

A Meal of Comfort

Well, the order is slightly different. The sermon text is Matthew 26, verses 26-28. Matthew 26, verses 26-28.

It is the Lord's Supper, and it's fitting to have a sermon related to the work and person of Jesus of some sort or other, and our relationship to Him, and the meaning of the Lord's Supper, if appropriate. Let us listen attentively to the word of God. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat, this is my body.

And then he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. Let us pray. Father God, we are thankful for the work of Jesus Christ, for your work through him, the blessing of the Holy Spirit given to us that opens our eyes and our hearts to read such a text and realize it's stretching back 2,000 years ago to a time, the incarnation of our blessed Savior.

And he willingly walked into the dead of death for us, and gave us this Eucharist, this meal of blessing, as an expression of the spiritual reality of the salvation we have in him and his broken body and his spilt blood for us. And as such, God Almighty, may our spirits and souls be comforted by this truth, to know that it is here for us, not to berate us, but rather to bring us closer to Jesus and open our eyes through a different avenue, through our senses, that is, the eyes of our soul through the avenue of the body, as only you can by your spirit. And indeed, may this be true for all of us, that we would be comforted and drawn unto our Lord and Savior.

We pray. Amen. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace.

You've heard this before, I'm sure. In other words, it is a tool, a means, an instrument used by God to help sanctify us, to make us more holy. It's not for God's sake that he does these things, but for our sake.

He does this in a two-fold way. The first way is highlighted in 1 Corinthians 11.27. You don't need to go there. Now, therefore, whoever eats this bread and drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.

So, you hear that and you're like, okay, do I want to take the Lord's Supper? The context of Paul's writing in 1 Corinthians 11 is about division within the church. And I don't mean the invisible division, but an outward public display of division. And arrogance that it manifested.

People were eating their home meals at church and excluding others, particularly the poor, who stayed hungry. Paul then explains the negative way in which the Lord's Supper helps a Christian grow, through self-examination. He says, but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup Improper self-examination, in other words, through ignorance or lying to ourselves in public scandals, brings about judgment.

That's the negative part. It's the stick that should scare us if we are inclined towards causing such divisions in public scandals. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

And for this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. You wouldn't have known about this without the book of 1 Corinthians. Because nothing like that happens here in the official declaration and formation of the Lord's Supper, the night that Jesus was betrayed.

There's a circumstance that had changed over time, two decades later, in which Paul has to bring this up. That yes, there's a blessing here, and there's goodness here, but there's also a warning for those who come in a flippant manner, especially in a public scandalous manner, as is the context of 1 Corinthians 11. This is the first way in which the Supper helps us grow, through discipline, warning, and of course, self-examination.

And it stands out so much there in 1 Corinthians 11 that we may easily forget the second important way in which the Supper helps us grow. And by second, I mean second logically, but not by priority. Through encouragement and comfort.

It's here for us, brothers and sisters. It's here for you. This is seen in how Christ created the sacrament on the night in which he was betrayed.

He thought of whom? He thought of us, and not his own life. And so he initiated and implemented this new sacrament in which he takes ordinary things of this life, bread and wine, and gives it spiritual signification. The main point is to show forth Jesus' love and compassion for his own people.

So you can imagine when you have a special party, an anniversary party for your parents, your grandparents, a birthday for yourselves and your spouse, and you treat it like dirt and have open schism. How the parents would think about that, and what they're going to do with the kids for causing such a problem. That's what was going on in Corinth.

Now, of course, for yourselves, I don't know your souls. Maybe you're full of bitter and anger and hatred and rancor. That ought to stop as well.

For that is what it means causing occasion towards further division and problems in the church. That's true. But here, the main point of the goodness, of the blessings, of the positive import of the Lord's Supper, is what I want to highlight, and what Christ highlighted and gave us.

It's only again because sin comes in, and sin brought confusion and division at the churches of Corinth. And God, through Christ Jesus, gives us this encouragement in a way that engages us as a human, both body and soul. We participate in the small meal here, as it were, yet it has big benefits for our spirit.

It comforts us by setting forth the Lord's blood and body as given for us, to strengthen our mind through physical means, in a way we are not allowed to do. We can't just come along

and say, well, I'm going to make this the special water and sprinkle it on your head to show you that God really loves you. Some churches do that.

I don't mean baptism, I mean like a special holy water thing. Roman Catholic Church does that. They think the church has the power and authority to grab ordinary things of life and give it special signification before God, and that's not the case.

A Meal of the Covenant

So here, the first point, a meal of the covenants. I'm explaining here, in the first point, what is the significance, what's the theological context of the Lord's Supper, sometimes called the Eucharist or Communion. It is, first of all, a command from Christ in the Last Supper there, as I read, in chapter 26, verse 26 and following, in which He took the bread and gave it to the disciples and He explained to them something different is going on here.

This is no longer the Passover, because that's what was happening earlier at the Passover meal. That's an Old Testament significant event in which God gave them, as we know, through the prophets in the Old Testament Bible, that you have to do certain things, ceremonies, activities of the body, and sacrifices and the like, because I tell you to do it. And they have certain spiritual significations, they point to Christ and His work for us.

The Passover, of course, does that. Jesus is our Passover. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of His people.

But Jesus is now shifting from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. Something is changing here in the history of redemption of His church, so that, as we know, all the old ways of doing things is now going to fall away by the wayside. And we have a new way of doing things.

We no longer have the sacrifices and the priests. We now have ministers and two simple sacraments. Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

That's it. We don't have to have all these additional things they had of old, or whatever man feels like he wants to make up today, as other churches do, unfortunately, but simply what is here for us. Christ said, it is enough.

And in His command, given to the church, here, through His apostles who represent us and the church, He gives them this new commandment, this new way of doing things, this new sacrament, or sign and seal of the Covenant, for that is what sacrament means. Drink from it, it's a command. Eat from it, it's a command.

I'm telling you the significance of the drinking and of the eating is with respect to this new thing called the New Covenant. It's a command, therefore, by word, His word, and His example. He could have chosen something else, other things in life.

This is my holy cloak. Wear this holy cloak and carry it down through generation after generation. But He didn't.

He chose a simple thing known as a meal. That's one reason why it's described as communion, because that word pictures the union and the communication we have with God by faith alone. A fellowship is another word for that sometimes.

And that's clearly the case, because that's what it signifies here. Jesus for us, dying for us, and our union with Him through faith and faith alone. And this is, of course, the New Covenant, that is a new way of expressing the Covenant of Grace.

The Covenant of Grace was given us after the Fall to Adam and Eve, and through that Covenant, God created a new people that would be saved and brought out of this fallen world. And that Covenant of Grace is expressed over time in different kinds of ways. Before Abraham, for example, and after Abraham was a big difference, clearly.

But it's the same way of being saved. Belief in the Messiah or the seed, the promised seed to come. But now we have a family explicitly set apart, Abraham.

But then there's a big change from Abraham to Moses. We have all these ceremonies and these additional laws that were not given before that time. But it's still the same Covenant of Grace.

It's the same Lord, same Savior, same way of being saved. Just some outward things have changed to teach and instruct them. And now again, the same Covenant of Grace manifests in what we call the New Covenant.

New Testament, sometimes we call it, of course, because the Testament is a special kind of covenant in which it doesn't come into effect until the testator dies, until Jesus dies. And he died, and it came into effect, and things have changed ever since then. And thus, it is the sacrament, that is the sign and seal of the Covenant of Grace, specifically the Covenant of Grace in its New Testament form.

But not just from Jesus' own words here to his disciples. Later, the new apostles of the new age. But from Paul, he confirms the continuity, the continuation, and the obligation of the Lord's Supper.

It wasn't just a one-time event. And of course, the great text that we know of is 1 Corinthians 11. I already read some of it.

I'm not going to read the rest of it for you. And so it's not just a unique occurrence of Christ, like when he washed their feet. You don't have to do that again.

But it reminds us that the Eucharist, or the communion of the Lord's Supper, is part of the Christian life. And the Corinthians exercised it, not just the disciples. Other believers exercised it and participated in it.

And some may be tempted today to think that it's not needed for the Christian life. You, of course, are here. I don't think it's a special concern of yours.

But you will have friends, maybe family members, who are Christians, who don't really take the church so seriously, or the sacraments so seriously. Take it or not take it, I don't really care. But it's important enough that it's in the Bible.

Jesus did it, gave it to us, and is there again in 1 Corinthians 11. And it's something that we need to train our children as they reach maturity, that it's a goal of their life to take the Lord's Supper and confess Christ publicly before the world, that they too may be strengthened and drawn closer unto Him and to each other. The commands of God that He's given us here in the Lord's Supper are not grievous, or they shouldn't be.

They're for your good. He gives us these things for our good, for your good, for your sanctification, for your growth, for your holiness, to be more like Him. And He didn't give it just because He felt like it, as we like to say, but that we may, through, again, physical activity, still draw our soul in a spiritual way to Heaven.

Now, is it a strict necessity? Of course, no. Jesus and His death and life for us is our strict necessity for salvation. All that we need is done in Him.

1 Corinthians 5, 7, For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. It's not a Passover again. It's not a dying or killing of Christ.

And so, in other places, like the Roman Catholic Church, it is, with respect to you getting to Heaven, you better have the sacrament. It's strictly necessary in that sense, because it literally is Christ dying again and again and again and again, every time, every minute, through every day, whenever it's practiced, throughout the world. That's what they teach.

And it's heinous. On the other hand, we may end up being in times of persecution and war, not having access to a church, and so, like the Huguenots, the French Huguenots, for many, many decades, even, they never had access to the Lord's Supper. That doesn't make them any less Christian.

That makes it, of course, a little hard and discouraging, to be sure, yes, but it's not strictly necessary with respect to our sanctification that way. Nevertheless, it's still required. It's relatively necessary, like baptism.

You can be a Christian and not be baptized. Ask the man on the cross. Today I shall see you in Paradise, Jesus told him.

But just because it's not strictly necessary, doesn't mean it's not necessary. It's something that, morally, if you are able, it's required. Do it.

And again, you know, Christians, especially immature ones, like to play these little games. Well, it's not really strictly necessary. No, no.

Do it if you can. But if you can't, you can't. We need it for our weaknesses.

Justification, of course, is significant and important. We have it through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior, and that by faith alone. We are declared righteous before His law courts.

That's justification. Sanctification is the subjective, inward outworking of that life in Christ that we have. It's still incomplete in our mind, our will, and emotions.

We are what? Therefore, still weak. And this is a tool or an instrument, what a means of grace, whereby we become stronger Christians. And God said, this is the way I'm going to do it.

I'm going to give you this simple little meal. It strengthens our weak faith, or it should, when we have doubt. Mark 9.24 is one of my favorite passages.

As I was struggling with what it means to be saved, with the question of predestination, of Arminianism and Calvinism and the like. Mark 9.24, we read, And I saw that, and I still see that, and I think you all see it with me, as the common cry of the believer. I believe, but it doesn't feel like it.

It doesn't seem like such a weak faith. And God has given us the Lord's Supper because of that. Because we have a weak faith.

He knows our frailties. He knows what we need. He knows the flesh of ours.

Although, in the abstract, in the sense of God didn't make it evil, it's fallen in sin. And so it keeps driving after us and saying, do this and do that, and lust after this and lust after that. God takes that which, the physical things, the senses, and turns it to good.

That's what he does in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. The Supper here is to awaken our minds and our emotions through the senses of sight, touch, and taste to become a meal of comfort, the second point. A meal of comfort.

A Meal of Comfort

A comfort through confirming your faith. To strengthen it. It's a way of life, confirmations are.

Perhaps you never thought of it this way. People want confirmation for what they did. That is verification of some sort.

A strengthening of the event to say this is genuine, this is real. Because human nature has self-doubt and limited knowledge. Discouraging words from others, bad circumstances that drag down upon us.

And that's why in marriages we have the ceremony. We have the ring. And the ring is with us to confirm that which is already real to us.

Because we are weak and need such confirmations at times. Maybe even a family portrait of the marriage. Look at it and go, yes, I made a vow.

Taxes paid, meals eaten. We have receipts, what, to confirm that it happened. Confirmation is part of life.

They assume an already existing relationship, however. That's the point. So coming to the Lord's Supper, it's given to those, ideally it should be given to those who trust in Jesus Christ.

And the confirmation here is tied to communion with our Lord and Savior. 1 Corinthians 10.16 1 Corinthians 10.16, we read the cup of blessing, which we bless. Paul writes, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? Communion, to participate, to be with union with one another, in fellowship here with Jesus Christ.

That's what it's picturing. A meal, to remind you again, in the ancient Near East, was an expression of communion, of fellowship, of being together. And the same is true today.

We don't often think of it that way, perhaps, but we have meals. We have get-togethers. We had one yesterday.

It was a blessed time. And it showed our union as a church. Our various backgrounds, to be sure, different parts of America, our different upbringings, but we're united together in Christ Jesus in one church through one baptism, and here through one kind of fellowship, and communion and participation there in a meal, and a get-together.

This is like that, that same idea of communion with Christ, except, of course, it's spiritual. Yesterday it wasn't spiritual in that sense. It wasn't designed by God to confirm our faith to Him explicitly, but more to each other, to encourage one another, that we're all in this together.

But this is specifically you and God. Through this instrument, this means, this tool of eating and drinking. It's a sign of communion with Christ, is what the Lord's Supper is.

I mentioned that before, a sacrament is a sign and a seal. We don't mean it in a Roman Catholic sense or Anglican sense, but in the idea there, specifically, a sign and seal. A sign is a visible picture.

Clearly it's a visible picture. It's pointing to something that it's not. And a seal, that confirmation upon your conscience that God loves you with an everlasting love.

In the midst of a busy life, brothers and sisters, work, more work. A young man here told us during prayer time he's got a second job now. Clubs, hobbies, family, family emergencies that come along.

Children, spouse, friends, church, neighborhood, car breaks down. All this adds up. It becomes distracting at times, and it bears down upon you.

In the midst of fighting sickness, your body falls apart. Discouragement, you become unfocused and tired. And that's before you fight sin.

Your own temptations and inclinations are temptations from others or other things around us. The Lord's Supper helps redirect us to him, to comfort our souls. Confirms us in the love of Christ for you, that it's about him and what he has done.

The Lord's Supper is representing what he did and accomplished for us and shows his love for us because he bled for us. His body was broken for his people. And so the love of Christ is expressed in here.

And therefore of his commitment to us. To you. You may lose that.

At times our faith is weak for various and sundry reasons. I gave a long list of them. In fact, various ways in which the world can affect us and the like.

But Supper is here to remind us, yes, your faith can be weak, but he is stronger. Not just confirmation in a broad sense, but to reinforce your weak faith. To double down, as it were, in your heart that yes, Christ loved me.

He shows it here. He reminds me of it in tangible ways, not just with the words of the pastor or the written word of the word of God. But he thought it appropriate to add these actions, these sacramental actions, to shore up our weak faith.

Your weak faith. And it's his pledge to you that he will never let you go. And it's also therefore our pledge to him that we will never let him go.

For we have a part in this as well. The bulk of the emphasis of the Lord's Supper is clearly about Christ, but we're still participating. We're not robots.

We must come with a faith that says, I love Jesus. I hate my sins. Nothing more complicated than that, in many ways.

You ask some questions, of course. Who is Jesus and the like? And the session will ask you, and that's why we have done this before you become a Communicant member, so that we help you get a better understanding, perhaps. But it's mostly about him.

To be comforted by the good news as seen in the Lord's Supper. Because he is here, brothers and sisters. In a special way, whenever his word is given honor, to be sure, he is worshipped here, and proclaimed before the world.

And God has given it to us, therefore, for our good, to proclaim him as well. He died for you, brothers and sisters, and the Lord's Supper shows this to us. For this is my blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

It points to, not just the death of a man 2,000 years ago, how sad that is, but the death of our Lord and Savior, who died for you, for the remission, to wipe away and to eradicate sin and its effects upon you. He took your place, brothers and sisters, in your stead, that you could go to heaven. He took your sins.

He took your guilt. That which you deserve, he took, for the remission of your sins, for your justification, for your adoption, for your sanctification, here and right now. And you can, therefore, through the Lord's Supper, be granted more grace and more strength in your walk with him.

For that's what it's for. Christ has already done it all, and now he's bestowing more of his gifts and grace upon you. Through preaching, to be sure, for the Lord's Supper, it's pretty meaningless without preaching.

It's not a magical instrument. You know what it signifies, because you've been told by the word of God, and I'm reinforcing that by preaching, saying, it's not really his body or blood here, that was 2,000 years ago, and he's in heaven, sitting on the right hand of God the Father, because he's accomplished what he's done. And he's not dying every day because the work he did 2,000 years ago wasn't good enough.

But he accomplished it once for all, Hebrews tells us. But this is pointing to his work, 2,000 years ago in particular. And it's finished.

And he's here to comfort you. For this is the blood of the new covenant, which is shed for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

Verse 28 of Matthew 26. So the Supper, indeed, points to the Old Testament, 2,000 years ago, way back then. What he did.

But his words at the end here remind us, he has not participated in it. But he will. And I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now until that day when I drink it with you new in my Father's kingdom.

When he returns, we will no longer need to have the Lord's Supper. It's temporary. Because this world is temporary.

It is fading away. And there will be a new heaven and a new earth, in which, he's pointing to, we will have this everlasting communion and fellowship and meal. That's that picture in Revelation, right? The great bountiful meal.

The great bounty of a beautiful relationship. A perfection in heaven forever and ever. So not only do we look to the past, we also look to the future a little bit here, knowing that Christ shall return, and we don't have to have the Supper anymore.

And in both cases, it's Christ at the beginning, and Christ at the end. And the Supper here in the middle. Do you feel down and out? Weak and tired? Doubt creeping in? Are you distracted from the heavenly realities in Christ Jesus for the everyday difficulties of life, brothers and sisters? Then take the meal of comfort, knowing that Christ gave it to you for your good, to strengthen your faith, and to comfort your souls, brothers and sisters.

Let us pray. Father God above, we are grateful for your consideration of our weaknesses, God, that our faith is still tied to the flesh, and we want to touch and hear things. So you

gave us the Word of God to help us with our faith that is preached, so we hear it, and we also see it with our eyes as we read it, but also we taste the good news of Christ Jesus through the Lord's Supper.

May this be true for all of us, I pray. In your name alone, amen.