

A Meditation on the Object of Our Faith in the Lord's Supper (taken from a discourse on the Lord's Supper by John Owen, June 8, 1673, 2nd version preached on Dec. 1, 2019)

The word "faith" is used all the time in the world. It means "belief." And when the word is used there is always a context. There is a specific meaning behind the word. There is an "object" in view when people use this word in different contexts. For example, someone might have "faith" that God will give help in a time of need. A Muslim may have "faith" in Mohammed as they believe he is a prophet. A Hindu might have "faith" in what he believes to be different "expressions" of God. A Jewish person may have "faith" that God will, in the future, reign from Jerusalem. Even the atheist has a kind of "faith" that their belief system is true. In every context, "faith" has a specific object.

It is also true for Christians. We have "faith" that God will save us because of his promises in the Word. In this regard, God, especially his promises is the OBJECT of our faith. If we believe Christ will return one day, "*Christ and his return*" is the object of our faith. In this way, faith can have different "objects" of focus. Today, I would like to consider the specific object of our faith as we take the Lord's Supper. And I think we can say that the object of our faith as we take the Lord's Supper is the suffering and death of Christ. This is the bull's eye of our faith regarding the Lord's Supper. I say this because of Jesus' words. "*This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*" "*This cup is the New Covenant in my blood. As often as you drink it, remember me.*" With this in mind, I have 3 ways we can focus our faith on Jesus' suffering and death. And, then I would like to give some responses (acts) to this faith.

1. Consider the Love of Christ. I don't understand the depths of the love of Christ, especially if one considers who we are. If you knew your spouse would cheat on you many times over and over and over again before you walked down the aisle, would you still marry him/her? Would you make that person an object of your love? This is how the Bible portrays us. Yet, we read about the steadfast love of God, and particularly the love of Christ for his people. The Apostle Paul describes himself in 1 Tim. as a "*violent, blaspheming, persecuting, opponent*" to the Gospel and God's people. He considered himself to be the CHIEF of sinners (v. 15). In that same passage he says, "*the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*" To the Galatians he says, "**I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me**" (Gal. 2:20). And when Paul thought of this love, he could only say, "**To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen**" (1 Tim. 1:17).

One of the main things Paul prays for when he prays for believers is that they "**know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge**" (Eph. 3:19). And, today, if you are in Christ, you cannot be separated from this love. "**Christ Jesus is the one who died-- more than that, who was raised-- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.**" ³⁵ **Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?** ³⁶ **As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."** ³⁷ **No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.** ³⁸ **For I am sure that neither death nor**

life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:34-39).

With this in mind, as we take the Lord’s Supper this morning, as we eat and drink, and see these elements, may we consider this great love and be moved deeply, that Christ may be more beautiful to us!

2. Consider the Sufferings of Christ. The elements we see, the elements we take and eat and drink, picture the body and blood of our Lord, the body and blood of a man who died. And in his life and his death, there was great suffering. This morning, the object of our faith is the sufferings of Christ. I think particularly, we must consider that the purpose of his suffering was for the purpose of laying down his life as a sin offering. In the OT, the Israelites would bring their offerings to the priest. They would say to him, “*We have sinned. Please take this offering and sacrifice it in our place.*”

This morning, Christ is our sacrifice. But, it wasn’t a sinful man who offered up his life! The Bible says, “**He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself**” (Heb. 7:27). If you or I offer up ourselves to God as a sinner, we would be punished, and this punishment would bear the full extent that our sins deserve, which is separation from God in a place called hell . . . forever. And we would be FULLY deserving. But Christ knew no sin. And though He did not deserve what he received, the Bible says: “**For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God**” (2 Cor. 5:21). And 1 Pet. 3:18: “**For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God . . .**” Gal. 3:13: “**Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.**” 1 Pet. 2:24: “**He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.**”

3. Consider the Effects of Christ’s Death. This morning, as we take and eat and drink, the object of our faith must be also upon what the death of Christ has accomplished for us. I remember as a kid, going to the beach every summer. And I was so excited working up to the trip. I couldn’t wait until I got there, to put on my bathing suit, and go swimming, and play on the beach, and swim in the pool, and go out to eat, etc. And you know the worst part? The drive. It took at least 27 days to get there. I hated that drive. But, the drive was worth it because of what waited at the end. The end of Christ’s death are the effects that come down to us. What are some of these effects?

Let me ask another question, “*Why did Jesus die?*” There are a lot of ways to answer this question that would be true, but primarily Jesus died to give himself as an offering for sin. Mark 10:45 says, “**For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**” Why does Mark use the word “ransom?” I think he is simply using a picture from life and from the OT where a slave could be bought with a price and be set free. In our case, as sinners, we are in bondage as slaves to sin. And there is no way out. There is no way

we can work off our debt. There is no price high enough to pay the debt we owe. This is why ONLY God the Son can lay down his life. ONLY HIS life was valuable enough to make such a payment. And this payment was made to God, God the Father, as a ransom. And this ransom was efficient to atone, to cover, all my sins. And if you are in Christ, your sins are covered. They are not counted as yours anymore. They were laid on Christ. They were counted as his. You are free from your sins. The God of the universes is no longer angry with you.

And now, you have peace between God and your soul. Let me ask, “*When you lay your head on your pillow at night, do you have peace?*” And now, not only are your sins forgiven, your guilt has been removed. The guilt of the ungodly never goes away. Guilt is the cause of the unrest in our souls that cannot be taken away. Medicine will only dull it and suppress it. I remember the day when I realized this fact! Oh, the weight of my sin! It was gone! And instead of a child of wrath, a child of the devil, I knew I was a child of God Himself! Under the righteous, holy law of God, we find that the blood of bulls and goats could not bring such effects! But today, as we eat, as we drink, our faith rises even higher because of the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God, who laid down his life for us to reconcile us to God! Oh the beauty of Christ!

When we consider the love of Christ, the sufferings of Christ, and the effects of Christ’s death, what do we do. I would like to finish this morning with 3 ways our faith is acted out.

1. Recognition. Every time we take the Lord’s Supper, we recognize the death of Christ. By faith, we look back at a past event. But, even though Christ’s death was over 2000 years ago, by faith, Christ’s death is present in our souls TODAY. His death, TODAY, is just as real as it was then. Where there is faith (real faith), there is the same advantage as the one who stood by the cross and watched him die. By faith, it is the same recognition it was 2000 years ago. In this way, we “remember.”

2. Humiliation. When we remember the cross of Christ, there should be a great sense of humiliation that floods our souls. The Apostle John stood by the cross as Jesus died. And he wrote in detail about what happened. In John 19:35-37, writing about himself, says: “**He who saw it has borne witness-- his testimony is true, and he knows that he is telling the truth-- that you also may believe.** ³⁶ **For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."** ³⁷ **And again another Scripture says, "They will look on him whom they have pierced."** Here, John is quoting a passage from Zechariah when he looks forward to a day when Israel will mourn as they remember whom they have pierced. And they will mourn like they had just lost their firstborn child. (In that context, he may have been speaking about the death of King Josiah, or how they had turned their backs on God. I’m not sure.) But, in that context Zechariah speaks of a great day in the future when God will restore his people. And John takes these words and applies them to the death of Christ.

I remember when we lived in Kenya. And we were gathered for a Sunday morning service. It was outside (just a handful of believers). And during the sermon, we started to hear crying. And it got louder and louder and louder, until we saw a woman passing by. And she was wailing, to the point that we could not continue for the crying. And someone told us, “Her son is dead.” Well, this is the kind of heart John speaks of when God’s people consider the death of Christ.

Today, when we consider Christ's death on the cross, we come by a humble faith as we KNOW "MY SINS PUT HIM THERE." It was for me he died. And, I'm the one who has always been unfaithful, unloving, unkind. Yet, he loves me still. When we consider Christ and what he did for us, we are humbled. "**But while we were yet still sinners, Christ died for us**" (Rom. 5:8).

3. Thankfulness. Finally, we give thanks! We give thanks for great wisdom of God in the great plan of history to save his people. We give thanks to Christ for his great for us. There is nothing in this world that give the Christian a more thankful heart than the cross of Christ. Our sins are covered.

Today, as we take the Lord's Supper, if you find that your faith "leaps" within you as you consider: 1) the love of Christ; 2) the sufferings of Christ; 3) the effects of Christ's death, then this supper is beneficial to your faith. Oh, God is good to give us such a feast!