

Is it an Ordinance?

extract from Proposition XIII § vi

§ vi. I have now sufficiently shown what the true communion of the body and blood of Christ is, how that communion is partaken of, and that it has no necessary relation to the ceremony of bread and wine practiced by Christ with his disciples. It is now proper to consider the nature and composition of that ceremony (since we spoke earlier about its proper use) and whether it is a standing ordinance in the Church of Christ obligatory for everyone. Indeed we must consider whether it is any necessary part of worship in the New Covenant dispensation, and whether it has any better or more binding basis than several other ceremonies practised about that time, which most of our opponents acknowledge are now ended and are not at all binding on Christians.

We only find this ceremony mentioned in four places in Scripture: that is, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and Paul to the Corinthians. If anyone wants to draw a conclusion from the frequency of its being mentioned, that adds nothing because it is a fact and is therefore mentioned by the evangelists,¹ and there are other less memorable things mentioned as often, and even oftener. Matthew and Mark only give an account of the facts, without any precept to do it afterwards; they simply declare that at that time Jesus asked them to eat the bread and drink from the cup. To this, Luke adds these words, “Do this in remembrance of me.” If we consider that action of Christ with his apostles, there seems to be nothing unusual in it which could form the foundation of those strange superstructures which many people have tried to build on it in their airy imaginations.

¹ Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23; RB.

Both Matthew and Mark express it as an action which he did while he was eating; Matthew says, “and while they were eating” and Mark says, “and while they ate, Jesus took bread,” etc. Now this action was not an unusual thing, nor was it a solemn institution of a Gospel ordinance, because it was a common custom among the Jews. Paulus Riccius describes at length in his *Celestial Agriculture* that when they ate the Passover, the master of the family took bread and blessed it, broke it and gave it to the rest, and likewise did the same with the wine. Therefore there is nothing more in this action than that Jesus Christ, who “fulfilled all righteousness,”² and also observed the Jewish feasts and customs, also followed this custom among his disciples. Just as in most other things he tried to draw their minds to something beyond, so in this case he takes the opportunity to remind them of his death and sufferings which were to occur shortly; he brought this subject up more often because they didn’t want to believe it.

As for the saying in Luke, “Do this in remembrance of me,” it amounts to nothing more than this: since it was the last time that Christ ate with his disciples, he asked them to remember him when they ate and drank, so that by this remembrance they might be more stirred up to follow him diligently through sufferings and death, etc.

Sources: Robert Barclay, *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, Proposition XIII § vi (Glenside PA: Quaker Heritage Press, 2002) pp. 390-391 and Roberti Barclaii, *Teologiae verè Christianae apologia*, facsimile (Amsterdam: Jacob Claus, 1676) pp. 300-301.

² Matthew 3:15