

How does God deliver His blessings

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[0 : 00] This evening, we're back in 1 Corinthians 10, and we're tackling this issue of what are the issues surrounding true fellowship.

Last week, we began by understanding how the Lord's Table is a table of participation, and if you truly want to understand fellowship, then the Lord's Table is the place to understand it.

That should be the very pinnacle of what true fellowship should look like, coming together, participating with one another, remembering the same things together about Jesus, proclaiming the same things together about Jesus, but also about each other.

In other words, we understood last week that the reason we participate in the table together is because the same thing has happened to us. Jesus has done for me what he's done for you.

He has done for you what he has done for me, and that's why we can both come to the table. Well, this evening, we're going to read a small section from 1 Corinthians 10, and then a smaller section again from Romans 10.

[1 : 17] So 1 Corinthians 10, verses 1 to 4 and verse 16. So now hear the word of the Lord. For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink.

For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. Nevertheless, we'll read verse 5.

With most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. And 6, now these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did.

Our focus will be on the spiritual food and drink. And so in verse 16, which what we read last week, that the cup that we take, notice, is a cup of blessing.

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? In other words, there is blessing to be found here. Just to illustrate why that's true, how God communicates his blessing, just go to Romans chapter 10, which is back one book.

[2 : 46] And verse 14 through to 17. This is regarding the message of salvation, and Paul picks it up by saying, how then will they call on him who they have not believed?

How can anybody call on Jesus, call on the person that they don't believe? And how are they to believe in him whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, how beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news, but they have not all obeyed the gospel.

For Isaiah says, Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us? Verse 17. So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Well, they're the readings that we have to tackle. And this evening, I'm going to be addressing a great question.

[3 : 57] I didn't write the question. It was written by several people together. You know, you have the Westminster Confession. You have the Westminster Catechism.

And they put a list of questions together and then answered those questions. But the question has to do about how we receive anything from God.

In other words, don't you find it puzzling in the Old Testament? That how do you get a sacrifice to God?

How do you get it from where it is to God? It is a puzzling one, isn't it? This is why God speaks of, you know, you burn the sacrifice and the smell, the aroma goes into the nostrils of the Lord.

We have this. That's how it's received. But what about the other way around? How does God get the blessings that he has for us to us?

[4 : 55] That's the question. Now, I'm going to read from the Westminster Catechism, the Shorter Catechism. It may sound a little bit wordy, but every word is carefully chosen.

They didn't waste any words. It is carefully chosen. So here's the question. What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?

That's the question. That's the question. What are the outward means? What are the things that we have that God communicates to us the blessings of redemption? What are they? Here's the answer that the Catechism gives.

The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are his ordinances, especially the word, sacraments, and prayer, all of which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.

And what that means really simply is this, that the word of God, that the sacraments, namely the Lord's table and prayer, Lord's table is something that we get baptized once, but you participate in the Lord's table often, and prayer are the means by which God uses to bless his church.

[6 : 16] Now, let me just put that in a way that's striking. If a church does not make use of the means of grace, the use of the word, the use of the Lord's table, and the use of prayer, if a church does not participate in any of those three, then there can be no benefits of redemption communicated to you.

Because God is already determined, he has already set an order in motion, that the way he blesses you, that the way he gets his benefits of redemption to you, is through the word of God, through the Lord's table, and through prayer.

That's how they come to you. Now, I'll try and illustrate it in this way. Imagine a very high hill with a very flat top, and at the very top of this hill there's a massive lake.

And from that lake flows a river down to the village below, and the people receive the water from the lake. Is the water the means of grace?

No, the water is the blessing. The water is the benefit. Okay, it's the water's at the top in the lake, and that's the blessing that they need.

[7 : 36] That's the benefit that they need. They need water to drink daily. And so as the water flows down the hill, the blessing comes down, but how does it get down? You say, well, gravity.

Okay, maybe. Well, of course, gravity. But more importantly, you have a riverbed, and you have riverbanks. And that riverbed and that riverbanks direct the water from where it is down to where you are.

Fair enough, it comes down by gravity. But nevertheless, the direction of it follows the direction of the banks on either side. So is the water the means of grace?

No, the water itself is not the means of grace. It's the blessing. The means of grace are the actual banks. The means of grace are the banks and the riverbed, the very objects that bring that water directly down to the village.

And in exactly the same way, God has his blessings and his benefits of redemption. And the way that he gets them from where they are down to where you are is by the banks of the Lord's table and the word of God in prayer.

[8 : 52] So is prayer a blessing? No, the prayer itself isn't the blessing as such. It is the bank that brings the blessing down to you. The Lord's table is not a blessing as such, though it is.

But it's actually the banks that bring the blessing down to you. And the word of God is the word of God. It is a blessing, but not a blessing as such. It is the vehicle by which brings the blessing to you. Hopefully that makes sense. In other words, if you're not at the bottom of the river, if you're not at the place where the banks lead to, then you don't get to drink of the stream.

If you're not in the place where the Lord's table is being practiced, where prayer is being observed, and where the word of God is being preached, then you're not in the place where the benefits of redemption are going to be received.

That's where God has them. Can God bless me during the week? Yeah, of course he can. But that's not how he does it. Generally, he does it in and through the means of grace.

[9 : 59] Grace. So the benefits are for everyone, but they're for everyone who finds themselves at the bottom of this river, at the bottom of this means of grace, on the other end of the means of grace.

If that is, you are to benefit to them, by them, and you are to understand how it is that God communicates. I mean, that's the most important question. How does God get what he has for us from him to us?

I mean, puzzle over that one. You don't need to, because I've answered it. And it's very simple. He does so through the Lord's table, through prayer, and through the word of God.

Now, here's the thing. It is true, as we said this morning, that God's mercies are new every single morning. That's definitely true. But that is not where the benefits of redemption lie according to God. They lie in his means of grace, the ordinances that he has left with us. Where are the benefits of redemption found? At the Lord's table.

[11:05] Where are the benefits of redemption found? In prayer. Where are the benefits of redemption found? As you hear the word of God. Are they found somewhere else? No, they're not found somewhere else.

They're found in the place where God has put them. Or the way he channels them down to you. So how many of you think, well, it'll come another way?

I mean, how many of us, I wonder, over the years have invented a Christianity by which we think we receive in a different way? That actually we can get these things other than the way that God has said that they come to us.

Now, I don't know how we've come to invent a Christianity or how we've come to imagine something different other than to say it must be in the absence of the word of God being present, which is the very means of grace to set us right.

Now, why do I say it like that? Well, I say it like that because of the background of 1 Corinthians 10. Paul is saying, look, there were a people in the past who ate spiritual food and drank spiritual drink and that food and drink was Christ.

[12:19] In other words, the people in the wilderness were fed and nurtured and had all of their needs met by Christ himself. They didn't recognize it necessarily in the manna from heaven.

They didn't recognize it necessarily in the water that came from the rock. They didn't necessarily see it, but that is who fed them. Christ was with them.

Christ benefited them all the time. He provided all of their needs. But then it says that God, with most of them, was not pleased.

And then I ask the question, well, why not? Why was God not pleased with these people in the Old Testament? And the answer that you find is, you know, did they experience the grace of God?

Yeah, they experienced the grace of God. Well, were they brought out of Egypt from slavery? Yes, they were brought out of Egypt from slavery and hard labor. Did they get to see the miracles of God?

[13:16] They got to see all the miracles of God and the temple eggs and everything. They got to see God at his most powerful, perhaps.

So why were they overthrown? And the answer, believe it or not, is boring. Really boring as to why these people were overthrown.

Having received so much grace and mercy and having seen so many miracles. Here's the answer. Or here's the reason, rather, in Exodus 16. It says, That's why God was not pleased with them.

Why? This is what they're saying. In other words, if Moses, if we're going to die anyway, Why couldn't we die back in Egypt where we sat and ate meat pots and had plenty of bread and plenty of drink?

Why couldn't we die where we had it good? Rather than having to die out here in the wilderness where we've got nothing to eat? It's not true that they had nothing to eat. It's not true that they were perishing with hunger.

[14:43] God always supplied all of their needs. But why is the answer so boring? Well, the answer is boring because of this one reason. They were preoccupied with the physical.

They were preoccupied with the physical. That's why God wasn't happy. And that's why they were overthrown. They were overthrown because there were people who belonged to God who thought the physical was more important than the spiritual.

They say, We sat by meat pots and ate bread until we were full. But now we're out in the wilderness. We have none of that. And you want to kill us with hunger. In other words, they are being fed. But they're seeing their life purely from a physical standpoint.

In other words, they are preoccupied with their physical conditions. They have become overly concerned with the physical. And that is always a recipe for disaster.

When you have become overly concerned with the physical. Even in a human relationship.

Between a husband and wife, let's say.

[15 : 52] And the husband perhaps becomes overly concerned with the physical. And doesn't take care of his or his wife's spiritual needs. Or even vice versa. It is a recipe for disaster.

The spiritual must be taken care of. Because we are a spiritual people. And I think we find this today in the church. Where people are almost obsessed with the physical.

So we've now come into a new year. I'm putting on weight. Not me personally. I said not me personally. But you may have your own opinion.

Well I'm putting on weight. What must I do? I must go to the gym. Or if you don't like the gym. Like me. Then you must at least stop eating when you're not hungry.

And you go straight to the physical. I have a hospital appointment next week. For this physical condition. Easy to talk about isn't it?

[16 : 59] And then when you're better. You come back in the church and let everyone know that you're better. Or you're getting there at least. It's so easy to communicate the physical.

How are you? And you go straight to the physical. Straight to the physical. It even seems that we've not learned the lesson.

Of the dangers of being too concerned with the physical. It's not that the physical doesn't matter. It does matter. It's not that God isn't concerned with our physical condition. He is. That's why he gave food and drink for the Israelites.

In the same way he cares for our physical body. But the danger is. Is don't become overly concerned with the physical. It is a dangerous recipe. It is the cause of being overthrown.

Why is it that we never see in our prayer news? Probably because of sensitivity. But nevertheless I think the point can be made. Pray for this person because he's not attended a prayer meeting in six years.

[18 : 08] We never see that. Why is it that we never see pray for this person? Because they have decided to remain in sin rather than confess their sin and come to the Lord's table.

Pray for this person because they'd rather not participate in the Lord's table so that they can continue in that. Why is it that we never see that in our prayer news? Or in the prayer bulletin? Or in a prayer meeting?

Why is it that even I'm guilty of this as a pastor that I find it easy to concentrate on the physical? Is it just because that the confidentiality level as it were to the physical is less than the spiritual?

Maybe. But I don't think that's the whole story. I think we think that the physical, because it's on show, we have to deal with it.

But the spiritual, because it's not on show, we go into our private little world and go, this is just a matter between me and the Lord.

[19 : 19] And as we have seen, it's not just a matter between you and the Lord. Your brother's spiritual condition or your sister's spiritual condition is of utmost concern to you.

Or at least it should be. But the church has succumbed, it seems, to the same problem as the Israelites did of old.

That we have become overly obsessed or heading towards that way with the physical, over and above the spiritual. And don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that the physical isn't important.

It is important. But it's never, ever more important than the spiritual condition of a person. Never, not once.

And so when people fail, as they did here in Corinthians, or as Paul looks back to the wilderness wanderings, when people concentrate on the physical, over and above the spiritual, they're overthrown.

[20 : 19] It's then that they grumble. It's then that they want to turn back. It's then that they want to complain against God, that God is not providing their needs. That God is not actually looking after them.

And so Paul says in verse 6, Now these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did. He's not saying that the physical is evil.

But what he's saying is that type of desire, where you have elevated that above the spiritual, is the evil thing. That's the problem. That's the problem that we all have.

So don't make the mistake of separating the spiritual to the heart, and the physical only to the sort of behavior. There is no category within scripture that says, I'm obeying Jesus in my heart. Or my heart is right with God despite how it looks on the surface. Be careful. Very, very dangerous to separate the two.

[21 : 24] Now given that background, given the seriousness of concentrating on one over against the other, why is that so important as we come to the means of grace?

Well, here's very simply. God does provide for you. But notice where he provides for you. He will provide for you in the word of God.

He will provide for you at the Lord's table. And he will provide for you in prayer. That's the means of grace. That's how the benefits and blessing of redemption are going to get you this very evening. Or any evening. Or any Sunday morning. That's how they will come to you. That's how you will receive from God. If indeed you receive it in faith. And assurance and blessing from God. But here's the thing. In order to participate in these spiritual blessings, you have to be there physically. So it's not just a spiritual matter.

[22 : 29] Don't think it's just a spiritual matter. It's not just a spiritual matter. I must hear the word of God with my ears. And therefore I must present my body in the place where the word of God is going to be preached.

That is a physical matter. It's not just a spiritual one. I have to participate in the Lord's table. I have to eat the bread and drink the wine. It's not just a spiritual matter.

It's actually a physical matter. Because participation is actually doing it. And prayer also. You must pray. It's very much a physical thing.

You have to move your tongue. Or at least the words in your head. So this idea that you can somehow separate the spiritual and the blessings of the spiritual away from the physical and somehow still receive them is just not the case.

The means of grace. The means of grace come to you which are spiritual through the physical as well. As you present your bodies as living sacrifice. As you listen to the word of God.

[23 : 31] As you participate in the Lord's table. As you pray with words and with understanding. That's how God gets what he has to you.

That's how God gives you what he wants to give you. Through those banks. Through that channel. That's how it gets from him to you.

And that is how you can benefit from the things that God has for you. That's the means of grace. And if you don't find yourself at the bottom of that valley.

That channel. Then you're not in the place where you're going to receive these blessings and benefits. All the spiritual food and all the spiritual drink and the benefits of redemption.

Now there is a way of illustrating this both positively and negatively. And it's interesting that Paul decides to do this in communion itself.

[24 : 32] So if you turn over to 1 Corinthians 11. And we go to verse 27.

I want you to notice the real effects. The real effects that attaches itself to the Lord's Supper. Verse 27. Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner.

Will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. But let a person examine himself then. And let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29.

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body. Eats and drinks judgment on himself. Verse 30. This is why. This is why many of you are weak and ill.

And some have died. 31. But if we judged ourselves truly. We would not be judged. And so what Paul is doing.

[25 : 38] See Paul understands that the Lord's Supper is a means of grace. It is the means by which God blesses you. But by the same token. It is the means by which God judges you.

If you take it wrongly. In other words. The thing to notice here is not the judgment. I'm just using this as a point. I don't want to concentrate on the fact of taking the Lord's Supper to be judged. That's not the point.

The point to be made here. Is notice how real effects. Are attached to the Lord's Supper. In other words. It's not just spiritual. But it's real.

Some of you are real. And some of you have even died. So this idea that we can enter into these things lightly. And not be affected by the benefits.

Or the judgments that can come from it. Is we must be very careful. Paul is saying quite clearly. That it is a means of grace.

[26 : 35] It is a cup of blessing. 1 Corinthians 10 verse 16. It is a cup of blessing. As you partake in it. You're partaking in the blessing of the Lord.

But by the same manner. If you take it wrongly. You're actually going to be partaking of a judgment of the Lord. In other words. There are real effects. Communicated.

Both blessing. And judgment. Through the Lord's table. Blessing. If you take it in faith. And you know. You're conscious. And you've repented of your sin. And judgment.

If you haven't discerned the body. As in the fellowship. Not the body of Christ. By the way. That's the body of the fellowship. Real effects.

So God does communicate to us blessing. Cup of blessing. And he does communicate to us judgment. If we take it in a manner not worthy.

[27 : 34] And so we're not messing around here. This is how God blesses you. This is how God deals with you. And so there is a couple of questions.

That I think that we could ask of this. And that is. Are the benefits to. Are the benefits. That we can receive real benefits. The answer is yes. Absolutely the answer is yes.

Are they very beneficial for us. The answer is yes. They are extremely beneficial for us. And how do we get them. By participating. Of course. But only by participating.

Do we get to receive these blessings. That have come. And so let me put it this way. As I put it last week. Is the church. Not our church. Though we can include our church. Is the church in Scotland. Is the church in Europe. Is the church in the West. Weaker. Than it could be. Because it doesn't participate. In the Lord's table every single week. And the answer is.

[28 : 34] Undoubtedly so. Obviously. Of course it is. Why? Because at the Lord's table. God deals with his people. That's why the early church.

Probably flourished in the way that it did. Because it partook of it every single week. Is the church weaker because we don't? Yeah. I think so. Because it is the very means of grace.

By which God communicates himself to us. And that means. Very simply. That if you don't have it every week. What don't you have every week? You don't have the blessing that comes with it.

Right? If we agree. That there is real blessing that comes from this table. As through prayer. And as through the word of God. Then we must also agree.

That on the weeks that we don't have it. We are not finding ourselves in the place where the blessing can be found. Because it's not there to be found. Here's the exhortation.

[29 : 38] In other words. What are we to make of all of this? What are we to do with it? Well. Note this. That there is both spiritual and physical benefit to those.

Who find themselves in the means of grace. At the word of God. At prayer. At the Lord's table. There is blessing for those who participate in these means of grace.

By faith. Are we to put the emphasis on the spiritual? Yes. Of course. The emphasis is spiritual. But not at the expense of the physical. You still have to present your body.

You still have to hear with your ears. And you still have to eat with your mouth. The bread. And drink the wine. And you still have to be wholehearted in your praying to God.

They are physical matters. But it's there that God blesses you. It's there that God communicates to you the blessing that he has for you.

[30 : 37] And so if I was to go to the gym and I was to do several exercises. Would my body become fitter through participating in all of those things?

Well of course. Hopefully. Maybe a long time. And in the same way as you participate in the word of God. And as you participate in prayer. And as you participate at the Lord's table.

God makes you fit. God makes you spiritually fit. There he deals with you. You don't do it by your own effort. God does it by you being found in the right place in order for him to bless you through the means that he has chosen.

And so God wants to communicate to you blessing. God wants to communicate to you the benefits of redemption.

The question here is where are you? Are you in the place where you're going to receive them? Or are you in the place where you're absent from them?

[31 : 41] Do you want them weekly? Or do you want them every now and then? You see if you truly understand that this is the place where God deals with us. If you truly understand that this is

