes to the Table to get strength in his misery, to lay hold upon mercy at the throne of grace...that more and more he may seek to live uprightly, holily and soberly all his days...Whoever comes to this Table with an evil purpose and without intending to repent, he comes to mock Christ, to scorn Him to His face..." (p50).*

*It is like (the apostle Paul) would say,*

*“Let every one of you try and examine your soul, that is, try the state of your own heart, and the condition of your own conscience. See what is the state of your heart with God, and what is the state of your conscience with your neighbour”. He bids you personally to try your own conscience, and try your own heart for no one can be certain of the state of your heart or the condition of your conscience, but you yourself. (p140)*

Bruce goes on to articulate at length what might be involved in this process of self-examination. In one place he says, *“For God cannot make His residence in a soul that is always stinking dunghill, and therefore of necessity it must be sanctified...Now let us see how the heart is sanctified. Peter says the soul of a man is purified by faith, that the heart of man is purged by faith (Acts 15.9). Therefore faith in Christ Jesus opens and purges the heart and in the merit of His blood we have peace with God. As the Apostle says, “being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5.1).”* (The Mystery of the Lord’s Supper, Robert Bruce)

For the reasons above we ask only believers in Jesus to receive the bread and wine. As believers, we review again the enormity of the grace of God in Christ for us, putting away from our lives all that would cheapen that grace.

The comments of Dietrich Bonhoeffer (the German pastor who was killed under the Nazis during the Second World War) highlighted the risk of believers treating the grace of Jesus Christ as “cheap”.

He writes;

*“...Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate....*

*Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ.*

*It is costly because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life.*

*It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it justifies the sinner.*

*Above all, it is costly because it cost God the life of his Son: "ye were bought at a price," and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.*

*Above all, it is grace because God did not reckon his Son too dear a price to pay for our life, but delivered him up for us. Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship )*

One of my friends wrote recently:

*In the sacrament, God the Holy Spirit renews our gratitude for grace, our confidence in forgiveness, our hope for glory, and our strength for service. Christ is alive and with us now in resurrection power by the Holy Spirit, and through God the Holy Spirit, and the risen Christ ministers to us each time the supper is celebrated. We should think of the bread and wine as coming to us by the hand of Christ himself and his guarantee to us in love, that he will nourish us spiritually forever. (Joshua Bovis)*