

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. We will also be reading from Ephesians chapter 3, so you may want to go ahead and place a marker there. Today we gather together one again as the body of Christ to worship Him. This Lord's Day is our Sabbath Day, but today is what the Scriptures refer to as a high Sabbath because it is a feast day unto the Lord. Today we come and partake of the sacramental feast of the Lord's Supper, communing with our risen Savior, and trusting the Holy Spirit to make this meal and effectual means of grace in our lives. Let us consider one aspect in which He does this by turning now to the Word of God. This is His inspired, inerrant, and infallible Word, so lend it your full attention.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Ephesians 3:14-19

Pray

One of the greatest mistakes which has taken the modern evangelical church by storm is the notion that the Lord's Supper is a mere memorial of Christ's death. When I was growing up in the Southern Baptist Church I was taught this view emphasizing that Christ said, "This do in remembrance of me." When we gathered together to partake of this sacrament in October we considered this saying by Christ and what was meant by it. We focused on the fact that this sacramental meal is a remembering ordinance designed to focus our attention upon the person and work of Jesus Christ in a special way. Last month during our communion service we did just that by looking at Christ who is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. But if this is all you believe is taking place in this sacrament then I am sorry to say that you have an incredibly low view of this meal. We believe that the sacraments are not merely signs of the covenant of grace but are seals of it as well. We do not believe that this Supper is a mere memorial of Christ's death. Yes, you are to remember Christ and His sufferings in a special way as you come and partake of the elements of bread and wine, but there is so much more that is happening in this ordinance. The Westminster Larger Catechism in its answer to question 168 says, "The Lord's Supper is a Sacrament

of the New Testament, wherein, by giving and receiving bread and wine according to the appointment of Jesus Christ, his death is shewed forth; and they that worthily communicate feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; have their union and communion with him confirmed; testify and renew their thankfulness, and engagement to God, and their mutual love and fellowship each with other, as members of the same mystical body.” The phrase “to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace” is what our attention is focused on today. We have seen how the Lord’s Supper is a remembering ordinance, now we will endeavor to see how it is a strengthening ordinance. So the charge to you this morning, brothers and sisters, is be strengthened by the Spirit of Christ as you partake of this sacramental meal. We will look at three areas in which the Spirit strengthens believers in this meal: first, in repentance; next, in faith; and finally, in love.

The first area in which the Spirit strengthens believers in this meal is in repentance. The elements of this meal, bread and wine, are given for a particular purpose, and that is to display before you Christ’s body broken for you and His blood poured out for the remission of your sins. Christ said, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me... this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” It is utterly absurd to think that you can come to this table and partake of this meal and not be confronted by the vileness of your sin. Stephen Charnock, that great Presbyterian minister of old, puts it perfectly, “Never doth sin look so ghastly, and repentance so sorrowfully, as when Christ and the soul meet together in this ordinance.” As you see in these elements Christ sacrificed on your behalf, and you are reminded with the breaking of bread that “he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him,” in the pouring out of the wine that His blood was poured out as a sacrifice of atonement, in the bitterness of the wine that He voluntarily took the wine cup of God’s bitter fury as seen in Jeremiah 25:15 and he drank it to the dregs, how can you not be

confronted with the very sin in your own heart which caused this terrible thing to occur.

And once the vileness of your sin is recognized there is but one thing that you ought to do, repent. The consideration of Christ's death represented by the breaking of bread, and pouring out of the wine, serves to exercise and renew true repentance: as first, to work in you a deep sorrow for your sins, because by them you have crucified the Lord of life, and put Him to death, that came to save you, even when you were strangers and enemies (Zech. 12:10). Friends, it is the Spirit alone who brings about repentance in the heart of man, and He especially works repentance in the hearts of believers in being strengthened through this means of grace. Seeing that you have been made members of Jesus Christ, being incorporated into Him, and united with Him as you head, it is necessary that you should become conformable to Him in purity and innocence. Cast our eye upon your sins and be humbled under the weight of them. Cast your other eye upon your Savior Christ Jesus hanging upon the cross, who having taken all your burden upon Himself, now invites you to come unto Him, that you may be saved. Beat your hearts for sorrow, that you have caused life itself to be put unto a shameful death, Him to be condemned that came to justify and save you, and for a time to be held under the bondage of death, who came to redeem and deliver you from death. Follow the example of Jacob Janeway who remarks, "Let me look at my remaining depravity; and, groaning within myself, let me earnestly desire the Deliverer's hand. Contemplating the great sacrifice for sin, and considering what my Redeemer suffered for my sins, let me abhor them, and strive to crucify them on his cross." Brothers and sisters, as you come to this Table today, be strengthened by the Spirit in repentance.

And in your repentance be encouraged that you are in Christ, for it is only those who have been united to Him, those who have the Spirit of Christ working within them, who are granted this gift of repentance. There is no cause for doubt if you are in Christ, if you

are bearing fruit mete for repentance. If you are weak and doubting, if you are poor and beggarly, come to the Table in full confidence as one in Christ and be strengthened by the Spirit in faith. In our Ephesians 3 passage Paul prays that God would “grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith.” Matthew Henry says, “That strength from the Spirit of God in the inner man is the best and most desirable strength, strength in the soul, the strength of faith and other graces, strength to serve God and to do our duty, and to persevere in our Christian course with vigour and with cheerfulness.” Friends, faith is a gift of God. If it were left up to you to cultivate your own faith you would be in grave danger. But Jehovah is gracious unto His children, and as a good earthly father gives good gifts to his children, so much more does your perfect Heavenly Father give you abundantly greater gifts. He promises your faith will be strengthened, and you can take that promise to the bank. You can be sure that it will happen because He has promised it will and He is the one who gifts it to you and provides the added portion of strength.

Yet you may be sitting there thinking that you are too lowly, you are too unworthy to come and partake of this blessed meal, you are too vile a sinner to come and sup with the Lord. Remember that you are lowly, yet if you have been united to Christ you have been raised up and elevated to place that is above all the things of the world. You, in yourself, are unworthy to come and partake of this meal, but if you are in Christ then it is not your worth which determines whether or not you may come and partake but the infinite worth of Christ which is credited to you as your own. You are too vile a sinner to come and sup with the Lord for sin cannot dwell in the presence of perfection nor can the wicked sit at His Table, but if you are in Christ you have been redeemed, your sins are forgiven, and you have been clothed in the righteousness of Christ and invited to come to this feast that is set before you. If you are weak and doubting, if you are poor and beggarly, hear the comforting words of our Larger Catechism in answer 172, “One

who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because promises are made, and this Sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened."

But perhaps you are weak and doubting, poor and beggarly, for another reason. Maybe you're sitting here today and you cannot be strengthened in repentance because you have never been confronted with your sin and brought to a state of repentance. Maybe you cannot be strengthened in faith because you have no faith in Christ Jesus. If that is you today, if you are not of Christ, then I beg of you come unto Him. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Paul tells you what you must do in order to be saved in Romans 10:9, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Christ Jesus took on human flesh, lived a perfect life, died the most gruesome death imaginable, was put into a rich man's family grave, and on the third day rose again from the dead. By His death, burial, and resurrection He purchased salvation for all His people. And if you continue in your sin, if you continue to reject the Gospel which you have heard, then all that awaits you is a life of sin and misery and a death which ends in your eternal punishment in hell. There will be no reprieve for you in the day of His wrath if you do not trust in Him. All that awaits you is eternal fire and weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yet if you put your trust in Christ Jesus, if you repent of your sins, turning away from them and turning unto Christ, if you believe this Gospel, you will be saved. Do not let another day pass, for you are not

promised tomorrow. Friend, today is the day of salvation. Come to Christ and you too will be strengthened in faith.

There is another area in which the Lord promises to strengthen His people, and this is one which I have said before I believe is one of the most difficult things for us to do: love. As you partake of this meal the Spirit strengthens you in love. Paul prays in Ephesians 3 “that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.” You must be strengthened in love, rooted and grounded in love, knowing the love of Christ. Calvin comments on this, “The true meaning is, that our roots ought to be so deeply planted, and our foundation so firmly laid in love, that nothing will be able to shake us.” The love of Christ ought to be your firm foundation, the foundation upon which the entirety of your life is built. Where do we see the love of Christ put on display? We see it clearly in this sacramental meal. “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us.” (1 John 3:16) “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9-10) “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) It is in His sacrificial death that He displayed the greatest show of love anyone has ever seen. And that is what is put on display before you in this Supper. You cannot rightly come and partake of these elements and not be captivated by the love which Christ Jesus showed towards you in breaking His body and pouring out His blood for you.

The Spirit works through this meal in strengthening within you a love for God. As you see the vileness of your sins, how it was your wickedness which drove the nails into Christ Jesus’s hands and feet, as you recognized the great sacrifice that He made in laying down

His life so that you could be saved, how can you not but have your heart overcome with such a great passion of love towards Jehovah? As you meditate upon how the Lord brought you out of the land of slavery, out of the house of bondage, how He mounted you up on wings like eagles and brought you safely into His rest, what else can your heart do but be enflamed with love for Him? Is this you? When was the last time you have been truly overcome with a love and appreciation for you Lord and Savior? Many of us are enraptured by how much we love our spouses. Most of us can remember that overwhelming love that we felt when our relationships first began. Does the fire of your love for God burn so brightly, so hot, that it makes any other love you have ever felt seem as though it is but a tiny spark? Brothers and sisters, this is what we ought to be feeling when we leave this place, when we encounter Christ, when we partake of His body and blood. The Spirit promises you that He will strengthen you in love. Believe that promise, take hold of the strengthening power of the Spirit, and let your love for Jehovah burn with the intensity of a thousand suns.

And that love for God will flow out in a love for one another. This is what is expected of you. This is what is commanded of your. This is what others will look at and know that you are a disciple of Christ. Hear the words of our Lord in Matthew 22, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." If you have experienced the love of Christ, then I plead with you go and show that love to this world. Do not hide it in. Do not isolate it. Do not keep it wrapped up and tucked away, but let it go forth. When I was a kid, I learned this silly little children's song 'This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.' I don't know if you've taught your kids this as well or not, but there's this one part where it says, 'Hide it under a bushel. No, I'm gonna let it shine.' Are you going to sit there and hide the love of God the Father, the love of Christ, the love of the Holy Spirit? Are you going to sit there and hide that love away under a bushel? Or are you gonna let it go and shine forth

until all peoples as you show love for one another for Christ Church and for this world. It's so simple, even children sing of it. But it's so complex that we will be doing this, we will be striving after this until we reach glory. Come to this Table, partake of the feast set before you which displays the love of Christ for you, and be strengthened by the Spirit in love.

Brothers and sisters, don't come to this Table if you think it is but a mere memorial. Don't come to this Table if you think something magical happens simply by the partaking of the elements. Don't come to this Table if you are not united in Christ and resting in Him alone for your salvation. But if you are in Christ, if you have seen the vileness of your sin and the gloriousness of your Savior, if you have repented and put your trust in Christ, then this Table is for you. If you have forsaken all of the things of this world and committed yourself to Christ, if you have been given the gift of faith and have been brought into the family of God, then this Table is for you. If you have been captivated by the love of Christ, if it is what compels you in all that you do, if your love for Jehovah has spilled forth in a love for your neighbor, then this Table is for you. Do not fret if you are weak or doubting, poor or beggarly, come to the Table and be strengthened by the Spirit of Christ as you partake of this sacramental meal.