

Another Look at Communion

Communion Meditation

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Bible Verse: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34
Preached on: Sunday, February 25, 2024

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Well, you have joined us on a Communion Sunday. which we try to make an earnest time of reflection and worship unto our Lord, and to prepare our hearts for the taking of Communion later in the service, I want to go back to a passage we considered several years ago in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, which is rather the definitive text on Communion in Scripture. And I'm going to read the entire text, 1 Corinthians 11 beginning in verse 17 through verse 34, and in honor of God's word this morning and in recognition of how the future service is going to go, I'd ask you to stand with me as we read this portion of Scripture and may God bless what lies ahead in the hour to come greatly to his glory. 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verse 17,

17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. 23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 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. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so 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. 30 That 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. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another---34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home---so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Please be seated.

It is a joy always to come to the Lord's Table at our church. We try to make an effort to always have Communion as an earnest time of instruction and of preparation for the taking of the elements, and my friends, I would corporately, as a church, want you to think through the challenge that that presents to do that. There are a lot of opposing forces in the world and in the church that would make that possible, and even in our own hearts. If you think about it, and think about the different religious backgrounds that we come from that bring us here today. Some of you have come from a Catholic background where the superstitious blasphemy of the Mass was what was ingrained in your mind at the start that could hinder a proper understanding and approach to the Communion Table. Others have come where Communion was practiced in a rote, weekly fashion without any instruction, without any contemplation, without any musical preparation of your heart and so you just came to learn to take it in a rote way as if it's just one more thing to do on a Sunday without any special sense of the significance of it. Others, you know, perhaps coming from a seeker-friendly environment have seen Communion practiced perhaps in a flippant way. I know during COVID I read accounts of churches that were encouraging people to take the elements at home, you know, eat, use birthday cake as the bread and take a Diet Coke for the cup, and they were actually encouraging people to talk about the creative ways that they had used different elements to celebrate, so-called celebrate Communion as they practiced it remotely. And if you just contemplate those things and those ranges, you realize that there's a lot of difficulty in trying to treat this earnestly, and the longer that I pastor here at Truth Community Church, the more I'm aware, I think, of the underlying forces that are in people's hearts as they come, unexamined presuppositions, unexamined practices that bring an overlay that kind of cloud and obscure the significance of biblical teaching in many different ways.

And so today what I want to do is just take another look at this passage here in 1 Corinthians to help us understand Communion, approach it and take it in an appropriate way, and what you're going to find in this text is really a magnificent text, all of Scripture is magnificent because all of Scripture is inspired by God, but this is a magnificent text to help us see the sobriety and the earnest joy that should be engaged in our hearts as we come to Communion, as we consider taking those elements out of the trays and joining with the people of God as the elements are taken. This text does a marvelous job of helping us see something of the fullness that Communion involves and none of the other practices or ways of practices that I mentioned would ever bring this to your heart with any sort of power like Scripture does. And so I urge you and I plead with you to hear me today, even if you've heard this text, you feel like you're familiar with this text, "This is all familiar ground, Pastor," let's set even those kinds of prejudices aside as we come to

the Table because what you're going to find is that there are three aspects of Communion that are utterly pervasive in examining our lives and giving us things to think about as we contemplate our walk with God in a broader sense than just partaking of the elements. There's a horizontal element to a proper approach to Communion as we contemplate our interactions and our place within the body of Christ. There is a vertical dimension to the practice of Communion as we contemplate the person and work of our Lord in past, present, and future dimensions. And there's certainly an inward aspect to a proper approach to Communion as we examine ourselves and examine our lives in light of all of these things.

Paul lays all of this out and our desire this morning is not to lay heavy burdens on anyone's heart or conscience, but simply to set forth what Scripture sets forth and for us as individuals and as a corporate body to respond in an appropriate way. Communion is really a plumb line. It is a marker. It is a signpost that points to many different aspects of spiritual life, not only individually, but corporately as well. And we need to not only think about Communion in an individual sense, but also as it pertains to the corporate dimension and how we have integrated or not integrated ourselves into the corporate body. And so, before we do that, let me just give you a little bit of the historical background from the gospels.

Turn to Matthew chapter 26 just to remind ourselves of the occasion on which our Lord instituted the ordinance of Communion. Christ, you will remember, initiated the Lord's Supper with the disciples during a Passover meal just prior to his crucifixion, and he took that familiar Passover meal and transformed it, transfigured it into a symbol of the new covenant. In Matthew chapter 26, verse 26, as they were gathered around the Table, we read this in verse 26, Matthew 26, verse 26, so that you can follow along with me. "Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.'" And so Christ takes these simple elements and say, "These represent something significant about me. This represents my body that will soon be offered on the cross for your sins. The cup represents my blood that will be poured out for the forgiveness of sin," because Scripture says without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin. And so Christ instituted it there at the end of his earthly life as a kind of a transition point, you might say, from his earthly ministry into what the church would practice in the days to come. And beloved, beloved, Communion was important to the early church. It's important in Scripture. Acts chapter 2 verse 42 says that the early church "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." Breaking of bread referring to the practice of Communion.

And so here we are and elsewhere in the book of Acts it speaks about how on the first day they gathered in order to break bread with one another, and so today we have a really remarkable privilege to join once again into the biblical pattern, the biblical tradition that Christ established in the early church practice that's been handed down through the ages

through the hands of faithful men to us, and so we have something here established 2,000 years ago by Christ himself to be done in honor and in remembrance of him. That alone should give us a sense of holiness and respect and reverence for the celebration of Communion. In a somewhat lesser way, we remember that through the ages, the church has passed this down from one generation to the next, and over the course of two millennia, we now have this and realizing that in our practice, we are participating in the further transmission of that to a future generation, just the chronology and the source and the origin of it gives us a sense of respect before we even get to what the biblical text is teaching us here about Communion. And so the origin and the source and the centrality of the glory of Christ in this just rises before us and enraptures our soul and humbles our hearts as we realize the privilege that is ours to even be in attendance at a Communion service. let alone actually participating, let alone actually being a Christian, just in a preliminary way to realize that we have the privilege of gathering together under the word of God in the comparative peace of the society in which we live to partake of something like this. This is a privilege not to be taken for granted and so we approach it with that spirit of reverence and gratitude to our Lord.

Now, let's look quickly at three primary principles that we should honor when we come to the Lord's Table that are right here on the surface of the text that we are considering. What should we do, what should we contemplate, what should we think about as we come to the Communion Table, and perhaps in a better way stated, what is it that the Lord has instituted that his people would honor and respect and further by their practice of Communion? Well, first of all, we are responsible to protect church unity. We are responsible to protect church unity. This is the horizontal aspect of the practice of Communion, that Communion is practiced not in private at home in the privacy of your own bedroom or something like that, Communion is a corporate practice. Communion is something that we do when we gather together, not that we practice in isolation. And there's this horizontal aspect there, a human relationship aspect within the body of Christ that we contemplate when we come to Communion. And we see this from 1 Corinthians in a negative sort of way because the Corinthians had been practicing Communion with selfish strife and selfish motives and just an abominable lack of love. As Paul corrects them, we see that beginning in verse 17, let's go back to the text. Notice that Paul is rebuking them and even in that, beloved, we see something that's contrary to the spirit of our age and what many people even want from a church. A lot of people don't want accountability. They don't want rebuke. They just want a church to be what they want it to be without anything that would make them uncomfortable. Well, that's contrary to the way that we're instructed to preach the word in 2 Corinthians 4, rebuke with all patience and instruction, and here the Apostle Paul self-consciously and openly rebukes them for the sinful way that they were practicing Communion.

Look at verse 17 with me. He says in verse 17, "But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse." He says it would be better if you weren't practicing Communion if you're going to practice it like the way you have been doing, you make things worse with your practice of Communion, he says to the Corinthian church. Verse 18, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it

in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat," not doing it to honor Christ and they have not honored Christ in what they were doing, and he goes and shows why that's true, verse 21, "For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What!" He's shocked. He's shocked. Here is the Apostle Paul, and you see this in other aspects of his letters as well, shocked by the practice of the churches that he founded or that he knew of and you can see his dismay at what had developed in the carnality of the people to whom he was writing. Verse 22, he says, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not."

Paul is rebuking them for their practice of Communion. There were divisions among them, and he spoke about that earlier in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, didn't he, when he talked about how some of you say, "I'm of Paul, I'm of Apollos, I'm of Christ," and they're just involved in following men, and they're just such divisions that were in the church, and he addressed it right at the very beginning. He's picking up on that theme now, you know, 11 chapters later and what he says is that the church had, he's describing a practice where the church had a meal in association with the celebration of Communion. And without getting into all of the details which aren't necessary for our purpose here this morning, wealthy men would eat their supper before Communion, while the less fortunate, the poor, part of the same church were going hungry and the wealthy were not sharing with those in need. They just had their plate in front of them and gobbled it up while others looked on with their tummies growling, you could say, and seeing how people within the same church were content to keep them on the outside and not share in their time of need. Some were becoming intoxicated in the midst of it. And beloved, what I want you to see from the from the divisions that were described in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, the practice that is described here in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, everything in that church, sadly, was repudiating the spirit of unity that the Lord's Table is designed to promote. They were humiliating others in the church in their gathering and standing apart from one another, not sharing in life together, not sharing in need from abundance to need so that everyone's need is met.

Why is that so wrong? It's not, there's a horizontal dimension to it, but remember that we're gathering together in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ when we come together as the people of God, and particularly in a special way when we come together at the Communion Table. So why is that so wrong? What does that say to us? Well, listen to me carefully, beloved: the church exists because the Lord Jesus Christ selflessly and lovingly laid down his life for everyone who would ever believe in him. He gave his life for the entire church to make it one body in him. Ephesians chapter 4, verse 3 says, "Be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit." The unity is not a matter of indifference. It's something that is central to a true church. It's central to the heart of true Christians to recognize the unity that flows from Christ, to protect that, to honor it, and to be eager to maintain it and to contribute to it. Church unity is paramount to a proper practice of Communion, this horizontal dimension of it. And so to inject that kind of selfishness at the Table where I'll gobble up what I've got and leave you out from under it, to divide according to the

teachings of men, to undermine church unity with complaints and accusations and things of that nature, all are contrary to the horizontal spirit of Communion that the Lord commands and which Scripture teaches us to maintain and eagerly seek.

Disunity at the Table is a deplorable contradiction of the reason the Table even exists, beloved. We have one Lord, one faith, one baptism. We have one common salvation. There is one way to reconciliation to God, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ, and everything about a local church should reflect that kind of oneness, unity, and commonness of purpose. And so for those who would come to the Table, there's a conscious desire, you could say in a good sense, in what I'm about to say, there's a conscious zeal, a conscious jealousy that says the unity of the body must be preserved and that is a priority to me, the one who comes to Communion says. And so how does that work out? You check your life. You check your life, you check your words for cracks in the harmony. You know, have you been standing apart from the church of God? Have you been physically able and yet unwilling to, for whatever reason, to not participating in the ongoing life of the church, standing apart from it? That's a violation of unity, particularly for church members who have pledged their unity to the church. Perhaps your words have been harsh, critical, divisive. Perhaps your ears have listened to harsh, divisive, critical things without rebuking the one who's bringing them to you.

You see, beloved, unity is precious and purposeful in the sight of God. Unity is a purpose of Christ for his people. It is not an optional accessory like it's some kind of handbag that a woman carries as an optional accessory to make herself look good or which she can dispense of as she wishes. Unity is central to the purpose of the church, and at Communion we come and we renew our commitment to unity, we check our lives, we check our eyes, our lips, our ears for that which perhaps has allowed cracks, and we come with a repentant spirit if we've been guilty of that. I do worry, I do worry about those who just consciously, deliberately stand apart from the church, maybe come but just make it sure that they're standing at a distance from the people of God. That's not consistent with true unity. True unity comes and gives of yourself freely to the body of Christ, seeking to add to the body of Christ, contribute to it, and not simply come in a selfish spiritual way that says, I'll eat of the spiritual food that I can get from the pulpit, but I'm not going to contribute anything in return. That's not true Christianity. That's not the horizontal love and unity that the blessed Lord of our lives and of our souls died to give himself to. And so, beloved, one of the things that you do as you come to the Communion Table is that you repent of selfishness as you approach Communion. You see, the attitude that we should have corporately and individually as we come, we practice Communion in unity or we don't take it at all. We don't take Communion in isolation from the body of Christ, in other words. This is very, very important and is shown by the way that Paul corrects the Corinthians. You've got to be unified as you come to the Table and put away this selfishness that you have practiced in the past, he says to them.

So church unity, horizontal aspect to the proper practice of Communion. Secondly, we remember Christ. We remember Christ and, you know, I hope that as we've talked about the glory of Christ in recent weeks in our beginning of the exposition of the book of Revelation, I trust, beloved, that you never get tired of hearing about Christ, that you

never get tired or think that you've mastered Christ or, you know, you've heard everything that there is to be said about it and, you know, can we move on to something else? No, we come back to Christ again and again and that's part of the genius of the design of Christ in establishing the Lord's Table is that it puts periodic markers in our path to remember him clearly, distinctly, uniquely with a sense of exclusive devotion that makes it unlike anything else. We remember Christ in a vertical way. You know, we do this corporately, we're remembering him corporately, but also you're remembering him individually in your heart as we come to Communion here this morning.

And the simplicity, the simplicity of Communion conveys several deep truths, and I just want to say a word about it. It's hard to imagine a more simple, humble remembrance set before us than a little bit of bread, a little cup, and yet the symbolism and the truth that it communicates is just so greatly profound. And beloved, let that be a marker in your mind as you think about what you're looking for in a church and what you want out of spiritual life and all of that. There is a simplicity and a purity to devotion to Christ that is contradictory to the spirit of the age in which we live and always seeking for something new. We come back to this simplicity with great gratitude just for the plainness of what it teaches us. And the simplicity of Communion conveys several deep truths to us. Each sub-point that I'm about to give you here could be and has been the subject of an entire message or more, but we're going to think about Christ and remember Christ in three distinct ways here. These are sub-points of point number two. We're going to look at his past work, his present work, and his future work. Communion communicates all of those things to us, and we see it in the text in front of us.

So as we remember Christ at Communion, first of all, we remember his past work for us, and the bread and the cup are symbols by which we remember the atoning death of Christ for sinners on the cross. The bread and the cup remind us of the sacrificial self-giving that Christ did at the cross of Calvary some 2,000 years ago. Look at verse 23 with me. Paul says, "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" Verse 25, "In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" Now two things that I just want to point out by way of an overview. Notice that Communion is a command to Christians to be practiced. Jesus said, "Do this." We are commanded to be at the Communion Table whenever we are bodily able and the church gathers to practice Communion. There is a responsibility on Christians to be present when Communion is practiced. This is a direct command from the Lord so it's good for you to be here in order to celebrate it, and that's why we emphasize it. This is a command of Christ and if we're going to call Jesus Lord, Lord, Lord, we don't want to be in a position of him asking, "Why do you not do what I say?" And so we do this in obedience to our Lord.

Now notice also that he says twice at the end of verse 24 and at the end of verse 25, "Do this in remembrance of me." So we remember, we look back and recall things to our mind about Christ as we practice Communion, we look back and we remember what he has done for us. And what has he done? What does the cup and the bread represent?

Well, Communion is a visual way to recall the past work of Christ on our behalf, and beloved, don't let the familiarity of what I'm saying here in these moments cause you to despise the significance of what's being said, don't let familiarity breed contempt but affection in your heart. Jesus Christ literally shed his literal blood, in a literal crucifixion, on a literal cross to inaugurate the new covenant as prophesied in Jeremiah 31. One way to think about this, I've mentioned this a time or two in the past, that the literal aspect of this is that as Christ was hanging on the cross, he was in a real human body on a real wooden instrument of execution. Someone could have literally gone up and pinched his flesh on that day. Someone literally could have gone up to the cross and rubbed their hand against the cross and gotten splinters in their hand from the wood in it. That's how real this was. We're not talking about some kind of allegory. This is not something spiritual. This was a real atonement, by a real person, in real time, in real flesh, on a real cross that took place and Communion is a tangible reminder of that.

And beloved, understand and remember that unless Christ had done that, we all would have been miserably lost. We would have no hope whatsoever. It is only in that death of Christ that anyone can find forgiveness of their sins and access and reconciliation to God. Jesus said, "I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me, that you are saved by grace through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God, not as a result of works, lest anyone should boast." 1 John 1:7 says the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin. The blood pouring out of literal wounds when literal nails were jammed into his hand, or more likely his wrist, as blood gushed out from him, the blood necessary for the forgiveness of sins was being spilled on that cross just outside the city of Jerusalem.

Now, beloved, I just pray to God that there is a collective sense of awe and reverence that comes over our minds as we remember these things. The sinless Son of God voluntarily laying down his life to wash away our countless iniquities, trespasses, and sins against him, doing it voluntarily in love for his people under no compulsion whatsoever, except the motivations that he found in his own perfect love and grace for his people. That's what we remember here. We remember a sacrifice that no one else could have offered for us. We remember a sacrifice that we could not begin to have offered on our own behalf. We remember a sacrifice of which we were not worthy and still are not worthy. We are on the receiving end of undeserved favor. We are the privileged recipients of divine grace, and we remember that at the Communion Table.

We look at his past death so that we don't forget. Part of the effect of that in our lives is it puts our present agitations, the present concerns, the things we worry about that appertain to this present life, present relationships and all of that. It puts those things in perspective. We look at the Communion Table, we hold those elements in our hand, and we do what Christ commanded us. We remember him as we do that. We remember him. We recall these wonderful truths revealed to us in Scripture, and we have a sense of gratitude that says, "This is more important than anything else in my life, that Christ loved me and gave himself up for me." And everything else, everything else bows before him in importance and so we look to that past death so that we won't forget. We remember it, we practice it periodically. Now obviously, day to day, week to week, we

should be remembering him in our own private reading of Scripture, our private prayers, offering thanks for his sacrifice for us, but Communion's a time of elevated concentration for the corporate people of God, and as we sit side by side with one another, there's a metaphorical sense corporately, don't do this literally, but metaphorically we nudge each other and say, "Do you remember too? I remember. Do you remember?" And we hold each other accountable to remember these things as we gather together and have them shape our lives and our thoughts and our devotion and our worship.

Christ's past work for us, part of how we remember Christ. Secondly, we remember Christ's present work for us. We remember Christ's present work for us. There is a present aspect to remembering Christ at Communion. You see this in verse 26 when the Apostle Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." And you see the ongoing aspect of it, "For as often as you do this." There's a present, ongoing, repetitive nature to it. And I don't want to spend, for the sake of time and so that we're not rushed as we go through Communion, don't want to spend a whole lot of time here, but Communion reminds us of the ongoing reality of our faith in Christ. Communion reminds us that Christ began a work in us and he is continuing it in us even as we gather today; there is an ongoing continuing, keeping, protecting, preserving work of Christ that guarantees that his people will arrive safely to the destination of heaven in the end.

It's not just that he died in the past and then left us to our own devices, he is presently keeping us so that we never fall away. And those of you that grew up, again, just coming to traditions and reminding of traditions, where you were taught and frightened by the prospect that you could lose your salvation, that there's some ill-defined sense where you could sin your way out of salvation and your salvation could be reversed and God would take it away, there's one word to describe that, and it's false religion. You say, "That's two words." Well, it's okay. It's hard to count this early in the morning. But it's false to everything that the New Testament teaches about the loyal love of God, the once-for-all nature of the sacrifice of Christ, the irreversible nature of regeneration, and it has to overlook such plain language in Scripture like Philippians 1:6 where the Apostle Paul says, "I'm sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Christ Jesus." He began the work, he's continuing it, he will complete it.

Communion reminds us of that and beloved, if you are in Christ, if you are in Christ today, it means that you have been irreversibly removed from the realm of Adam and placed into the realm of Christ. You have been irreversibly forgiven of all of your sins. Irreversibly, the righteousness of Christ has been imputed to you. Irreversibly, everything that is true about the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, you join in that through grace in the union of Christ. So that as Christ died to sin, so have you died. As Christ was raised from the dead to new life, so you have been raised. So as Christ is now exalted in heaven, so you are positionally there and one day will enter into it. And you can never be separated from the love of Christ. That's exactly what Romans 8:38 and 39 says, verses 35 through 39. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? There's this present dimension. We are in Christ now as Christians, and we are safe. We are secure. Our ultimate salvation is absolutely guaranteed. God will not reverse what grace he has shown

to us. And we remember that present work and as we receive Communion by faith, we remember our faith in the Lord, and with great gratitude, we remember that he is keeping us, and if you've come after a bad spiritual week, maybe fearful, maybe agitated, maybe angry, maybe lustful, you name it, and you're here with a repentant, broken, contrite heart over those things, grateful to remember Christ, take comfort in the fact that the love of Christ is something that he doesn't give and take away. His love is not like the love of humans. He sets his love on you and it stays there. We remember that at Communion as we share in the person of Christ and his work.

So the past work of Christ, we remember that, the present work of Christ, we remember that, and there's even a future work of Christ that we remember that I read in verse 26, but look at it again with me. Christ has us looking back to remember him, and yet we're also simultaneously looking forward as well, seeing the fullness of the salvation that he has given to us. Look at it there in verse 26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Until he comes. Communion has a self-conscious element built into it in which we are looking forward to the return of Christ. It reminds us that the fullness of our salvation is future. We are in perfect possession of a perfect salvation now as we sit here, and yet there is more to come. Christ is going to return. Christ is going to reign. We are going to be in the eternal state with him. We will see him face to face. We will participate in unspeakably glorious worship, "Holy, holy, holy," as the angels and the 24 elders join and lead us in worship around the throne. We will somehow cast crowns at his feet. We will see him face to face. We will be made like him because we will see him as he is, 1 John 3, verse 2. "Until he comes" reminds us that this world is passing. It's temporary. This life is temporary. It's transient. Everything that we see is going to be gone one day for those of us in Christ, replaced by a new heaven and a new earth and a new reality where we're glorified and perfection and sin and Satan and self are banished. O God, bring that day. The sooner the better.

Well, at Communion, we remember that Christ is coming. We remember the blessed promise of our Lord, John 14:3, "I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am there you may be also." Isn't that marvelous, wonderful, glorious? Isn't that cool water on a weary, thirsty soul, that our Lord remembered us in the past, he's working in us now, he's got a plan in the future? And it is his desire, beloved, it is his desire that we be with him where he is. He's preparing a place for us. As he prayed in John 17, I believe it's verse 24, on the night of his crucifixion, or prior to his crucifixion, he prayed to the Father, "Father, I desire that they be with me in your presence," I'm paraphrasing, "so that they may see my glory." It is the design, the purpose of Christ, that you be with him in heaven and that you see his unveiled glory that Peter and others saw for just a glimpse at the transfiguration. They were overwhelmed by it. The Apostle Paul saw his glory on the road to Damascus. It threw him at his feet. Paul was in the third heaven, saw things that men are not permitted to speak. Well, beloved, all of that gives us the most tiny taste of what lies ahead in the future work of Christ for us. Unspeakable glory, unspeakable grace, unspeakable worship, and we are going to have the privilege of being there and belonging there because our Lord loved us and brought us to himself.

Now listen, all of that is rightly brought to mind when we come to the Communion Table. I hope that you see why we as a church try to take this seriously. Can you imagine being in a so-called place of worship where Communion is treated as some kind of rote add-on? We have a rote add-on to things before the pastor gets up and starts talking about his family life and his golf game. What a travesty! What a travesty to treat it lightly! No, we remember the atonement. We remember the perseverance of the saints guaranteed to us by the indwelling Holy Spirit. We remember the future glory of Christ and what he is going to bring us into when we come to the Table. We remember Christ. Of course we take it seriously. Of course this is a matter of earnest worship. Of course it is. How could it be anything else when Communion invokes all those things? That's why Communion is a joyful, hopeful remembrance.

So, we remember, we protect church unity, point number one. Point number two, we remember Christ and his past, present, and future work for us at Communion. Thirdly, so there's the horizontal aspect, the vertical aspect before Christ, thirdly, there's an inward aspect to a proper practice of Communion. Point number three, we examine ourselves earnestly. We examine ourselves earnestly. In light of everything that we've seen here today from the word of God, as we've remembered our Lord, and I trust that the Spirit has used what we've said, what we've considered together here today, to draw us near to Christ, to convict us where that's necessary, but in light of the elevated importance of Communion, appointed by Christ himself, communicated to us over the centuries at the hands of faithful men, we examine ourselves earnestly by which I mean this, we do not treat the Communion Table lightly. We do not treat the work of Christ, the person of Christ, lightly. We do not treat the unity of his church lightly.

Look at verses 27 through 32 with me here in 1 Corinthians 11. "Whoever, therefore," notice that word therefore. In light of what Paul has said about the person and work of Christ, in light of what he said about church unity, "Whoever, therefore," what he's saying now in verse 27 is directly connected to the prior 10 verses. "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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." And so eat of the bread. So eat, meaning having examined himself in light of these principles of unity and the person and work of Christ, having done that, having examined yourself, now you can eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Do it following these things, not apart from them. Verse 29, "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." He's saying, "Look at the congregation around you. Look at your practice of Communion. Look at the bodily health that some of you are lacking. Look at the fact that some in the midst have died. And understand that there's a direct correlation between the way you have profaned the Lord's Table with the results that you see in life about you." Verse 31, "if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

Beloved, let me say this. I don't want to overstate it. I don't want to be too dramatic here but I think in light of the text that I just read, this is certainly justified. We want to take

Communion seriously, here's how seriously we take it. You literally take your life into your hands when you take the Communion elements. You literally take your life into your hands at Communion. Paul says that the Lord disciplined insincere Christians with sickness and even with death for their irreverence at the Table. You think to Acts chapter 5, Ananias and Sapphira, you know, they came, they lied to the apostles about the gift that they were giving. They both died on the spot. You say, "Well," and we look for ways to explain that away in the careless, irreverent spirit of the age in which we live, both in society and within the church. Understand that Scripture is not having any of that. Scripture is saying this is a matter of sobriety and earnest attention that it must take for us to participate. I'm going to talk about how to think through these things all in just a moment here, but let's close the text.

Paul closes with an appeal to correct the problem at Corinth in verse 33. He says, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another--if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home---so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come." Paul says, "It's time to fix this. It's time for you to make changes," he says to the church at Corinth, "in your practice of Communion." And with his apostolic authority, he's giving them the word of Christ directly to the church, that the practice of Communion is to be done with a sense of holy reverence, not just in Corinth, but everywhere that people would gather in the name of Christ and presume to practice the Lord's Table in their midst.

Beloved, two things. Communion is a wonderful Christ-centered event that we are greatly privileged to take part of. It's a time where we remember our Lord in a unique way. We remember that he loved us, that he loves us, that he will love us in ways that will be manifested even more in the future. We remember the spiritual unity that is at the heart of being a part of the body of Christ. We remember that he suffered for us. We're strengthened in the knowledge of his return. This is, you know, this is a highlight in church life, not a passing thing to hurry up and get through. So it's a wonderful thing, and those of you, my brothers and sisters in Christ, as we share in this, it's a joy and a privilege for me as a pastor to share in this together with you, as we share in the love of Christ and in love for one another. Jesus said to do this, and so we gather in obedience, and we as a church see the neglect of Communion, we see an irreverent approach to Communion as being a great sin against our crucified Lord.

And so we've tried to guard ourselves against that sin here this morning, but before we distribute the elements, and the men are going to come soon, before we distribute the elements, let me just say a word or two to help you in the wonderful remembrance that we're about to have, and I want to give a little bit of an extended caution that you will have the Spirit of God sort out in your life as I say these things. Communion is a time for the glory of Christ, not for appearances before men. I realize that there's a certain social pressure that you feel when you're sitting next to someone and the trays are being passed, and if you don't take it, you're going to get an awkward look, perhaps. We've got to stop thinking and worrying about that. This is for the glory of Christ, not for maintaining appearances before men. And Communion is not for spiritually careless people. It's not for people that are playing the part of a hypocrite. And so let me just say some things in

light of the three points, remembering church unity, remembering Christ, remembering our self-examination, let me just say these things that I offer to you in love with a spirit of wanting to help you, protect you, and yet also with a more surpassing desire to place a boundary around the Table so that it is treated with the respect and reverence that it deserves and that Christ deserves. My friends, if, and I know that we have some visitors with us today, we always do and we're glad you're with us. Visitors are welcome to take of the Table with us, but not just as a matter of entitlement, and I say this to those especially within our body even more. My friends, if your life pattern for a number of weeks or even months has been an indifferent and unrepentant avoidance of the people of God, you need to let these elements pass. You need to come to grips with church unity and your role in the body of Christ before you rush into the presence of Christ to take of the elements that are designed to promote church unity. And if you have spoken or given ear to things that are divisive, you should heed that caution as well.

Secondly, if your life pattern for weeks or months has been indifference to Christ, hostility to Christ, resentment against Christ for whatever reason, you need to let the elements pass. Don't outwardly before men partake of elements that say, "I'm a part of this," when in the reality of your life you have not at all lived in that way. Let the elements pass. Better to let the elements pass, maybe face an uncomfortable question afterwards. It would be better for us not to question anyone about that, but leave it between the man and the woman and Christ himself. But better to risk embarrassment before men than to profane this Table, this Table which represents church unity, which represents the person and work of Christ, that represents serious self-examination. And when it comes to self-examination, my friends, if you have not cared to confess and repent of sin in your life for weeks and months on end, you should let the elements pass and let the passing of the elements act as a conviction upon your heart that says, "My life is out of order here. Far more than needing these elements, I need to seek Christ afresh with a broken and a contrite heart." And if you don't know anything about a broken and a contrite heart, maybe this Table today is exposing to you that you've never been a Christian no matter how many times you've darkened the door of a church. You see, this is what Communion teaches us if we would only take the time to take it seriously, if we would only take the time to read the word of God, if we'd only have the humility of heart to say, there's a big difference between what Scripture says and what my life represents. Better to acknowledge your spiritual poverty by letting the elements pass than to play the part of a hypocrite and pretend as if God didn't know that you're pretending to take part in something that you actually in reality have no part in.

And so the elements matter. With that said, let me say this to those earnest brothers and sisters in Christ that are here with us today that make Truth Community Church a special and sweet place to be. Let me give you a word of encouragement as we approach the Lord's Table. We see that we come to the Lord's Table not with a sense of pride, but with humble gratitude. If you have truly trusted Christ and repented of your sin, we invite you to this Table. We want you to join in it and to share in Christ with us. If you look to Christ when you stumble, and we all stumble in many ways, but you look to Christ and you confess that, come to the Table and rejoice in the fact that your Lord has provided abundant access to a holy God and he did so gladly. And with fear and gratitude and a

sense of holy trembling, you take these elements and with a sense of, "Lord, thank you. I would be lost without you, but in you I know I'm safe," if there's something of that in your heart, then by all means take the elements because that's what Christ would have you do, to do this in remembrance of him.

I'd ask the men to come forward. Please bow with me in prayer as the musicians come.

Gracious Lord, may your Spirit give clarity of mind to each one, not only for this moment of the elements, but for a right viewing of ourselves in light of who you are. We thank you for the Table. We thank you for the Church and pray that you would protect and promote the unity of the body. We thank you, dear Jesus, for your past, present, and future work and we pray for each one an honest examination of self, and that you would use this to promote the salvation of some souls and the sanctification of many others. In Jesus' name we pray as the men come now. Amen.

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