

The Seventh Sermon, March 15, 1522

Saturday before Reminiscere

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Yesterday we heard about the use of this holy and blessed sacrament and saw who are worthy to receive it, namely, those in whom there is the fear of death, who have timid and despairing consciences and live in fear of hell. All such come prepared to partake of this food for the strengthening of their weak faith and the comforting of their conscience. This is the true use and practice of this sacrament, and whoever does not find himself in this state, let him refrain from coming until God also takes hold of him and draws him through his Word.

We shall now speak of the fruit of this sacrament, which is love; that is, that we should treat our neighbor as God has treated us. Now we have received from God nothing but love and favor, for Christ has pledged and given us his righteousness and everything he has; he has poured out upon us all his treasures, which no man can measure and no angel can understand or fathom, for God is a glowing furnace of love, reaching even from the earth to the heavens.

Love, I say, is a fruit of this sacrament. But this I do not yet perceive among you here in Wittenberg, even though you have had much preaching and, after all, you ought to have carried this out in practice. This is the chief thing, which is the only business of a Christian man. But nobody wants to be in this, though you want to practice all sorts of unnecessary things, which are of no account. If you do not want to show yourselves Christians by your love, then leave the other things undone, too, for St. Paul says in I Cor. 13 [I Corinthians 13:1], ***“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.”*** This is a terrible saying of Paul. ***“And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”*** [I Corinthians 13:2–3]. Not yet have you come so far as this, though you have received great and rich gifts from God, the highest of which is a knowledge of the Scriptures.

It is true, you have the true gospel and the pure Word of God, but no one as yet has given his goods to the poor, no one has yet been burned, and even these things would be nothing without love. You are willing to take all of God’s goods in the sacrament, but you are not willing to pour them out again in love. Nobody extends a helping hand to another, nobody seriously considers the other person, but everyone looks out for himself and his own gain, insists on his own way, and lets everything else go hang. If anybody is helped, well and good; but nobody looks after the poor to see how you might be able to help them. This is a pity. You have heard many sermons about it and all my books are full of it and have this one purpose, to urge you to faith and love.

And if you will not love one another, God will send a great plague upon you; let this be a warning to you, for God will not have his Word revealed and preached in vain. You are tempting God too far, my friends; for if in times past someone had preached the Word to our forefathers, they would perhaps have acted differently. Or if it were preached even now to many poor children in the cloisters, they would receive it more joyfully than you. You are not heeding it at all and you are playing around with all kinds of tomfoolery which does not amount to anything.

I commend you to God.