

Communion Conviction

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Well, as you can see from the table in front of the pulpit here this morning, we're coming to the Lord's table this morning to celebrate communion together. One thing that we try to do here at Truth Community Church as a pattern of our fellowship, as a pattern of our life as a body, is to establish reverence for the Lord's table. Communion is one of two ordinances that the Lord has given to the church to observe on an ongoing basis. Baptism, which we believe is the outward sign of regeneration in the heart that a person has been born again and one day soon we'll be able to use our new baptistry and celebrate baptism together as a church and celebrate new spiritual life for those that have been born again through faith in Christ and also the Lord has given us the table of communion. The Lord said very clearly, "Do this in remembrance of Me." And because it is a particularly special way of remembering the Lord, because the Lord specifically commanded us to remember him in this way, it is important for us, beloved, to take communion seriously and I realize that it's not that way for everyone and I realize that we come from different backgrounds where communion has been observed in different ways but I want us to think through communion and particularly what kind of convictions do we bring to the table as we remember the Lord in this manner. Well, I think that it's important for us to see that what you think about communion is ultimately a reflection on what you think about the Lord himself. Really the two can't be separated in any real meaningful way when you realize the Lord said, "Remember me by this observance," and this observance is a symbol of his blood, his body, sacrificed for us, we really can't make too much of a distance between what we think about the Lord and what we think about being present for the observance of communion.

With that said and I speak gently and I speak as one who seeks your spiritual good, for some not just in this room but throughout the church in general, for some communion is simply an optional experience. They easily skip the observance if it doesn't fit their schedule. If it doesn't quite work out for them to be there, then it doesn't bother them. It doesn't pang their conscience at all to miss communion because they don't see it as something that is important and worthy of their time and worthy to make a priority in life. That's not good. That's not worthy of Christ who shed his blood and said, "Remember me in this way." Well, if we treasure our Lord Jesus Christ and if we treasure the shed blood that secured our salvation, then shouldn't it be that in our hearts we would want to be in a place where that is specifically remembered, particularly as part of our experience in our

local body and an ongoing part of our life? Communion is not optional. The Lord Jesus commanded it and so we have the opportunity to obey him here this morning.

But for others, there is a different risk, I suppose, I different pothole that you can fall into and that is when communion simply becomes a rote experience. It's just a matter of going through the ritual and showing up but not engaging your heart in what is being said or what is being done and as long as you take the bread and take the cup then, you know, you can check that box off for another time, for another month, and people like that go through the motions of communion with no meaningful impact on their hearts. Beloved, that's not good either. How could it be that we would have a particular appointed remembrance for us of that which secured our eternal salvation, that which washed our sins away, and approach it as if it were just another aspect of daily life like brushing our teeth or, you know, just taking care of the personal needs of the day? That's not good either.

So what we see here is that the element of communion begins to expose to your heart, it exposes to you in your attitude and your response to it, exposes to you, it is a very good barometer of where you're at with the Lord and if communion is something that you don't care about, well, let's not talk too seriously about how much you care about Christ. If it's something that you just go through mechanically with, perhaps your heart has gotten cold and needs to be warmed up. And if communion is something that you can easily ignore, you know, I don't understand your spiritual life, to be frank with you. So today is a day for us to set all of those things straight for this day as we come to communion. This is an opportunity for you to consider Christ and to reflect on where you are at in your walk with him. You see, communion is a probe; it exposes our convictions. It exposes what we really believe about Christ and our trust toward him and strong convictions about the Christian life will enable us to honor Christ as we take communion. We want to just kind of take a broad look at the way that we believe about Christ and the way that we believe about what it means to be a Christian today as we prepare our hearts for communion so all that we say here from the pulpit here this morning is designed to help prepare you so that you could take communion in a worthy manner or perhaps, since communion is only for those who truly know the Lord Jesus Christ, perhaps it's an opportunity for you to say, "Do you know what? My life doesn't reflect that at all. I'd better pass on these elements," because the elements of communion are a statement. Communion is a statement that is a visible, outward manifestation that says, "I am acknowledging that I am a sinner guilty before God. I recognize that my only hope of salvation is in Christ alone. I have truly repented and put my faith in him and as a symbol of remembrance that the Lord commanded, I take these elements in remembrance of that upon which I rest my eternal destiny." There are convictions that flow in the life of someone who has truly repented like that, that go along with that and that's what we want to see.

We're going to go to the book of 2 Timothy this morning and I invite you to turn there with me. It's not a text specifically about communion but it's a text that goes to the very convictions that should animate the Christian life. The convictions of which we are going to speak here this morning should be true of every believing Christian and we're just

going to look at 2 Timothy in an overview fashion here this morning in a way that I trust will be an encouragement to you as we examine ourselves before we come to the table.

Here in 2 Timothy, the Apostle Paul is writing to Timothy at the end of his life. He says in chapter 4 that his time of departure has come and so he's conscious of the fact that he is saying his final words, in a sense, that he is writing in a way that he may not be able to speak further to Timothy about and Timothy is the man, as it were, that is receiving the baton from the Apostle Paul. The apostle handing off the baton of Gospel ministry to a man who is not an apostle, who would never be an apostle, but one who would be a strategic leader after Paul's death and after Paul goes to heaven. Paul was evidently concerned about the weakness that Timothy had manifested. There was a timidity about his spirit. He was easily discouraged and he was physically weak when you read the fullness of what Scripture says about him and so Paul is writing this letter of 2 Timothy to strengthen his convictions so that he could rise to the occasion of ministry after Paul was gone. This is urgent to him as he's writing at the end of his life. These are his final words and because Paul loved the Gospel and loved Christ, it was very urgent to him that Timothy would pick up the mantle and carry it on with strength.

Now, why would we care? Why would you care about what Paul says to Timothy from 2,000 years ago? Well listen: the message that Paul has for Timothy is completely applicable to us today as Christians ourselves. We have received a trust from those who have given the Gospel to us. We have received a stewardship from the Lord Jesus Christ who shed that precious blood on Calvary on our behalf and that calls forth a response and it calls forth an energy of life. A conscious direction of will and volition and emotion. A conscious commitment that says, "I am going to live my life in light of these truths that have captivated my soul." That's what a true Christian does. That's how a true Christian thinks about these things. It's not something superficial. It's not just an add-on to life, you know, like you're got your job and you've got friends and you've got a home and, oh, and I've got Jesus too. No, that's not it at all. If that's the mindset with which you approach Christianity, my friend, you might ask yourself, "Am I even a Christian?" because we are to love the Lord God. We are to love the Lord Jesus Christ with all of our heart, soul, strength and mind. He is to be the preeminent priority of our hearts in a way that nothing else compares to. So there is a distinction that communion reminds us of. There is an elevation of Christ that it brings to our hearts that we need to take to our inner man.

So what Paul says to Timothy shapes our lives and it also prepares our hearts as we come to the Lord's table here this morning and it's my prayer that you would listen with a receptive and tender heart that's willing to let the Spirit of God convict you at points where you need to be convicted and also that the Spirit of God would strengthen and comfort you and encourage you where perhaps your tender heart has been bruised because you come here conscious of the ways that you have fallen short. So we're going to rely on the Spirit of God to take the word of God and apply it to the hearts of the people of God so that we can come to the table of God and remember Christ in an appropriate way.

First of all, what can we take away from this? What should we see as we read 2 Timothy? Well, I'm going to give you four things to examine your hearts with here this morning and the first one is this, the reality of being born again, of being rescued by the blood of Christ means this, first of all, it means that you should be a Christian with conviction. You should be a Christian that has conviction about your life. You're not a vacillating person, "Maybe I believe, maybe I don't," that the realities of the work of Christ and the authority of God's word are something that is settled in your heart. It's not open to negotiation. It's not open to being reconsidered. This is something that you know to be true, that these things are settled and it is the ground upon which you stand and it is the ground that you will be firm on. Be a Christian with conviction.

You say, "Well, what is a conviction? What do you mean when you say that we ought to be one with conviction?" Well, here's what I mean by that: a conviction is a fixed belief through which you interpret life and duty. It means that you believe something to be true and you adjust your life and your affections accordingly and that this is not something that wavers over time, you don't know what you're going to think tomorrow. No, a Christian is someone who is convinced of the things of the Gospel and these things are established and firm and not to be negotiated.

We start with that and Paul illustrates this. He calls Timothy to be a man of conviction. As you look at chapter 1, verse 8, it's very interesting what Paul says to him here and let me just maybe back up to verse 5 as he's writing to encourage Timothy and he says, "Timothy, I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline." Why do you think that Paul says this to him? Why does Paul say, "Timothy, God hasn't given us a timid spirit but a spirit that is full of power and love and discipline"? Well, he's given it to him because Timothy is quavering. He's shaking. It's uncertain about what his next step is going to be and so Paul, as it were, rides in like the cavalry and waves the flag of the glory of Christ and the honor and the blood of Christ before him and says, "Timothy, rally around this flag. Rally around the person of Christ and stir yourself up to duty and commitment that is worthy of the Christ that we believe in."

So he calls him in verse 8 to this conviction. Verse 8, he says, "Therefore do not be ashamed," notice the "therefore" flowing out of the fact that God has given us a spirit of power and love. He says, "Don't be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God. Timothy, buck up. There may be hard times coming and you need to be a good soldier of Christ Jesus. You need to rise to the occasion." Look, we talk about this in comparative comfort here in middle America. Very much, my heart is very much mindful of a friend that I have in the Middle East who is a leader of many churches in a very dangerous place. He's in the Middle East in a place where there is a travel ban for Americans. I would go there to be with him to support him but there is a travel advisory against going to this place. He literally risks his head there in that environment where such hatred is

being manifested and so much blood is being spilt. He risks his head by standing up and preaching the Gospel of Christ. He's showing the courage and the faithfulness that Paul here is calling Timothy to. He is living out and paying a price and risking his life. Why? Why would you do that? Because we as Christians are called to join with those who have gone before us in suffering for the Gospel according to the power of God.

You don't rise to an occasion where your neck may be sawed off unless you are a man of conviction. In a much lesser way, you know, we all feel, if you're like me, you feel the fact that sometimes weak and retiring and you're not as bold even in your witness here where there is no physical threat to your life. Well, we need to be mindful and reminded of the fact that we're called to be people of conviction that are faithful and willing to suffer for the Gospel. You don't suffer for that which you're not convinced about. You don't suffer for that which is a negotiable for you. Paul says to Timothy, "Timothy, there are fixed beliefs that we have and that we yield even our own lives before we would yield what we believe," and Paul would eventually give his own neck to the executioner for what he's writing here.

Look at what he says in verse 9. "Why is it?" you say, "Why is it that, you know, I'm used to Christianity lite? Why should I think about Christianity at such a deep level? Why should I be so committed to Christ that I would be willing to suffer for him even to the point of death?" Well, verse 9 answers the question for you, he "has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity." There is a transcendent element to being a Christian. There is an eternal purpose of God at work in the hearts of those who believe and we are convinced of these things though we cannot see them. We are convinced of them because they are revealed in Scripture. God is working out his eternal purpose according to his grace and that means that we transcend this world and embrace the purpose of God.

Oh beloved, don't you see that what we have here at the communion table set before us is a reminder of an eternal purpose that's been working out throughout millennia and that we step into a small slice of time as God is working out something that transcends all of our lives? And the glory of that? And the price of the blood that was shed to secure our part in it is of such infinite worth that we're fixed in that, that we would never back off from that and that that would shape the way that we even approach the table today with a sense of reverence that this symbolizes something much greater that we cannot see and that this symbolizes the price that Christ paid for my soul and he endured the agonies of the cross both in a physical sense but in a much greater sense the price of separation from God, bearing the eternal judgment of sin in his body, in his infinite, perfect person so that your sins could be washed away and that you could be set right with a holy God.

We need to be a Christian with conviction and Paul manifests this in his own life. He calls Timothy to it and then he says what his own attitude is it about. Look at it at verse 12 there with me. He says, "For this reason I," notice his personal example here. He says and remember, beloved, we're talking about someone who is late in his life. He's approaching the end. He's filled with love for Christ and love for Timothy and he realizes

that there is an important transition that's about to take place and his heart bleeds through with this. His own conviction comes forth, what he's convinced of. Verse 12, he says, "For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." Standing with courage as he faces the executioner's sword. Standing with courage saying, "Timothy, I'm unmoved. That's why I suffer these things. That's why I'm not ashamed, it's because I'm mindful of all that Christ has done for me to lead me to this point." And in humility of mind, he bows his knee and he bows his neck to the Lord who saved him and offers up his life as his final sacrifice of praise.

Well beloved, if that's the fountain which is handed to us, the precious faith that we have, then we must be people of conviction as well. We must be resolved not to be ashamed of the Gospel and we must instead be convinced of the truth of the Gospel and of the sustaining grace of God so that we come out right here, what I'm about to say. It should be settled in your mind. Settled. There is no negotiating this point that nothing, not even suffering, will cause me to move away from fidelity to the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gospel which saved my soul. Are you a person of that kind of conviction? Is it that important to you? Is it that settled in concrete to you that, "This is what I believe. I embrace this and I don't care what happens to me in an earthly sense. My affections in a transcendent way belong to Christ and nothing will cause me to move away and I will not be ashamed and if commitment to Christ causes me financial loss, I'll bear the financial loss. If it costs me friends, it costs me family relationships, I'm willing to pay that price because my heart belongs alone to Christ and my affections and my convictions will follow that which purchased them." We must be Christians of conviction.

Now, secondly as we follow through in what Paul says here, we say, "Okay, I'm a person of conviction." Well, it seems obvious to me when that's settled in your mind that this second point will be true, is that you must be a Christian who pursues sanctification. A Christian who pursues sanctification and here's the point, beloved, is that the conviction of which we're talking about here this morning will lead you to a practical godliness that sets you apart from the thinking of the world. It sets you apart from the way that the world talks and what the world loves and from the conduct of the world. You see, you can't have convictions like we're talking about here with Christ and then mix the world into them and share your love and affections that should belong to Christ alone and have an equal love and affection for the things of the world. That doesn't work. You can't mix oil and water. You can't mix a love with the world with a true Christianity. The writer James says that, "He who wants to be friends with the world makes himself an enemy of God." You don't want to be in that position, do you? Well, communion calls these things out and has us think about what it is that we're doing and what it is that we're living for.

Look at chapter 1, verse 13 here and we see as Paul works this out, we see how the element of true Christianity separates us away from the things of the world. Verse 13 and 14, Paul tells Timothy and he commands him, he says, you "retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. You guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you." He says, "Timothy, you set in your mind and you remember and you

defend and you keep the sound teaching, the sound words that have been given to you." And remember how he started it out, he said, "Timothy, you heard this from your mother. You heard it from your grandmother. You've heard it from me. Timothy, there is a flow that has entrusted this to you. There are generations of faithful people who have delivered this truth to you." And he says, "Timothy, you cannot shrink back from defending that. It is your responsibility. It is your call as a Christian, Timothy. It is your call as a Christian leader that you would retain that, defend it and guard it with your life, with your thoughts, with your energy, with your teaching, with your conduct."

Beloved, let me remind you that all of us here are the beneficiaries, those of us who are Christians, all of us are the beneficiaries of parents, pastors, friends, someone else, who loved the Gospel enough to be committed to it and to give it to us. Someone spoke to you. Someone called you aside and said, "Look, I'm concerned about your soul." Probably for many of you there are people who have maybe never spoken to you but they were on their knees pleading with God for the sake of your soul and asking God to save you from sin, "God, open their eyes. God, turn their heart. God, have mercy on them like you had mercy on me because, Father, I don't want to go to heaven without them." So there has been this enormous outpouring of human love upon you if you're a Christian that has been motivated by the greater love of Christ and you are on the receiving end of a great gift from Christ and from those who have entrusted it to you and who shared it with you because they loved you enough to care for your soul.

Well beloved, that has ramifications. That has consequences. That means that we recognize there is a moral responsibility. There is a moral duty for me to stop living my life for myself and to conduct myself in a way that furthers the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That is to live a life that is worthy of the shed blood, that is worthy of the nail scarred hands that secured my salvation and that is worthy of the tender human love that helped bring it to bear upon our own lives. I am mindful of those friends, men and women alike in my early college days who spoke to me as an angry, bad man and just gently, lovingly shared Christ with me. Who came to me and said, "You know, I'm praying for you." Well, you know, how can I betray that kind of selfless love that they showed to me? On a greater level, how can I betray the selfless love of Christ with infidelity and sin and indifference and living a selfish life only to please my own ends? How could I do that?

Beloved, it's the same question for you: how could you do that? How could you betray such love and not guard that which has been entrusted to you? To not have that be the priority of your life? Well, we guard it by the way that we live and Paul calls Timothy and I'll just briefly touch on these things, this affects the way that we talk. It affects our speech. Look at chapter 2, verse 14, a Christian who pursues sanctification will be mindful of speaking in a sanctified way. Paul says in verse 14, "Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers." Without going into all of the detail of what this means Paul is saying, "Timothy, you be mindful of the conversations that you engage in. Don't get engaged in silly talk. Don't get engaged in things which are just arguments about words that don't ever go anywhere." He said, "Timothy, separate yourself. Stand back. Stand apart from that because that is not worthy of a Christian to

do." So this sanctification of which we speaks affects the way that we talk. It affects the conversations that we have. We could go on and say that not only our speech but our very doctrine must be sanctified. Our doctrine, our teaching. Stated on the receiving end, what we believe must be sanctified. It's not up for grabs. It's not up for endless debate. There comes a time after study where you say, "This is what I believe and this is where I stand because I'm persuaded out of Scripture," and these things become non-negotiable.

Look at verse 15. That's what Paul calls Timothy to. He says, "You be diligent, Timothy, to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." Then notice how he goes back to the issue of speech again. He says, "But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness." He says, "Timothy, you be set apart in what you think and in what you speak." You know, Scripture says, Jesus told us, didn't he, that a man speaks out of that which fills his heart. Well, you know, I just encourage you as we're approaching the Lord's table, you think about what's come out of your mouth this past week, especially some of you young people, you know, and the foolishness and probably for some of you just the dirty things that you were happy to talk about. This is not good because, you see, for you to claim to be a Christian means, "I'm going to abandon that. I'm going to set that apart," and being 12 or 13 or 17 or 18 is not too young to set your pattern in that direction. The sooner the better. For some of us older people, you know, who are old enough to know better and have been in the church long enough to know better, we're even less without excuse for our ungodly talk, aren't we? We need to recognize that that's sinful and something that calls forth our repentance as we come to the table.

Look at verse 16 with me again. I just want you to see this. This is the word of God commanding us, "avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness." Well, you just think about what you read and what you listen to on the radio and on tv and what you're willing to engage your mind in on the internet. There is plenty of that empty ungodliness out there. Sometime, probably now if you haven't thought about this, it's time for you to say, "I will cut that and separate myself from it because I want to be a man of conviction and my conviction leads to my sanctification."

Paul goes on and calls Timothy to a sanctification of his very inner man. Look at verse 22 with me. Chapter 2, verse 22, Paul says, "Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels." All I want you to see from this, beloved, is this, I always struggle with this point in trying to make this point and so all I can do is just trust the Spirit of God to help make the connection for you in your heart because I don't have the power to do that on my own. What I want you to see is that the claim to be a Christian is intimately connected to, it's plugged into the wall with the way that you live. There shouldn't be a separation in your mind that, "Oh, this is how I am on Sunday and now I'm free Monday through Saturday to do what I want." It doesn't work that way. That's not true Christianity, do you understand that? You see, Jesus said that he's Lord of the Sabbath which we don't believe that Sunday is the Sabbath but that's not our point here. Jesus isn't simply Lord of Sunday. He's Lord of all of your life if you're a Christian. That means that all of your life

comes under the purview of his Lordship, of his authority, of responding to him in love and obedience, in recognition of that sacrifice that we're about to remember in a short period of time.

You see, there are convictions that come from this. There are convictions that flow and shape us and that's what we need to think about. We connect Scripture with the way that we live, with the way that we speak, with the way that we think. If you have never, ever, ever contemplated that, beloved, I invite you to examine yourself whether you're saved at all because when the Lord Jesus Christ comes into a life, he asserts his authority. He asserts his dominion in a way that causes us to change from the person that we used to be. It flows out of true Christianity.

Well, there is a third conviction, a third point for today that we would say. Want to be a man of conviction? A woman of conviction? Want to be a Christian who pursues sanctification? Thirdly, you and I, we must be a Christian who honors God's word. We must be a Christian who honors God's word. Paul calls Timothy to go back to those convictions that he had received in times gone by and this is central to the closing part of his letter as you'll see. Notice as we go through these last two points how central the word of God is to everything that Paul says. This is the lifeblood of true Christianity.

He says in verse 14, notice how he's calling on Timothy to refine and strengthen his convictions yet again. He says in verse 14, he says, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." He says, "Timothy, from the time that you were on your momma's knee, from the time that your grandma was cradling you in her arms, you were hearing the Scriptures," which in Timothy's youth would have simply been the Old Testament Scriptures. "Timothy, you have heard the Old Testament Scriptures that says that God is the Creator of mankind. That God created man with dignity to be his vice-regent on earth, to be the one who would have dominion over his earthly creation and that God gave laws by which men were to live but, Timothy, you know what Scripture says that man rebelled against that. That man rejected the law of God. That man sinned against God. That man turned his back on God. Turned his back on his dignity and responsibility as the creator of God and started to pursue his own lusts and his own worship of idols and all of that. And now, Timothy, you know from the Scriptures that mankind has been ruined. That insanity is in their hearts all of their days. That the heart is deceitful above all else. And Timothy, you realize the guilt of man against this holy Creator based on what you know from the Scriptures." He says, "You know that, Timothy."

Look with verse 15 with me again here this morning. He says, "Knowing that, Timothy, you remember and you continue in that which leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, that those Scriptures told you that God in his grace, God in furtherance of his eternal purpose sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. Sent his Son to be the sacrifice through which guilty men could be reconciled to God. If they would believe in Christ and receive him and rest in him, they could be reconciled to God. Timothy, you

remember these things. These are your convictions. These are the things that I need you to call upon to be faithful to." Why is he making this point? It's because the way Timothy responds to that was going to determine the outcome of the rest of his life. When you think rightly about salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, it determines the way that you live.

Going further, what you think about Scripture, those two things are inseparable really. What we think about Christ and what we think about the written word of God are inseparable. Look at what Paul says in verse 16, he says, "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." As part of our conviction, as part of our commitment to Christ, we honor the word of God. We honor it as that which was breathed out by God and delivered to us without error. That when you hold the Bible in your hand, when you hold the Bible in your hand, even in English in a good English translation, you are holding the very word of God. You have in your hand in the written word of God what the mind of Christ is. You have in your hand the way that God thinks and what God calls us to and how it is that we can be reconciled to him. We have to honor that. If that is true, and it is, then Paul says to Timothy, "You remember this word." For us today, we remember this word. We don't care who mocks it. We don't care who criticizes it. This is our stand. Here we stand. We can do nothing else. God help us, Amen. To paraphrase Martin Luther.

That means that we respect this word. It means that we study it. It means that we defend it. It means that we obey it from its place of centrality. We understand that it is sufficient for all that we need. That no matter where you're at in life and what your struggles may be, the answers are found in the word of God. It makes the man of God adequate, equipped for every good work. So we're just so convinced of the boundless, infinite value of the word of God that we honor it in our lives and we honor it in our church and we understand that when we study the word of God in the power of the Spirit of God from a sanctified life, that Christ will bless that and that's his means of perpetuating the work that he is doing. I want to be a part of that work, don't you? I want to be right in the middle of the flow of that. I want to be a part of that and not come to the end of my life, not come to the end like Paul did and look back and say, "Ah-ha! I squandered it! I squandered it! I didn't honor the word. I didn't take it seriously. I didn't care about Christ and it was reflected in the way that I spoke and the way that I lived and my inner man. It was corrupt and I was just content to go along like that and now it's too late and I can't do anything about it. I can't get those 60 or 70 years back." Beloved, you don't want to be in that position when you come to the end. The way that you find and the way that you avoid that awful outcome is to refresh and renew your convictions about Christ and his word today.

Well, one final thing here before we come to the Lord's table, fourthly we would say that you live your convictions over time. You live them over time. Now, I like to say this to Christians because it's easy to get discouraged in the shortcomings and the sins of the particular day that perhaps are on your mind as you come here today. It's important for us to realize that we live out these convictions over time. That there will be times when it

seems like we're flourishing and there will be times where we fall short and you get discouraged and you get kind of scuffed up over the fact that you fell short. Sometimes you see abundant fruit in your life. Sometimes the tree seems kind of barren. Well, here's what I want you to see from God's word is that Scripture anticipates that, that we're not going to be on this perpetual emotional high that is never unbroken. That we live in a fallen world and we live in fallen flesh and that there is going to be some ups and downs as we go along. We don't ride with every up and down. What we're talking about with these anchored convictions is that they provide a stability and a maturity that sustains you. It sustains you through the ups and downs and there is a current that is always flowing in the direction of sanctification toward Christ despite whatever the daily vicissitudes may have been.

Look at 2 Timothy 4:1-2 as Paul addresses Timothy, particularly in how he is to handle his ministry. He says, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God," chapter 4, verse 1. He says, "I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." Notice what he's doing here, he's saying, "Timothy, you make it your pattern to be faithful to the word of God when times are up and when times are down, with patience and instruction continuing on." Well, Timothy is doing this as he ministers to the people of God and so this passage gives us an insight to the fact that there are going to be times where it seems really exciting maybe and there are times where it's going to be kind of dull. There are going to be times where we're engaged and times where we're weak. Strong and weak and through it all, you have this sense in your mind that, "My convictions are anchored over time and I'm taking the long view." If you have fallen and you struggled in this past week, beloved, just pick yourself up, confess your sin to Christ and trust in the fact that his eternal purpose is still at work in your heart. He shed his blood to cover all of your sins, not just the ones that you've forgotten about. The ones that are freshest on your mind perhaps are the ones that you can most draw upon and take comfort in the shed blood of Christ. He had mercy on a sinner like you. He loved you to the point of shedding blood so that your sins could be wiped away and that you could be made white as snow. What a gracious God. What a gracious Savior. No wonder this song that we sang at the start says, "Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

So we anchor our life in that conviction and we continue on in that no matter what happens around us. Look at verse 3 and now we kind of think about it in terms of what goes on outside the walls of the church. Paul tells Timothy, "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths." Paul goes on and sums it up for Timothy and by extension for us as well in verse 5. He says, "But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."

Beloved, what is it that will sustain you in suffering? What is it that will give you courage on the brink of a new life? What is it that picks you up and lets you go on another day in

the midst of sorrow and enduring loss? What gives a man like my friend in the Middle East the courage to stand for Christ when it's all a threat to him? Ultimately it comes down to the fact that we have embraced the Lord Jesus Christ and we have taken the next step and shaped convictions around that. That we will be strong in these convictions. That we will pursue a sanctified life. That we will honor and trust in God's word and that we will do that in the long haul. That it's settled in our mind that there is nothing that will ever happen in the future that will shake me from where I'm at right now, by which I mean it is not negotiable for me to abandon my faith and trust in Christ or to abandon my faith in God's word. That is out of the question.

I know we're not used to thinking about life in those absolute terms but, beloved, that is where you find the strength to live the Christian life and I ask you to look at the table for a moment knowing what it represents. On the one side the bread which represents the body of Christ broken for you. On the other side the cup representing his blood which was shed for you. In accordance with an eternal purpose of God to bring you as part of the church, that your sins would be cleansed and that you would be reconciled to God and that you would share an eternity of blessedness with him forever. That's the truth. That's reality and when you think of what the conviction, what the commitment of our Lord Jesus Christ was as he carried his own cross to Calvary where he would be executed for you and me and you appreciate the fact that one step with his bloodied body after another he marched relentlessly to Golgotha in order to fulfill that which his Father sent him to do. Beloved, all that we can do is rise in like manner and say, "Whatever my failings and shortcomings may be, I will rise to follow after conviction like that, conviction which led to the salvation of my soul." That's what we remember here at communion, the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ and now we respond with conviction and in this moment that is now to come to this table where he said, "Do this in remembrance of me."

Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, it's a joy to remember and to honor this Christ who loved us and gave himself up for us, the marvel of Jesus, the marvel of our sins forgiven, the wonder, the appreciation with which we bow before you here this morning. Father, we understand that our lives fall short, that even as Christians we sin and fall short of the glory of God. We ask you to forgive us of our sins as we approach this table and yet as we approach this table, Father, for all of our imperfections and all of our sinfulness that still remains within us, we ask you to look at our hearts and say this is our conviction. This is what we want. This is what we aspire after. This is what we're committed to. And help us, Father, having confessed our sins and examined our hearts, help us now to receive this gift, this way that you have instituted for us to remember you.