

DISCOURSE XXV.*

IT is a common received notion among Christians, and it is true, that there is a peculiar communion with Christ in this ordinance, which we have in no other ordinance; that there is a peculiar acting of faith in this ordinance which is in no other ordinance. This is the faith of the whole church of Christ, and has been so in all ages. This is the greatest mystery of all the practicals of our Christian religion, a way of receiving Christ by eating and drinking, something peculiar that is not in prayer, that is not in the hearing of the word, nor in any other part of divine worship whatsoever; a peculiar participation of Christ, a peculiar acting of faith towards Christ. This participation of Christ is not carnal, but spiritual. In the beginning of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, when he began to instruct them in the communication of himself, and the benefit of his mediation to believers, because it was a new thing, he expresses it by eating his flesh and drinking his blood; John vi. 53. 'Unless ye eat the flesh and drink the blood of the Son of man, ye have no life in you.' This offended and amazed them. They thought he taught them to eat his natural flesh and blood. 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' They thought he instructed them to be cannibals. Whereupon he gives that everlasting rule for the guidance of the church, which the church forsook, and thereby ruined itself; saith he, 'It is the Spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak, they are spirit and they are life.' It is a spiritual communication, saith he, of myself unto you; but it is as intimate, and gives as real an incorporation, as if you did eat my flesh and drink my blood. The church forsaking this rule of a spiritual interpretation, ruined itself, and set up a monster, instead of this blessed mysterious ordinance.

We may inquire therefore how faith doth peculiarly act itself towards Christ in this ordinance, whereby we have a distinct participation of Christ otherwise than we have by

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and in any other ordinance whatsoever. And I would mention four things unto you, which you may make use of.

1. That faith hath a peculiar respect to the sole authority of Christ in the institution of this ordinance.

All other ordinances draw upon the light of nature, and upon the moral law, as prayer, preaching the word, and singing of psalms to the praise of God; but this, that we should receive Jesus by eating of bread, and drinking of wine, it has no respect to the light of nature, or the moral law at all; and we should as soon choose to honour God by sacrifices, and eating the flesh of them, if it were not for the authority of Jesus Christ. Herein doth faith give honour to Christ in his kingly office. This is the most direct profession of the subjection of our souls and consciences to the authority of Christ, in all our religion. We can give no other reason, we can take no allusion from things, but merely this, Christ would have it so.

2. Faith hath a peculiar respect to the love of Christ in dying for us, making the atonement for us by his blood, and therein the glorifying of the wisdom, love, and grace of God the Father. Faith is led into special communion with Christ as dying for us to make the atonement, and therein we give glory to Christ in his priestly office in a peculiar manner in this ordinance, it respecting the sacrifice of Christ, whereby he made atonement for us.

3. Faith hath respect to this special manner of the exhibition of Christ to the souls of believers, under the outward signs and symbols of bread and wine by his institution, making such a sacramental union between the thing signified and the sign, that the signs remaining to be what they are in themselves, they are unto us the thing that is signified by virtue of the sacramental union that Christ hath appointed between his body and blood, and the benefits of it; and this bread and wine, though not changed at all in themselves, yet they become to us by faith, not what they are in themselves, but what is signified by them, the body and blood of Christ. Herein we give glory to Christ in his prophetic office. It is he who has revealed, taught and instructed his church in this truth which depends on the sacramental union which follows by his institution. That

is the third thing wherein faith peculiarly acts itself in this ordinance.

4. The fourth thing is, the mysteriousness, which I leave to your experience, for it is beyond expression, the mysterious reception of Christ in this peculiar way of exhibition. There is a reception of Christ as tendered in the promise of the gospel, but here is a peculiar way of his exhibition under outward signs, and a mysterious reception of him in them really, so as to come to a real substantial incorporation in our souls. This is that which believers ought to labour after an experience of in themselves; to find that indeed under these four considerations, they submit to the authority of Jesus Christ in a peculiar manner, giving him the glory of his kingly office; mixing faith with him as dying and making atonement by his blood, so giving him the glory and honour of his priestly office; much considering the sacramental union that is by his institution between the outward signs and the thing signified, thus glorifying him in his prophetic office; and raising up their souls to a mysterious reception and incorporation of him, receiving him to dwell in them, warming, cherishing, comforting, and strengthening their hearts.

I have mentioned these things as those which lie in your practice, and to obviate that (if I may mention it), which you may be tried with. There is but one plausible pretence that our adversaries, who design to oppress us, have in this business: If, say they, there be not a real presence and a real substantial transmutation of the elements into the substance of the body and blood of Christ, shew you a way whereby you may have a peculiar communion with Christ any more than in the word preached. We say, we have in these things experience of a peculiar communion with Christ in a way made proper to this ordinance, which is not to be found in any other ordinance.