

A Communion Token

Selected scripture

Introduction

Dwight Lyman Moody was born on February 5, 1837. He would later serve as an evangelist, a publisher and, although uneducated himself, a planter of several schools. The most notable of his schools was the Moody Bible Institute, which is still training young people for ministry today – including several from our church.

Moody's deep desire to reach young people in his early years as an evangelist led him to begin a Sunday school to teach the street children of Chicago. Their meeting room on the first Sunday was a saloon! They eventually outgrew this location as the number of children attending, and their parents, soon exceeded a thousand – all being reached with the gospel. This Sunday school made such a national impact that Abraham Lincoln visited one Sunday to see it for himself.

This ministry led to the planting of a church on Illinois Street that later moved to its final location at the corner of LaSalle and Chicago Avenue. It is still home to biblical preaching and ministry, one hundred fifty years later, under its current pastor, Erwin Lutzer. Dr. Lutzer, by the way, is scheduled to be with us during our church's next summer series.

There was an important series of events that established a high level of accountability in D. L. Moody's life. This translated into his own passion to see young and old alike living to their fullest potential for Jesus Christ. So let me back up a bit to tell his story.

D. L. Moody was born to a large family. His father, a stonemason, was an alcoholic who died at the age of forty-one when Dwight was only four years old. His mother would raise Dwight and his seven brothers and sisters, including a set of twins born one month after the death of their father. We can only imagine the hardship Mrs. Moody faced.

If you are wondering whether God can use you in a fruitful, spiritual manner even though you did not come from a long line of believers, take note of Moody. He was the first to begin a spiritual legacy for Christ in his family.

Moody's mother struggled to support her family, finally having to send several of the children to nearby places where they could work for room and

board. When Dwight turned seventeen, he moved to Boston to work in his uncle's shoe store. His uncle required that he attend the Congregational Church of Mount Vernon where an evangelical pastor preached the truth of God's word. This laid the groundwork for a visit from Moody's Sunday school teacher who led him to faith in Christ.

Moody applied to his Congregational Church for membership in May of 1855. He was rejected as a candidate and required to spend a year studying the scriptures. Church records, which I found online, included a quote from Mr. Kimball, the Sunday school teacher who led Moody to Christ. Kimball recorded,

I can truly say, and in saying it I magnify the infinite grace of God . . . that I have seen few persons whose minds were spiritually darker than was his when he came into my Sunday school class; and I think that the committee of the Mount Vernon Church seldom met an applicant for membership more unlikely ever to become a Christian of clear and decided views of Gospel truth, still less to fill any extended sphere of public usefulness.

The church records state that Moody was rejected because his knowledge of the Bible was insufficient. However, this did not stop Moody. He read, studied, and became accountable to Mr. Kimball and others to learn what he needed to know in order to make his public profession of faith in Christ through baptism and church membership.

I found a number of things fascinating about the methods of the members of this church.

- They were more interested in spiritual development than numerical expansion.
- They made an obvious and concerted effort to make sure their members had an understanding of the basic principles of Christianity.
- Identification with their church, the Congregational Church of Mount Vernon, was considered an accomplishment and even a privilege for growing, dedicated believers.
- Their membership standards of basic biblical knowledge did not discourage new believers,

but instead, challenged and exhorted even the newest believers among them.

- Their requirement of accountability to other more mature believers did not hinder D. L. Moody's spiritual growth, but reinforced it and ultimately provided spiritual protection to him.

D. L. Moody was not discouraged, beaten down, or shuttled away, but was actually motivated to continue learning. This local church was something worthy of being associated with; the fellowship of this body of believers was a prize worth winning.

Moody dedicated himself to reading the Bible and studying basic doctrinal truths and a year later on May 3, 1856, reapplied for church membership. After a time of answering questions before the membership committee, Dwight Lyman Moody was accepted into the membership of the church.

It took Moody one year to become a member of a church that he wanted to join. Our church requires thirteen sessions of basic biblical instruction before a person can join. I do not know, but perhaps thirteen weeks is a bit too fast?!

I could not help but think – especially in the average church in our own country – how far we have come in the wrong direction. It is amazing to me how little accountability we now have in most churches.

Coming to the Lord's Table

During the time I was learning about D. L. Moody's membership trials, I came across a most interesting custom carried out by the evangelical Presbyterian churches throughout Scotland many years ago. In fact, I am holding in my hand a rather unique object that I purchased from a museum. This object originated at some point in the Reformation of the sixteenth century and developed extensively throughout Scotland. It is a communion token.

These tokens were normally crafted by local blacksmiths and made from a variety of materials such as copper and bronze. For most of the 1800s they were made out of lead and stamped with various pieces of information.

Each local church designed its own communion token, the size and shape of which varied quite a bit. The way it looked did not matter – what mattered was that a person had been given one of the tokens. Once a year, these evangelical Protestant churches held what they called a "communion service" and a person could not get in without a token.

I am holding in my hand a token that was crafted and stamped by a blacksmith in 1814 – twenty-three years before the birth of D. L. Moody. This particular token is made of lead and stamped on both sides by a local blacksmith in the Conveth Parish, which is in the northeastern corner of Scotland.



On one side of this token are words around the edge that say, "Token for the Parish of Conveth". Conveth is an area located in the mountains of Aberdeenshire. In the middle of the token is the name of the pastor, "Dr. George Cook, Minister," and underneath his name is the date, "1814".

The church had these particular tokens stamped and prepared only for the year of 1814. They would be given to members in good standing who could then attend the year's communion service.

I discovered, by the way, that larger churches would normally have another number stamped on their tokens to signify the individual table where the members could sit. Large churches had many tables set up to accommodate the crowd as they ate together and then partook of the elements designated to remind them of the death and sacrifice of their Savior Jesus Christ.

This particular custom helped customize our own reference on communion day to the Lord's Table, rather than the Lord's Supper. We are pictured as a church today, coming to a table from which we eat the elements that remind us of the death of our Lord on our behalf.



To this day, we emphasize the words of our Lord, which were stamped on the other side of this token that I have, “Do this in remembrance of Me” (taken from Luke 22:19).

Now at the time D. L. Moody was growing up in America, just as he could not join his church without personally demonstrating some knowledge of biblical truth, believers in Scotland could not partake of communion without being interviewed personally.

I researched the aspects of these Scottish interviews and found that the annual communion service lasted several days. This was simply because the people not only gathered for fellowship and meals, but they were all interviewed by the elders of the church. The climax of the event was the actual partaking of the elements of communion. The individuals were, “examined for faith and Christian knowledge, and scripture memorization was a requirement.”

In other words, if the individual demonstrated they were walking with Christ, were learning the doctrines of scripture, as well as memorizing passages of scriptures, they were given the coveted token and allowed to participate in the prized event of the celebration – the Lord’s Table.

Do you know where I am going with this? Are we going to start passing out tokens in our church? No.

I simply want to give us time to consider how well we would have been received in 1814 at the communion service in the church of Conveth, pastored by Dr. George Cook. Suppose your name was called by the pastor and some of the other elders to go for questioning into a little room in the simple church building located in the windy mountain pass of Aberdeenshire, Scotland.

Based on my research, I have crafted a number of questions that the church members would most likely have been asked.

- Have you grown this year in basic Bible understanding?
- What have you learned from this understanding?
- Can you recite the basic elements of the gospel?
- Did you participate in some kind of ministry activity this past year?

Let me interject at this point these words that D. L. Moody said on one occasion, “There are many Christians who will do great things for God, but not nearly as many who will do little things for God.”

- How much of the Bible have you read this year; this past month; this past week?
- Do you have a personal Bible from which you read and study?

Another quote from D. L. Moody in relation to this question is, “Either this Book will keep you from sin, or sin will keep you from this Book.” In which direction are you heading?

- Have you memorized a verse of scripture – or a chapter, or a book – this past year? Have you ever memorized a verse of scripture?
- Is there someone you have prayed for this past year? Did you let them know?
- Do you take time to pray, beyond the blessing at mealtime?
- Have you read any Christian books of substance that developed doctrinal truths or understanding and insight into the scripture? What exactly are you reading?

I have asked the congregation of this church a question in the past that seems fitting to repeat, “If you were arrested for being a Christian and taken to trial, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

In the mountain pass of Aberdeenshire, in the year of 1814, the leadership of the church asked one another and then every member of the flock for the evidence – evidence of growth and faith and a desire for the things of Christ, of Whom they were about to remember.

Would they get a token? Would you? If our church required an examination of doctrine and practice, would you be here today?

This idea would never fly in America. If someone did not pass the test, they would probably sue the church for emotional distress and get a free token pass to communion for life!

Of course, there is a problem with this Scottish tradition – it would be possible to lie to the elders; to put on a good front and fool Dr. George Cook and get a token.

I think it is insightful to consider the fact that the Apostle Paul commanded accountability in relation to this table, but it was concerning accountability between the believer and the Lord. This happens to be the highest form of accountability known to mankind. We can lie to Him, but we know we are lying and we know that He knows we are lying!

Paul wrote to the local church of Corinth and told them to “examine themselves,” or to judge themselves (I Corinthians 11:28). In other words, they were to ask themselves the kinds of questions that when answered revealed a genuine desire to live for Christ. They were to give evidence that this desire had created some type of demonstration and some measure of development in the Christian faith and walk.

Do you think there were tears in Corinth over personal evaluation and honest, transparent examination? Of course! They were just as imperfect as the saints in Conveth, and as those in Cary.

I do believe that the churches throughout Scotland had a good idea, and I think they had one thing crystal clear. These church members understood that our approach to the Lord’s Table should not be without personal examination, transparency, honesty, and confession.

The Lord’s Table *calls* for this, as well as for rededication to the disciplines of the Christian faith and genuine Christian living. There should be a rededication to learning, reading, studying, memorizing, praying, testifying, and serving, to name a few.

We may not pass out tokens in our churches today, but we do want the blessing of the grace of God as we openly evaluate our lives, confess our sins, and commit our hearts – especially at the beginning of a new year – to the glory and pleasure of Jesus Christ.