

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 173.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #173. *May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, be kept from it?*

A. Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's supper, may and ought to be kept from that sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his church,¹ until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.²

Question 1—*May the Lord's supper be kept open to all such as profess faith and desire to come?*

Answer—Though it may be that a person makes a general profession of the Christian religion, and is not willing that any should question his right to it, yet it is certain that not all should be admitted to the sacrament, Matt 7:6. Those who are ignorant of the great doctrines of the gospel, and consequently unacquainted with Christ, whom they never truly applied themselves to, nor received by faith, cannot rightly improve this ordinance, or have communion with Christ in it, Gal. 3:26, 27; 1 Cor. 10:16. Those who are scandalous, or immoral, in their practice, whatever pretensions they make to the character of Christians, deny their profession by their works, Tit. 1:16. Such as these ought not to have communion with those whom the apostle describes as called to be saints, Rom. 1:7. Neither the ignorant, nor the scandalous, are able to partake of this ordinance aright, because they are not able to make a right estimate of the end and design of it, and they are not, therefore, able to discern the Lord's body, 1 Cor. 11:27-31.

It may be objected, concerning those who are to be excluded from this ordinance, that both the good and bad have a right to it, from what Christ says in the parable of the wheat and tares, Matt. 13:29. After all, Christ says to allow them both to grow up together until the harvest when the reapers will make a separation of the two, Matt. 13:30. However, this is not speaking of the church but of the world, as Jesus expounds it, Matt. 13:38. Although through the forbearance of God, the wicked are allowed to live in the world until the end, this passage gives no allowance to the supposition that the known unbelievers and the outwardly wicked ought to be joined with godly members of the same church, 1 Cor. 6:15.

It has also been objected that Judas was at the Lord's supper when instituted by Christ, though he was a known hypocrite and traitor, and that he had designs against the life of the Saviour, Luke 22:14. It is then said that Christ instituted the supper, Luke 22:19; and, it is intimated that Judas was then present, Luke 22:21. Yet, we know that at that time, the Passover and the Lord's supper were celebrated, the one immediately after the other, at the same table, so that the hand of Judas might be close in the former and not

¹ 1 Cor. 11:27-31; Matt. 7:6; 1 Cor. 5; Jude 23; 1 Tim. 5:22.

² 2 Cor. 2:7.

the latter. In John's account, this is made clear as Jesus tells them that one of them would betray him, John 13:21; then, he reveals that he meant Judas by giving him the sop, which was a part of the Passover meal, John 13:26; and, finally, having received the sop, Judas departs, John 13:30.

Nor is there reason to object that one might as well keep a person from prayer and preaching as from the sacrament, because the former are converting ordinances and the latter is confirming and sealing, Rom. 10:17.

Question 2—Who is charged with keeping the ignorant and the scandalous from coming to the Lord's supper?

Answer—The power of all church discipline, including the right to debar from the Lord's table, has been committed to the hands of church officers, to be administered in the name of Christ, 1 Tim. 5:22. The apostle greatly reprimands the church of Corinth for this very failure to keep back the scandalous from a holy partaking together with the flock, 1 Cor. 5.

The power which Christ has left in his church is to be used for edification, 2 Cor. 13:10. Now, it is clear that it pertains to the elders to exercise oversight in the feeding of the flock of God, Acts 20:28. It is also clear that it is possible for a person, being ignorant or scandalous, to eat or drink damnation to himself in the supper, which cannot be construed to be edifying, 1 Cor. 11:29. Exercise of the power Christ has left in the church must allow for the keeping of this ordinance from such, Matt. 7:6. Although this exercise should be undertaken with reverent fear, Jude 23; it is also appropriate, in cases of lesser and greater excommunication, for this to be undertaken in a more public way, 1 Tim. 5:20. Furthermore, those who are debarred, or under sentence of excommunication, ought to receive this admonishment as from the hand of that power, appointed for their edification, which must give account for their souls, Heb. 13:17

Question 3—What things are required before such be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's supper?

Answer—Those who are ignorant are to be debarred until they receive instruction, particularly that needed for self-examination, 1 Cor. 11:28. The apostle distinguishes between those in the church who are in need of milk, needing to be taught the first principles of the faith, and those ready for meat, Heb. 5:12. These require instruction in those things pertaining to the doctrine of Christ, Heb. 6:1, 2. Apart from this instruction, such are characterized as not ready for strong meat, because they lack discernment, Heb. 5:14. The Lord's supper is an ordinance for confirming and sealing those who are spiritual, not those who lack discernment, 1 Cor. 3:1, 2; 11:29.

Those who are scandalous are to be kept from the sacrament until such time as they manifest their reformation, Heb. 10:29. Once, however, they have demonstrated this reformation, they ought to be received again because the sacrament is given for the comfort of those who trust in Christ, Matt. 26:28; 2 Cor. 2:7.