

Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Last week we concluded a mini-series on the sacrament of baptism. This week we will begin another mini-series, this time focusing on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. We will see what it means that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace, what the elements that are commanded to be used by Christ Jesus are, and how we rightly receive this sacrament. So with that in mind, give your attention now to the reading of God's Word from 1 Corinthians 11 beginning at verse 17.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Pray

As we take up this doctrine and practice, we must remember the warning that we have heard numerous times in this sermon series already. When we consider the sacrament of the Lord's Supper we do not consider it from a position of tradition or of preference, but looking to the Word of God for teaching and instruction. If at any point we find that our doctrine or practice does not line up with Scripture then we are obligated to reform in those areas and be conformed to what the Lord has commanded. Our focus this morning is on the nature of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, that it is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace. Unfortunately, this simple fact has been twisted and perverted throughout church history, and many today still operate from a false understanding of what this sacrament is. I have had numerous people, even those who are Reformed, tell me that without the sacrament administered the congregation is starved of grace. That is why so many seek to have the Supper on a weekly basis, because they view the worship service as incomplete without the administration of the sacrament. While this is not a sermon on the frequency of the Supper, and if you want to discuss that further we can, it is important to the topic at hand because it stems from a flawed understanding of what the Lord's Supper is. In fact, this is nothing more than a softened form of the papist doctrine *ex opere operato*, that out of the working of the sacrament grace is conferred to the one partaking of the sacrament. This blasphemous view must be

rejected, and the softened form of it found within Reformed churches must be denounced as a grave error. So what is it that we do confess about the Lord's Supper. Our Larger Catechism states, "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." So as we consider this theme of the Lord's Supper let us do so by looking the three things that are signified and sealed in this sacrament: first, the death of Christ; next, spiritual nourishment and growth; and finally, union and communion.

The first, and perhaps the most obvious, thing that is signified and sealed in this sacrament is the death of Christ. Look at verses 23-26, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." The entirety of this Supper is signifying the death of Christ. We will consider these elements more in depth in another sermon, but it is crucial to understand what it being shown forth in this sacrament. Every time we partake of this sacrament we given sensible signs and seals of the great atoning sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. The bread which we partake of is the body of Christ. It shows forth His body broken for you. And so each time you put that bit of bread in your mouth you ought to be reminded of what Christ endured on your behalf. His back was ripped apart by the whips of the Roman soldiers. His hands were pierced with nailed

that hung Him to the cross. His brow stuck with the thorns of that makeshift crown. That is what is before you in this Supper. Each time you take a sip of that wine you partake of His blood which was poured out for the remission of sins. The bitterness of the wine reminding you of the bitter cup of God's wrath which He drank to the dregs. Flowing forth from the Son of God was a fountain of blood teeming with life, each drop spilled for the remission of your sins. That is what this Supper shows forth. That is what is signified in it. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

But the death of Christ is not merely signified in the partaking of the Supper, but it truly sealed unto you. Those realities which are contained within this sacrament, particularly His sacrificial death of atonement, are sealed unto you in partaking of this sacrament rightly. It is not simply that Christ died for His people. It is that Christ died for me. Christ died for you. Christ died for His Church of whom we are all part. In the sacrament of baptism you are sealed with that initiatory sacrament marking you as one who belongs to Christ. In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper you are sealed with that confirmatory sacrament which proclaims to all that you have made this covenant your own, that you have agreed to the terms of the covenant and have been made a partaker in the death of Christ. You are proclaiming with the Old Covenant saints in Exodus 24, "All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient." And so it is a heinous thing to partake of this sacrament if you have not been made a partaker in Christ's death, if you cannot agree to the terms of the covenant as seen in Exodus. This sacrament is not a parallel sacrament with baptism as some try to make it out to be. This is not an initiatory sacrament which proclaims you belong to the people of God; this is a confirmatory sacrament which declares that you have made this covenant your own. Do not confuse the two, for great errors and heresies are bound to happen if you do.

Dear friends, do not neglect this simple truth that is the crux of this sacrament, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save

sinner. His death purchased salvation for you. This sacrament, by the working of the Holy Spirit in your heart, seals this great reality unto you. You are His and He is yours. What a great comfort that is to us as we walk this winding road of life that is so often filled with moments of great weariness and discouragement. You are who the Lord's Table is open to, weary sinners who cling to the cross of Christ. Lay hold of that which is sealed unto you, remember the sacrifice of your Savior as His body was broken for you and His blood poured out for the remission of your sins. Lay hold of Christ. But perhaps you are here today and you have not made this covenant your own. You have not truly repented of your sins and embraced Christ Jesus as your Savior. Then the call to you this day is to repent and believe the Gospel. You know the Gospel. You have heard Christ preached unto you. Close with Him. Make this covenant your own and vow to uphold the terms of it. Put to death the old man and be made a partaker in the death of Christ. If you are outside of Christ, then nothing else in this sermon or said here today is of more importance than this right here. Turn unto Christ and be saved. Embrace Him, and you too will be made a partaker of that which is signified and sealed in this sacrament.

Let us move now to consider another spiritual reality that is signified and sealed in the Lord's Supper, spiritual nourishment and growth. While this one may not be as obvious as the death of Christ, it is still fairly plain to see in the sacramental action itself. It is important to realize that Christ gave us this sacrament as a meal, and this is one of the purposes of it. He could have chosen something other than food or drink to be this confirmatory sacrament, but what better to show nourishment and growth than the imagery of eating and drink. Look at the text once again, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink

it, in remembrance of me.” When you sit down at a table and you partake of a meal, you know the reason why you are doing that. The Lord has given us food as a good gift to both enjoy and to provide us with the nourishment we need in order to grow. Our food, once ingested, gets converted into our bodies and causes us to increase in muscle, strengthens our bones, and provides the energy needed to continue functioning. This same is true of the Supper. This is why we say that we feed on Christ, not that we believe He is physically present in the elements of bread and wine like the Lutherans and the papists, but that we feed spiritually upon Him, trusting that He will provide us with the spiritual nourishment we need and cause us to grow spiritually by it.

But we must be careful to not think that it is in the simple act of eating some bread and drinking a bit of wine that we are spiritually nourished and caused to grow. This is the great error that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon that tends to attract many within the Reformed community. There is nothing inherently special in eating bread and drinking wine which would cause it to confer grace unto you. There is no special type of grace that is found only in the Supper that is missed out on if the sacrament isn't partaken of. It is the Spirit of God operating within the heart of the believer who makes the Supper an effectual means of grace. That is only done when the Supper is taken rightly, with a proper understanding of what the sacrament is, and with a heart that has been prepared to receive the sacrament in a worthy manner. And that operation of the Spirit is not through the sacrament itself, but is through the preached Word applied and confirmed by the sacrament. There is no grace conferred in partaking of the Supper which is not also found in the preaching of the Word. On this Calvin writes, “As the use of the sacraments will confer nothing more on unbelievers than if they had abstained from it, nay, is only destructive to them, so without their use believers receive the reality which is there figured.” The reality of the grace figured in the sacrament is received by believers even when it is not partaken of. This is because the preaching of the Word is the primary means of

grace as is confessed in Westminster Larger Catechism 155, “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.”

Friends, we must guard ourselves from a quasi-sacerdotalism which believes that we are missing out on the grace of the Lord if the sacrament is not taken. We do not believe as the papists in an *ex opere operato* view of the efficacy of the sacrament. We must be careful not to begin to think in this way. The Lord promises to nourish you and cause you to increase. Yes this is a glorious reality which is signified and sealed in this covenantal meal. But it is not only here that this is done, nor is it primarily here in the sacrament that this is done. If you are waiting for the Lord’s Supper to get your fill of spiritual nourishment and to rely upon the Lord to cause growth in your spiritual life, then you have completely mistaken what the purpose of the sacrament is, what its nature is, and you have diminished the essential nature of the primacy of the preached Word. You have your spiritual food set before you each and every day. Open your Bibles and feast upon that all you can eat buffet which is contained therein. Sing with the psalmist in Psalm 19 as he describes the Word of God, “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.” Proclaim with the prophet Jeremiah, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts.” Take heed to the words of Christ in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Jehovah has given us His Word to be our spiritual food, and it is by the Holy Spirit working through the Word attached to the Supper that this sacrament is sealed unto you for your spiritual nourishment and growth.

And now let us finally consider that in the Lord's Supper is signified and sealed unto you union and communion. This ought to be something that is obvious considering we refer to the Lord's Supper as communion, but that only gets to one aspect of it and it also fails to highlight the spiritual reality that is signified and sealed in the sacrament. Let's look at union. Union with Christ is an absolutely essential part of the Christian life. Without it there is no Christian life. Here in the Supper you partake of the body and blood of Christ, not in a carnal sense, but in a spiritual sense. And this is but a confirmation of the partaking of His body and blood that brought you into union with Him. Without this spiritual partaking of His body and blood there is no means of salvation. Listen to the words of Christ in John 6:52-53, "Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." It is His body broken for you and His blood poured out for the remission of your sins, those things which are signified and sealed here in this covenantal meal, that purchased your salvation. If you are not made a partaker of His body and His blood by the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit then that salvation is not yours and you do not have that vital union with Christ that is necessary. But we must be careful here so as to not fall into the blasphemous lies of popish thought concerning the Supper. The bread and wine are just that, bread and wine. Partaking of the sacramental elements are not what unite you to Christ. The meal does not confer salvation unto you because it is not a saving ordinance. The only means of salvation is the Holy Spirit applying that body broken and that blood shed to you, making you a partaker of it, and uniting you to the Savior. Anything else is heresy.

Flowing from the union that you have in Christ and being signified and sealed in the Lord's Supper is communion. This communion is twofold: communion with Christ and communion with your fellow believer. Friends, this is something that can very

easily be shown forth in the sacramental actions of the Supper. We are called to come and sit at the King's Table. That is an honor and a privilege that ordinarily wouldn't be given to people such as us, because we are unworthy to even sit on the floor at His feet and eat the scraps that fall off the table. But Christ Jesus has made us worthy to come and commune with Him, to partake of a meal with Him, and to enjoy fellowshiping with Him in His presence. I fear that this is something which is often overlooked in churches today. The Confession of Faith states that by faith we "spiritually, receive and feed upon Christ crucified, and all benefits of his death: the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally in, with, or under the bread and wine; yet as really, but spiritually, present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are, to their outward senses." Christ is really, but spiritually, present with us in the Supper. What a beautiful thing this is, and it ought to cause you to draw closer and closer to Him each and every time you partake of that sacramental meal.

But it is not only with Christ that you are communing with in the Supper, you are also communing with your fellow believers. This is one of the reasons the sacramental action of the body of Christ sitting together around a table to share this meal together is so important. Friends, I know that modern American Christianity teaches that everything about your religion is personal and individual, but that is patently false. We'll get into this truth of communion with one another further in another sermon, but I want to show you now how without a proper understanding of this it will tear the church asunder. Look at the beginning of our passage, "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What?

have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? what shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.” These Corinthians turned the Supper of our Lord, this communal sacramental meal, into an individualistic hedonist free for all. And this was causing divisions to arise within the congregation. They had turn what ought to have been a sober part of worship which highlighted their unity with one another into a debased hedonistic party where the poor among them were neglected. I pray this never becomes the case with you. I pray that you never fall into the trap of thinking that this meal is something that is particular to you and that all that matters when you partake of it is your own self. The meal is called communion. Let us truly view it as such.

Brothers and sisters, I know some of what was said here has been repeated in other sermons, but what was said here is worthy of being repeated. This sacrament is one that can very easily become twisted, distorted, perverted, or even turned into a blasphemous ceremony. You must take heed lest you fall into those errors which we are all so prone to do. This meal is give to you, not you individually but you as a corporate body, and it is given to you for your benefits. All of those benefits which are found in Christ are truly signified and sealed in this sacrament, and you as the people of God are to partake of Christ in this Supper, eating of that one bread, drinking of that one cup, partaking of that one Christ, as His one people.