

CHAPTER V.

THE PRACTICE OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES.

They observed the ordinances as they were delivered to them.—The Supper was delivered to be observed as a church ordinance.—They had no authority to change any rite in the least respect.—They were commanded to judge all whom they allowed to eat with them, and the can not judge the members of sister churches.—Intercommunion was unknown among the apostolic churches in the earliest ages of Christianity.

The **invariable practice** of the apostolic churches, and the **specific instructions** delivered them by the apostles, will have a **conclusive** bearing upon the right settlement of the question before us. If we find that these are in accord with the nature and symbolism of the ordinance as developed in the previous chapters, it will certainly be the part of Christian candor to admit that the practice of Intercommunion was unknown among the apostolic churches, and is, therefore, unscriptural. Baptists indorse this as logical reasoning when opposing infant baptism and feet washing; **practices were unknown to the apostolic churches**, and, therefore, must be unscriptural. To place the subject fully before the reader, I will submit this

AXIOM.

Any practice or theory which vitiates or contravenes what Christ has appointed must be unscriptural, and fraught with evil.

Now there are **two principles** fundamental to the New Testament and Baptist church polity, viz.:

1. That each church of Christ is an absolutely independent organization, complete in itself, and clothed with executive functions only.

2. That to the churches, as such, Christ delivered the ordinances, and constituted each one responsible for the purity of its administrations.

I mean by fundamental, that a scriptural church can not be constituted without them. An organization may possess every other feature; but not possessing these two, it is not a Christian or evangelical church, and should not be so called. I refer the reader back to Bishop Doggett's position (p. 21). Any theory or practice, therefore, that antagonizes or contravenes either of these principles, must be unscriptural, and of evil tendency.

I. The theory of some that the rights, ordinances, and privileges of one church belong in common to the members of all churches, is both unscriptural and pernicious. For,

(I.) **It is destructive of the polity Christ appointed for his churches, abrogating as it does the principle of Church independency.**

Once establish this theory, and no church could discipline its own members, administer its own government; for the members of surrounding churches could command majorities, and control the business meetings of a local church; dismiss its pastor and elect another; determine

his salary; arraign, try, and exclude members; receive and administer her ordinances. The reader who can not see how utterly this theory annihilates the last vestige of church independency is simply unreasonable. The theory must, therefore, be unscriptural and pernicious.

(2.) It is equally manifest that the above theory as utterly ignores and abrogates the second fundamental principle, viz.; the **guardianship** of the ordinances by the local churches. If the members of one church have equal privileges in all churches, it follows, of course, that no church has the **right** to refuse them the exercise of any church privileges—as of voting and coming to its table—and consequently can have **no control of the Supper** any more than of **baptism** or of its **discipline**. The most obnoxious characters, retained as they are in the fellowship of so many sister churches,—drunkards, fornicators, adulterers, revelers, and even those unbaptized, and those excluded from her own fellowship,—can come to the table of any church without let or hindrance on its part. This is the monstrous theory set forth by some who propose to teach Baptists the right observance of the ordinances. It utterly **annihilates** both the **independency** of the churches and their control of, and responsibility for the right observance of the ordinances, and is therefore unscriptural and pernicious, and fraught with evil only.

We are therefore, compelled to conclude that no member has a scriptural right to any church, act, privilege, or the Supper, in a church of which he is not a member. All standard Baptist authors are agreed in this.

Dr. A. P. Williams, D. D., says:

“He [a regular Baptist] has a right to the Communion in the church of which he has been added; **but nowhere else**. As he had no general right when running at large, so he has no general right now.”—*Lord’s Supper*, p. 93.

Dr. Arnold, of Madison University, N. Y. says:

“Such a principle is in our judgment incompatible, alike with the **independence** and the **responsibility** of churches—with their independence, because it takes from them the right to judge of the qualifications of those whom they receive to their highest privileges; and with their responsibility, because it deprives them of the power to guard the table of the Lord against the approach of the unworthy.”—*Prerequisites to Com.*, p. 62.

Dr. Gardner says

“A member of one Baptist church has no more **right** to claim the privilege of voting in another Baptist church, than has a Campbellite, Methodist, or Presbyterian. The same is equally true of Communion at the Lord’s Table, which is a **church act**, and the appointed **token**, not of Christian or denominational, but of the **church fellowship** subsisting between **communicants at the same table**. Hence it follows that a member of one Baptist church has no more right, **as a right**, to claim Communion in another Baptist church, than he has to claim the right of **voting**, for both are equally **church acts** and **church privileges**. The Lord’s Supper being a **church ordinance**, as all admit,¹ and every church **being required to exercise discipline over all its communicants**, it necessarily follows that **no church can scripturally**, [and it is certain that it can not **unscripturally!**] **extend its communion beyond the limits of its discipline**. And this, in fact, settles the question of church Communion, **and restricts the Lord’s Supper to the members of each particular church as such.**”—*Com.*, pp. 18, 19.

¹That Christ has not given the members of one church a right to the table spread in another church, see Curtis, Paxton, Adkins, Harvey, Pendleton, and Hovey.

Now if this be true—and who will presume to doubt it?—can we for a moment suppose that the apostolic churches habitually contravened those fundamental principles, and the express instructions of the apostles without their remonstrance or reproof? If not, we can not believe that the apostolic churches practiced Intercommunion.

I now propose still further to demonstrate that—

THE APOSTOLIC CHURCHES DID NOT PRACTICE INTERCOMMUNION.

My first argument is:

I. There is not a precept for, nor an example of, intercommunion in the New Testament.

If Baptists really believe that this is a valid argument against infant baptism and feet-washing being **church** ordinances, or even **Christian** duties, they must admit its equal force against Intercommunion. It is inferred to have taken place at Troas, but no one ever has, or can prove, that there was any church at Troas in the first century at the period of Paul's last visit;² and, therefore, the expression "when we come together to break bread," refers to a common repast, and not to the Lord's Supper.

My second argument is:

That the apostolic churches did observe this ordinance, as well as baptism, as the apostles delivered them unto them.

The churches were especially praised for this. (1 Cor. xi: 2; Col. ii: 5.)

In whatever respect any church departed from the traditions of the apostles, for this they were reproved (1 Cor. xi: 17, 22; Rev. ii: 3). But we have no intimation throughout the New Testament that any church had transgressed in **this respect**. (See letters to the seven churches.) But I have shown, what is generally admitted, that Christ did appoint the Supper to be observed as a **church** ordinance, and among other things, to symbolize "church relations"—*i. e.*, that all who unite in partaking of it are fellow-members of the same church.

So Prof. Curtis:

"So when our blessed Savior instituted the Supper, as he did upon one of these Paschal occasions, it was, we say, as a **church** ordinance that **He ordained it**."—*Com.*, p. 87.

He therefore committed it to his churches to be **so** observed to the end of time.

Therefore, the apostolic churches did observe the Lord's Supper as a **church** ordinance, and **Intercommunion was unknown among them**. But, strange to say, there are good Baptists who believe that in virtue of the independence of Baptist churches, they can invite members of other churches to participate in their church acts.³

²This case will be treated in a future chapter.

³Is it in violation of the Scriptures for a member in good standing in a church of Christ, to partake of the Lord's Supper, with another church of the same faith and order?

"ANSWER.—The Lord's Supper is strictly a church ordinance; yet, by virtue of the independence of a church, she may, or may not, invite to her Communion, members of sister churches of the same faith and order, who she knows to be in good standing, and we advise the brethren to moderation and forbearance."—*Ans. of The Suwanee Bap. Ass'n, Fla.*, 1881.

Now, it is evident, that, if Christ did appoint the Supper to be observed as a **church** ordinance, as these brethren all admit, and as a symbol of **church relations**, then it is certain that he forbade the intercommunion of members of different churches. This must be as evident to a Baptist as that Christ forbade the sprinkling of water on the head for Christian baptism, by appointing the act to symbolize his death, burial, and resurrection.⁴ Let not Baptists use the arguments they do to disprove sprinkling, unless willing to admit their force with reference to the Lord's Supper. For a Baptist Church, then, to grant a right which Christ has withheld, it must be authorized by Christ to modify his appointments—in a word, to **legislate**. But scriptural churches are executive bodies only, and therefore have no authority to enact or abolish rites or ceremonies, or modify, in the least, any ordinance or appointment of Christ. For a church to presume to do this, would be to forfeit its claims to be considered a Church of Christ.

This fact should be indelibly impressed upon the mind and heart of every Baptist—a **church of Christ has no authority to enact laws or to change, in the slightest respect, what Christ has appointed**. It can not be true, therefore, that a church may grant a privilege which Christ has withheld, and much less to so modify an ordinance of his Church as to change its entire character. This would be equivalent to enacting a new law. If a church can enact one law, she can a thousand; if she can **change** one law or ordinance of Christ, she can abolish all his laws, and enact those suited to her tastes, feelings, and convenience. By granting a church the authority to modify the **least** appointment of Christ **in the least**, is to concede all the powers claimed by the Papacy. **A principle can not be divided.**

2. But suppose it is conceded that Christ did authorize his churches to **legislate**, in **some things**, in some peculiar circumstances, can we for a moment suppose that he authorized them to make changes, or do that which would **contravene** his own appointments, or vitiate the very symbolism of his ordinances, and thus render them **null**? But it has been shown that it inheres in the very nature of a church act or privilege, that its participation is limited to the members of the **one** church; that it can not be extended beyond the jurisdiction of the church celebrating it; that Christ appointed the Supper to be such an ordinance, as to symbolize **church relations**, and therefore we can not suppose that he has authorized his churches to change his appointment at their pleasure; and therefore we can not suppose that the apostolic churches ever changed this ordinance, or extended the right to eat, any more than the right to vote, beyond the limits of their discipline.

3. My second argument is:

(1) If Christ appointed the eating of the “one loaf” to symbolize **church relations** subsisting between all those who jointly partake of it, then we must conclude that all the apostolic churches, **which observed the ordinances as delivered**, did symbolize the fact that all who ate together were members of the one self-same church, and they did not therefore extend the Supper to the members of sister churches.

(2) But it is admitted by all our authors, who have thoroughly examined the subject, that the symbolism of the “one loaf” is the organic unity of all the participants—*i.e.*, that they are members of the same local church (See Symbolism of the “One Loaf,” Chap. III).

⁴It would not be strange for Protestants and Catholics to believe that a **church** may change Christ's appointments, for the right is incorporated in the very creeds of those sects—

“Each particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.”—Acts xxii; *Methodist Discipline*.

And they have changed both the subjects and the acts which Christ commanded, for their convenience; but this doctrine has always been, and should be, peculiarly repugnant **to all Baptists**.

(3) We are thus forced to the conclusion that the apostolic churches observed it, among other things, as a symbol of church relations, and **therefore did not practice intercommunion.**

My third argument is:

From the fact that the guardianship of the Supper is strictly enjoined upon the local churches, she is to judge all with whom she is authorized to commune.

The apostolic churches were required to allow no one, whose faith or practice was **“leavened,”** to come to their table. They were not only authorized, but commanded, **to judge** all with whom they ate. They were strictly required to **know**, so far as they were able to judge by their observation, or reliable information, that they were “unleavened” as respects their Christian faith and conduct.

“But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is **called a brother** be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one, no, **not to eat.** For **what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within?”**

Each church, then, has not only the right, but is commanded, to **judge** all she permits to eat with her—judge of their **baptism**, and be assured that they have indeed received Christian baptism; judge of their **faith**, and decide if they are heretical; judge of their Christian **conduct**, and decide and declare openly by the act whether they are qualified or disqualified to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Is there a church in all this broad land that will grant that a sister church has the right to sit in judgment upon the faith and conduct of her members? Is there a Baptist who will acknowledge the right of a church, of which he is not a member, to sit in judgment upon his faith and Christian walk, and discipline him according to **her** judgment? Not one, who has any regard for the appointments of Christ, or self-respect. But by **partaking of the Supper with another church, he does symbolically declare that he subjects himself fully to its government and discipline.**

Dr. Harvey, of Hamilton Theological Seminary, in his late work, “The Church,” says:

“When a man eats of that ‘one bread,’ and drinks of that ‘one cup,’ he, in this act, **professes himself a member of that ‘one body,’** in hearty, holy sympathy with its doctrines and life, and **freely and fully subjecting himself to its watch-care and government.**”—(1 Cor. x:17.)

“Hence, in 1 Cor. v: 11, the church is forbidden to eat (in the Lord’s Supper, as the context clearly shows) with immoral persons, thus distinctly making the ordinance **a symbol of church fellowship.**”—p. 221.

There is not a Baptist in the whole land who could be influenced to go to the table of a sister church if he was required to acknowledge himself a member for the time being, and subjected to its discipline. The church could arraign him before the Conference closed, try and expel him for conduct not fellowshiped by her.

Rev. G. M. Savage, President of the Masonic College, Henderson, Tenn., in a treatise lately put forth on “Communion,” thus comments upon 1 Cor. v: 11, showing that Paul, in this letter, was establishing the doctrine that the Supper was a **church** ordinance, and symbolized **church relations** between those communicating:

“Again, there is a man in the Corinth church who was living with this father’s wife, whether married to her or not, can not be determined. Paul, in giving orders to the church to exclude him, added: ‘But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any brother be a fornicator, or

covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner, **with such an one, no, not to eat.**’—(1 Cor. v:11.)

“The first deduction I make from this passage is, that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper **can not extend beyond the limits of church discipline.** Suppose it does. Then the offender, without a satisfactory reformation, may go and join some organization, claiming to be a follower of Christ; and, at the very next communion season, when the usual general invitation is given, present himself, and the church thus having to eat with him would violate the command of Christ. The only way to avoid such guilt, such trouble (for cases of this kind sometimes occur), is carefully to restrict the communicants to those within the limits of church discipline. From this deduction it follows, that **communion is a sign of church fellowship;** and, consequently, **intercommunion is unscriptural.**”

Dr. Gardner says:

“If another Baptist Church thinks proper to invite him to its communion, then he may partake as an invited guest and as **a temporary member.** Such intercommunion [*i.e.*, without membership] among Baptists is not only **without Scripture** warrant, but does **much harm,** and no real good. The practice, therefore, is **unscriptural and of evil tendency;** and, doubtless, will be abandoned by all our churches as soon as they reflect properly upon the subject, and can overcome the force of **habit and prejudice.**”—p. 204.

If the above positions, indorsed by such authorities, are conceded, then it follows—
That the apostolic churches did not practice intercommunion, for it can not be conceded that they, unproved by the apostles, habitually practiced what was unscriptural and of evil tendency.

My fourth argument is:

Let it be granted that the character and symbolism of the rite itself does not necessarily forbid the church extending it beyond her jurisdiction, nevertheless the special directions of the apostles to the churches, to refuse the Supper to the factious and heretical of that age, made it impossible for intercommunion to be practiced by them.

In the later years of Paul’s ministry a multitude of false religious teachers infested the churches he had planted, and taught doctrines that subverted the souls of men, and corrupted the faith of many. The churches of Galatia seem to have been influenced largely by these false teachers, and turned away from the true faith (Gal. iii: 1). Paul called the doctrine of these Judaizing teachers “leaven,” and all **persons** who embraced it would be called “leaven;” and he commanded the churches to purge out and away all “leaven” from the feast.

Now it is a fact that all these heretical ministers and false teachers were members, in good standing, of sister churches, which means not under discipline, many of whom belonged to the church at Jerusalem; and there were “many thousands” of the members of that church who held this doctrine of the “Concision.”

“And certain men, who came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said; Except ye be circumcised, after the manner of Moses, ye can not be saved.”—(Acts xv: 1.)

These were members of the church at Jerusalem, as we learn from the letter of that church to that at Antioch, to which it sent up messengers to learn from the apostles of this church, it being their mother church, if the doctrine taught by these teachers was true.

During the discussion in the church at Jerusalem we read (v. 5):

“But there rose up certain of the sects of the Pharisees which believed [*i.e.*, were members of that church], saying: That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”

Paul thus describes these brethren in his letter to the Galatians:

“And because of **false brethren**, unawares brought in, who came privily to spy out our liberty, which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage, to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of these, who seemed to be somewhat [of influence in the church], whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me. God accepteth no man’s person, for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me, but contrariwise,” etc.

In the letter sent to the church at Antioch, the pastor, James the apostle, and the church, write thus:

“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls.”—(Acts xv:24.)

When Paul visited Jerusalem, eight years after, and had recounted his missionary labors and successes to James and the elders, we hear them warning Paul of his imminent personal danger from these zealots of the law in that church:

“Thou seest, brother, **how many thousands of Jews there are who believe**, and they are all zealous of the law.”—(Acts xx:20.)

How did Paul regard these ministers, church members though they were?

“As many as desire to make a **fair show in the flesh**, they constrain you to be circumcised; **only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ**. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer for persecution? Then is the offense of the cross ceased.

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers [these Judaizing teachers and brethren] be transformed as ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

“For many walk, of whom I told you before, and now tell you, even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.” – (Phil. iii: 18.)

What does Paul say of their doctrine?

“I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him who called you into another gospel, which is not another; but there be some who trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel unto you than that we have preached unto you, **let him be accursed**... I would they were cut off who trouble you⁵ (*i.e.*, excluded from the

⁵Paul’s wish that the false teachers of his day “were cut off”—**excluded**—should satisfy those brethren who call for proof that these false teachers, false apostles, and false **brethren** were church members. If church members, then Baptists, since all the apostolic churches were Baptist churches.—See Chap. V, Part II.

church of which they were members, which it was not in Paul's power to accomplish, and I suppose, not in the power of the pastor at Jerusalem; but he could advise it.]

“Behold, I Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised Christ shall profit you nothing...Christ is become of none effect unto you...Ye did run well; who did hinder, that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him who calleth you. A little **leaven** leaveneth the whole lump.”

How did Paul instruct the churches to treat these Judaizing brethren?

“Beware of dogs, beware of evil-workers, beware of the **concision**.”—(Phil. iii: 2.)

“Now, I entreat you, brethren, to watch those who are making **factions** and laying snares contrary to the teachings which you have learned, and **turn away from them**; for such like ones as they are not in subjection to our Anointed Lord, but to their own appetites; and by **kind and complimentary words** they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”—(Rom. xvii: 18.)

To the Thessalonians he wrote this:

“Now, we charge you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to **withdraw** from every brother who walks disorderly, and not according to the instructions which you received from us...But if any one obey not our word by this letter, point him out, and do **not associate** with him, so that he may be put to shame.”

These **brethren**, whom Paul called “false brethren,” “false apostles,” “false teachers,” “dogs,” “ministers of Satan,” and the multitudes of brethren, in many of the churches, corrupted by their teaching, with the many thousands in the church at Jerusalem were all members of sister churches in good standing—*i.e.*, in their own churches. The question I ask is, Could the church at Corinth, or any other, give the usual intercommunion invitation to all members of sister churches, in good standing in their churches, to come and eat, without openly violating the above instructions of Paul? I have no further argument with any one who will say that it could.

But such like characters, **leavened** with the ungodliness Paul specifies (in 1 Cor. v, and Gal. v), abound in all our churches, and our **general** invitations are therefore unscriptural, and most inconsistent; and, since they are in violation of the apostle's injunctions, and vitiate the ordinance of the Supper, they are of evil tendency.

I will take it for granted that all Christians will admit that **such** characters ought not to participate in the Supper. But the question arises, How are all such to be debarred the Supper, and the orderly of other churches admitted? Certainly not by “considering” (?) them all members for the time being, for these are **leaven**, and must be rejected as members; and no church has the right to receive applicants without a rigid examination both as to their faith and practice, for those received must be “unleavened,” and no one can be received to membership without the unanimous consent of a church expressed in some way. This is universal Baptist practice, and founded on correct principles. To ascertain who, of a company of brethren present, are leaven as to **faith** or practice, it is evident that an examination before the **church** must be had, that all the members may be able to judge of their soundness, so as to receive the fellowship of all the church. But we have seen that no church has the authority to “judge” others, save its own members. It is quite as evident that no church would allow a sister church to sit in judgment upon her members, and decide by public vote with ones ought to be excluded from the Lord's

Supper and the Church, and which ones retained, for those unfit for the Supper are unfit for the Church. Every one can see, that to invite the members of all sister churches, would have been to invite all the above characters to the Supper; but to have singled out these characters, and rejected them, would have been passing a sentence of judgment, by the church, upon members of those **without** its jurisdiction, which is strictly forbidden.

Now it seems that every candid Baptist, who wants no shadow of practice not warranted from the Word of God, must perceive that, by observing the Supper as a church ordinance, as it was delivered, all the above difficulties are solved, and all the Scriptures harmonized, and the admitted symbolism of the Supper preserved. I therefore claim, with the utmost confidence, that I have established it as a **fact**—

That both the teachings of the apostles, and the practice of the apostolic churches, were opposed to the practice of intercommunion.

THE PRACTICE OF THE EARLIEST AGES.

Touching the practice of the churches in the earliest centuries, I will only add the statement of so careful a scholar as Prof. Curtis:

“The records of church history plainly show that originally the Lord’s Supper was everywhere regarded as a **church** ordinance [observed by the members of one church only]; for, after centuries of gradual corruption had altered the **forms** of church government in many other respects, and many separate congregations were united under the care of one bishop, and were considered as only **one church**, there was ever one, and but one, altar to each bishoprick, at which alone the elements of the eucharist were consecrated. To set up another altar, or communion table, was considered a violation of unity, or a declaration of church independence. Each bishoprick had the absolute power of receiving to, or excommunicating from, the Lord’s table. The whole of this shows how contrary to all the centralizing tendencies, and amid many corruptions on all sides, this truth remained, embalmed and preserved, that—

“THE LORD’S SUPPER WAS A CHURCH ORDINANCE.”

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