

Usefulness of the Lords Supper

Let us turn to our Bibles to 1st Corinthians chapter 11, 1st Corinthians chapter 11, verses 26 to 28. 1st Corinthians 11 verses 26 and following, let us listen attentively to the Word of God. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.

Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Let us pray.

In going over this short passage, God, help me to unpack the further truth of what we've certainly heard at least once in our life as Christians, the usefulness and importance of the Lord's Supper in our life. That it's useful not in the sense the world thinks of it, God, but in a very practical sense for our soul. That it's a tangible way to help our intangible faith to grow closer to our Lord and Savior.

It's as simple as that. And may our faith therefore grow in accordance to the truth, the truth of our Lord and Savior who bled and died for us 2,000 years ago and lives and reigns in heaven right now, bestowing upon us great grace and mercy. In his name alone we pray.

Amen. The Holy Communion of our Lord is not an ordinary meal as we know. Regular meals help our bodies grow and sustain our energy levels throughout the day.

This meal given by Christ is for our soul's growth in sustaining us on our walk to heaven. As such, we should gratefully participate in the supper it was designed for us for this end. And it was given not to replace faith, but to elevate our faith to God in Christ.

In other words, it is not a meaningless gesture or a mere memorial, but an outward act to express our inward faith, and it's therefore useful for a Christian walk. It's not something to ignore or skip. I don't think that's a problem with us and our circles.

Although again, what you learn here, if you think, well, I already know that, Pastor, you can learn, relearn it again, and give it to others who don't know. There are lots of evangelicals who don't take the Lord's Supper seriously, baptism seriously, or worship in general. But for our purposes here in particular, I want to remind us again of how useful it is in our Christian walk, and in what sense it is therefore useful.

Lord's Supper Seals Your Salvation

The Lord's Supper seals your salvation. That's the first point. The Lord's Supper seals your salvation.

That is, it's a means of grace, in particular, not just of that large category means of grace, but a sacrament, which is a particular type of means of grace. All sacraments are means of grace, but not all means of grace are sacraments. Another way of saying that.

The means of grace is that which helps you grow, just like the title, the description tells us here and there. And so, prayer is part of that, reading the Bible is part of that, Sunday worship, of course, and the like. We know the sacraments fall under that, preaching, but also throughout the week, family time, you have the Word of God, you can still grow throughout the week.

But, in particular, the sacraments. Question 92 of the Catechism, we read, what is a sacrament? The answer is, a sacrament is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ, wherein, by sensible signs, Christ and the benefits of the new covenant are represented, sealed, and applied to believers. So, it says, whereby sensible signs, that is, signs of impinging or impacting our senses, our seeing, our smelling, our taste, clearly with the bread and the wine, that's what they mean by sensible, of Christ, and they are particularly represented, sealed, and applied to believers in the sacraments, the sacraments only being two, that is, baptism in the Lord's Supper or communion, also called the Eucharist, that which is celebrated, what Christ has done for us.

Romans 4:11 is the classic passage here, and he, that is, Abraham, received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith, which he had while still uncircumcised. Paul is expounding what is going on in the book of Genesis with Abraham, the father of the faithful, and explaining to his audience there in Rome, look, it was never about circumcision as such. He believed before he was circumcised.

He was justified not because he was a Jew, but because he believed. He believed before he was circumcised. And it's a sign, your thought, I'm sure all of us read those passages in Genesis at least once in our life, well, he's, obviously something symbolic going on here, but Paul goes further and says it's a seal of the righteousness of faith.

It's not just a sign, it's a seal. That's what the language comes from in our tradition from the Bible, from Presbyterianism, Reformed theology, a sign and a seal. So these are specific means of grace, especially designed to represent the covenant of grace.

So we know this in Genesis because God ties it there explicitly to Abraham, to the covenant, and that circumcision, as we know in Colossians 3, is paralleled in the grammar and the thoughts of Paul in Colossians. He talks about circumcision, then he turns around in the same sentence, talks about baptism, in parallel. He switched the words, but had the same idea in the same sentence.

So this is something, in other words, as a sacrament that you wouldn't ordinarily know about unless you were given it to you by Jesus Christ. We would not have the Lord's Supper, we would not have a baptism if the New Testament had not described these for us by the words of Jesus. In other words, they were given by Him, by our God, Father above, not as natural ordinances like prayer, Bible reading, and praise to God that you can do on your own without a church and the like, but something added to that, what they call instituted worship, which you find in the Word of God and given to us by His will and His good pleasure and desire.

He changed it from the Old Testament circumcision to the New Testament baptism. He got rid of all the Old Testament sacrifices, and we just have the Lord's Supper. That was His

decision, like a parent has a decision to do multiple things in his family, to teach them certain lessons and kids' lessons and the like, and God did that historically.

So prayer and preaching, if you think about it, not very long, I hope, prayer and preaching are not symbolic. They don't represent anything. It's just what you do.

It makes sense. You want to talk to God. He's your Savior.

You want to praise Him. You want to learn about Him. These, however, you had to learn from the Bible, these sacraments, and therefore they are specifically instituted to represent and push beyond what you see in the visible.

So natural worship, even when unbelievers have it, that's why we have so many pagan religions. They have a God. They want to talk to their God.

They want to praise their God. They want to worship their God. They would do that intuitively, we would say, instinctively, but of course it's twisted by sin.

They would never know in a thousand years you got to have baptism and Lord's Supper without the Bible. That's one of the big differences here. And it's significant in this way because sacraments, as instituted worship, are special in that way and unique and set aside, and clearly the will of God, that He said, do it.

It's sufficient that I tell you to do it, and it has a purpose behind it, as we know, as a sign and a seal. Now part of the activity here, before I describe what a sign and seal is, from our text, we read before and after here, verse 25 in particular, "...in the same manner he also took the cup after the supper, saying, This cup is a new covenant in my blood. This do, as often you drink it, in remembrance of me." In remembrance of me.

So this is important to learn as we go and understand into the sign and seal of what is going on in the Lord's Supper. Significance and therefore usefulness for our Christian walk. What is the idea here? What does it mean by remembrance? This explains what the sealing aspect is about, in fact.

The word here is different from the typical word you know of memory. There's another word for that in Greek. You can almost see the word memory in English from.

This is interestingly different. It's more along the lines of reflective. It's a memory, of course, that's involved.

Your brain is there. But it implies an active understanding and rumination in your mind and thinking upon the matter at hand. It's not like remembering something for a test and you're done.

But closer to the idea of meditation. Active thinking about the matter at the time. To know what Jesus did for us.

To know why he died for us. To receive and renew our love to him. And hence we read, "...as often as you drink this cup and eat this bread and drink this cup," verse 27, "...you proclaim the Lord's death till it comes.

And therefore whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." That is, guilty of not understanding and drawing the correct signification from the body and the blood being portrayed here in the Lord's Supper. That's what it's referring to. To the act that, in verse 25, that you were remembering or thinking upon, even meditating upon, its significance for your life as a believer.

If you come to it in an unworthy manner, that is, you don't understand what the body is, what the blood is, that's a bare minnow. You've got to at least know what it is, or it's a meaningless activity. It's not a magic act.

It's symbolic. It points to something else. The personal work of Christ 2,000 years ago and by implication is continued work upon us even today, right, by the power of the Holy Spirit upon us.

And remembrance is part of that. We are called in this act to remember. In that sense.

Which means the Supper is not a magical event. It's the doing in itself doesn't make things happen in our Christian life and our growth. It requires an informed faith at a minimal.

We know it's at a minimal because you have to know what the body and blood is to even know what it means to have an unworthy understanding of it. But behind this, we know in this chapter 11 where he complains earlier in verse 17 and following, I don't praise you because you don't come together for the better, but for the worse and some of you gather here and eat in the corner and you're divided and others and the poor people aren't able to eat and the rich people are. There's division in the body of Christ in the time of worship which is supposed to represent a time of unity.

So it's a public scandal. This division, that's the word he uses, division among you, verse 18. And in your part, I believe it.

Paul is basically saying, of course, that's what you guys would do. Corinthians have a problem here with division. I spent three chapters on it.

And so he's warning them, you are coming in an unworthy manner. They probably understood the significance so the unworthy manner here would easily be tied to verse 18. They have come with division when clearly the body and the blood as represented in the sacrament is about unity in Christ.

It was a public scandal. And so it's not just enough to confess Christ and say, I know what he's done, what it means that his body and blood broke for me, but I relate in identifying the sense of faith and believing in him. It's an act of faith.

It's a mature enough faith that I can say this is mine and not my parents. And I'm glad kids follow their parents lead, but they eventually have to own it themselves, right? I'm gonna follow Jesus. But there's also maturity, a level of maturity.

There's a public scandal and that's historically been the case. We have in our book of order as well that we can discipline you through a proper trial and one of the disciplines you can have is you don't get access to the Lord's Supper because your sin is a public scandal serious enough that we're like you can't have the Lord's Supper. We're not excommunicating you.

This is one short of it. You're not gonna have the Lord's Supper as a discipline upon your act to draw you back to Jesus. Now it's a sign and seal and I've already explained a little bit about the idea of the seal.

Remembrance, your faith being actively knowledgeable of what's going on here. What does this mean? What's it pointing to? What is salvation? What's the gospel? Who is Jesus? A sign and seal, a sign, an outward symbol representing an inward reality. That's the idea here or with respect to Christ, of course, an outward reality was 2,000 years ago, but for ourselves that are believing in Jesus points to our faith as well, but to Jesus to who we have to believe who's in heaven even now.

The Old Testament altars temple were never about appeasing God. It wasn't like God's like, you know, I'm very angry with you. If you just kill an animal, I'll feel better about it.

It was never that way. It was never the purpose. Just to talk that way, you can think how ridiculous that sounds.

Why does God care about a temple? Why does he care about animals? He has no body like a man. In fact, Paul argues that on Mars Hill. That's very much his argument against the pagans of his days.

Like you guys even know better. He quotes a pagan poet. But there are visible and tangible what? Symbols or signs to point to the inward reality of salvation.

Of course the outward reality of Jesus Christ delivering us and there in the Old Testament that he would come and for us that he has come. That's the difference past and future. To point to his work in our need of a Savior.

This, the Old Testament sacrificial system, the New Testament sacraments, which are not a sacrificial system, are concessioned by our Lord in the sense of a father coming down to a child and babbling to them. Talking to them in their language and our language is what? Earthly. And I mean that not in a negative sense, but that we are of the earth and we have the senses of the earth.

The five senses. He's like, I will give this to you because you have a weak faith and you're so embodied, literally, whoever's soul and a body together, that you are dependent upon your senses and therefore your faith becomes weak because what? You don't see Jesus. He's not here in the flesh.

You don't see God. He has no body. So now what? Well, God could simply said, isn't it good enough? I gave you the Bible and you have Jesus.

No, he came down to our level in the form of Jesus, but even through that he gave us the sacraments because of the weakness of our faith. Because of the strength, flip on the other end, the strong influence of our body and our bodily senses upon us and therefore influencing our soul. As we know the body influences the soul and the soul influences the body.

You know how you think. If you're always negative, always down, you can lower your immune system, I hear. This is a concession from God because he loves us with an everlasting love.

And so he gives us a tangible sign of what Christ has done and is doing, of grace. The bread and wine is a picture of the body and blood of Christ. It's symbolic.

It points to something else. The supper represents reconciled fellowship, therefore. So multiple things are going on here.

It's not just the two elements. It's the act itself and eating it. In the ancient Near East, the way you showed friendship and fellowship is you sat down and had a meal with somebody, like with your enemy.

We're done with the war and we want to seal the pact that says the war's done and we're done fighting each other as a tribal war. You will sit down and have a fellowship meal. Very common.

And we do something similar to that today. We have meals with one another. It's a time to sit down and be friendly.

We do a similar idea as well, though it's not as significant as it was back then. And that's what it points to. Two elements, the body and blood of Christ, combined together in the actual act of eating together.

We're eating with our Lord. We are fellowshiping with him because we are now united by the blood of Christ. Otherwise, we are what? At war.

We're antagonistic. We are sinners. We want nothing to do with the Lord and Savior, but he has redeemed us and therefore we are reconciled.

And this is a picture of that reconciliation, having a meal with the one we had offended. It's a seal as well, a sign and a seal. A seal is a confirmation of our faith.

An affirmation of the Lord's love for us. It assists us in the authenticating of our faith in Christ. That's an authentic faith that helps us in that regard.

Like receiving your diploma. It affirms your public right. It's a public act.

That's why we don't have the Lord's Supper in private homes. It affirms privately to yourself, of course, as you meditate upon, hey, you know, I feel like a loser, but I guess I did get a degree. I did something.

And it authenticates your position in society as well. That is the diploma. And the Lord's Supper is similar in its function in this regard as a seal.

Authenticates and shows the genuineness of the gospel and of his love for us and our love for him.

The Lord's Supper Grows Your Salvation

Secondly, the Lord's Supper grows your salvation. Higher on, I'm going to get a little more particular what the sealing is about, what it looks like.

The Lord's Supper grows your salvation. It's a means of grace, as we know, used by the Holy Spirit to form you in the image of Jesus Christ. Just as prayer does throughout your week, Bible reading and worship on Sunday, the Lord's Supper is a tool by the power of the Spirit for us.

Prayer and Bible reading, singing before God, praises before him. They help us grow. We understand in what sense this is true, because we are thinking about him, we are reading about him, we are singing about him, and what he's done, what he's taught us, everything.

So you're like, that makes sense. Part of your growth is you have to know a little more about Jesus. You shouldn't be a child your entire life as a Christian in your knowledge of our Lord.

Some of us grew up that way. I know I did. I didn't really emphasize instruction that well.

But the Bible is very clear that part of your growth, again, the means of grace is not magical. It involves you at least knowing something. You've got to know how to read, and when you read the Bible, you have to know what you're reading and understand what you're reading.

Or it's not going to have an effect upon your soul. It's not a magic book that way. It engages your mind, and therefore from your mind, it should uplift your emotions and your will to heaven above, to be excited and to be relieved that Christ Jesus lived and died for you, and he's evidencing this through the sign and seal of the Lord's Supper.

And so, baptism and the Holy Supper themselves do the same thing, but of course through different imagery. Washing of water and here the eating of bread. Feeding and drinking worthily.

This is the text I highlighted here in these verses that I read earlier. 1st Corinthians 11 27 and following, For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

So, this shows us already, verse 29, excuse me, verse 30 in particular, that those who come unworthily to the supper, so they're Christians, they've been baptized. They made a profession of faith to show that they are indeed worthy, understand what it means to have the body and blood. You can't be guilty if you're ignorant.

In this sense. But people were punished. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

That is, they're dead. They died, because they came to the Lord's Supper in a public scandal, and therefore the implication being they came with arrogance. I'm good enough.

I don't care about this division that we have in the church between the rich and the poor, and they don't get to eat, and I get to eat, and I'm on my own, and all the factions they have in the church and whatnot. God punished them for it. So having the Lord's Supper is an automatic.

Oh, I'm gonna grow as a Christian. God can use it to discipline you perhaps. Because you came in a flippant manner.

So these are, I'm highlighting if you notice, specific sins, and usually public sins, although part of it can be private. I can't read your heart. If you're coming flippantly, you better change that.

But you're not gonna be perfect. I know that. You're gonna sin.

You're still a sinner, and God still calls you to the Lord's Supper with a repentant heart. So you're not perfect, but you are indeed, I pray, avoiding public scandal. So we have to understand the good news, in other words, if we wish to examine ourselves and our faith in Lord Jesus so that we would not be guilty.

To discern, to evaluate, to understand the Lord's body. Here it's negative. They didn't discern it right.

So therefore you're eating in an unworthy manner. On the flip side, you should be doing it right. You should be making a proper examination of yourself.

Verse 28, with the word of promise, of course. The Lord's Supper can just be seen if you didn't have any Christian background. Calvin says this in one of his letters.

It'd be like a pagan rite or act, because they too would have meals and pagan meals with their gods. There were some meals in the Old Testament, we forget about this. The priest didn't always eat all the entire sacrifice.

Some of them, like the fellowship meal, you ate with the priest, because he represented Christ, of course. So they had meals as well, probably copying the Jewish tradition that God gave the church. What makes it distinct and different is that the gospel is preached and explained during the act of it.

You cannot grow in ignorance. It's another way of saying that. And so we have in Ephesians 1.13, a forgotten verse sometimes, in him you also trusted, that is in Jesus, you also trusted.

After you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom also having believed, you were what? Sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. The sealing act is through the Holy Spirit. And here it's not tied to the Lord's Supper, which we call what? A sign and seal of the covenant.

So there's a sealing act going on by the power of the Holy Spirit in believing, in hearing the word of God. And so it's not the Lord's Supper or baptism as such, but those, they are attached to that which is superior, which is the word of God, especially preached. It explains.

You've got to have the preaching. You've got to have the gospel of Christ explained in human words, not just the symbolism. To explain the symbolism, so you have a better understanding and grow closer to Christ.

What the Supper does when it's wedded to faith. If you believe in our Lord and Savior, that he lived and died for you, and that you are his and he is yours. You can look at 1 Peter 3.21 to see what's going on here in particular.

The sealing aspect. What does the sealing look like? Exactly how does it grow your salvation? I've already hinted at this a little earlier. In 1 Peter 3.21, we read in a longer discourse here, I went through 1 Peter a couple of years ago, baptism, not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God.

Well, Peter, in using this illustration of Noah and the ark and the baptism, that is all the water come around him. He says, this baptism I'm talking about here is not the removal of the filth of the flesh. That is, it's not about being washed in a tub, about the body and being dirty, but it's about what? A spiritual matter, a matter of the soul, an answer of a good conscience towards God.

What about your conscience towards God? Is it assuaged by the gospel of Jesus Christ or is it unrepentant and living in sin? Those are the only two options. And baptism helps in that sense of strengthening your faith, an answer of a good conscience towards God. That he, baptism especially, emphasizes his activity and our passivity with respect to the gospel.

He washes us with his Holy Spirit. We don't wash ourselves. That's why you have the minister wash you in the name of Jesus.

It's what he's doing to you. Regeneration comes from God first and you react because now you're born again. It's not because you reacted, therefore God comes along and saves you.

He woke you up first. He brought you to him. It's a picture of regeneration, of being born again.

Babies don't birth themselves. Their parents, their mother does and God births you and then you're alive. That's what the Lord's, excuse me, that's what baptism in particular emphasizes and highlights.

And, but as a sacrament, it participates in the same understanding of its usefulness as a means of grace, just as the Lord's Supper. So the Lord's Supper also helps us with an answer of a good conscience towards God. That I am his and he is mine.

In giving me the Lord's Supper, God in his providential guidance of all things is saying, I set you here to this moment to show you through this act that I love you. To help you therefore overcome uncertainty and doubt. To strengthen your conscience before God.

It is like the wedding ring or a hug. You want more than the wedding ring and you want more than the hug in your relationship with your spouse. But you usually don't want less than that. Because it's a reminder that you are his and he is yours. She is yours and you are hers.

Lord's Supper Unites Your Salvation

Thirdly, the Lord's Supper unites us in our salvation.

Or unites your salvation. Unites your salvation to one another in particular. Unity through a bond and a pledge.

Another way of describing the Lord's Supper is like a bond and a pledge. Like being a patriotic American, it reinforces our commitment to the Lord as well as to each other. This is what we do.

We don't do this with anybody else but Christians. And so we further highlight and identify ourselves with one another as over and against the world. And the Lord's Supper is helpful therefore to equip and strengthen us to say, I'm a Christian.

I shouldn't forget that throughout the week. Because I've been very busy and I have to stand out and follow my Lord like the rest of my brothers and sisters. They too are following our God.

And I identify with them and they with me. It's hard to walk a lonely walk like Athanasius did, we heard in Sunday School class. Athanasius contra mundum.

Athanasius against the world. Just him there in Alexandria, Northern Africa, no one else, perhaps for several hundred miles, and he's standing firm upon the deity of Jesus Christ. That's very hard.

The Lord's Supper reminds us we're not in this alone. We have each other. And of course we have Jesus above all.

1 Corinthians 12, 13 reminds us of this aspect of the Lord's Supper and its usefulness in strengthening our resolve as believers in a public sense. 1 Corinthians 12, 13, For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free, and have been all made to drink into one spirit. And of course you could say and eat into one body.

And we have that in 1 Corinthians 10, 17. The cup of the blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we though many are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread. There's the picture of unity more explicit there in the Lord's Supper.

Not just with him, but with one another because Christ is our head. We share a common salvation. And thus the unity, the growth therein helps us as Christians as well here in the Lord's Supper.

We partake it as what? One. Not every one of us taking it whatever we feel like. So in that sense the symbolism is significant and it should be retained.

It represents of course our unity with Christ as we partake of his bread and of the wine. We are believing that he broke his body and shed his blood for us and thus drawing closer to him and our hearts and our faith. And that we are united whether Jew or Gentile.

Whatever our nationality or background in our salvation, it is a common salvation. And none of us are closer to God because of whatever our background is. And of course our unity is not reduced to the Supper for we have doctrine and practices we must agree upon.

It's not like we have the Lord's Supper, but the rest of the time we argue over the Trinity, we argue over how to live as a Christian. Should all be of a peace. It assumes the unity of teaching and of practices outside the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper given to us in short, it is a sign that points to the work of Christ and of course to the invisible salvation that we have with him. And it strengthens our conscience and as a means it helps us to grow as Christians and as a seal it reinforces our belief and as a bond it helps us unite our community. Come therefore brothers and sisters trusting that Christ gave this meal for your good and it's a useful thing in your Christian walk.

Let us pray. Indeed Father God above we ask and implore your spirit to be upon us especially in this manner as we take and partake of the sign and seal, the bond and pledge, the redemption that we have in our Lord and Savior. Therefore to grow inwardly in our inward man as believers to further strengthen our trust and belief in you what you have done for us and will continue to do for us as you've in the gospel.

We ask these things by your blood and your broken body for us. Amen.