

A Closer Look at Communion

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It's a joy for us to come to the Lord's table. Communion is always a special time for us at Truth Community Church and I'm so glad that you're here with us. We gather together as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. We come remembering the love of Jesus Christ who gladly, willingly, voluntarily laid down his life for us on the cross that our sins might be forgiven and that we might be fully reconciled to God and secured for all of eternity because of his righteousness and his blood which was shed for the remission of our sins. It's a joy to remember that every time that we do it and it's always a unifying impact on our church when we celebrate communion together.

Today, what I want to do is I want to give you specific teaching from Scripture about communion itself and what the Bible says about the way that we should approach the table and even more, what the meaning and the significance of this table is, what does it mean when we take communion; and as we remember an eternal sacrifice offered by an eternally righteous and an eternally existent Savior on our behalf, how should we respond to that? To come to communion and I would just impress on your mind and heart right now, to come to the table of communion is to come to a sacred event. It is to remember a sacred sacrifice made on our behalf. It is something that we don't approach lightly. It is something that we come and approach the table, as you're going to see, together, and we come in a humble and a reverent spirit, and at the same time a joyful spirit, remembering the sacrifice that these elements point us to remember was a complete one, it was a sufficient one. It was all that we needed to be reconciled to God forever and it's a remembrance that the Lord is going to come again as you'll see from our text. So we find it represented and symbolized in this everything that we need for life and eternity. We find in this symbolized the love of God, the love of Christ poured out for sinners like us. And at the same time, we remember that this is the Lord's table and so we don't come lightly, we don't come flippantly, we don't come without looking to ourselves and making sure that we're approaching it in the manner that the Lord would have us to do. Oh beloved, make it clear in your mind, have it settled in your heart, that whenever we come to communion, we come and we approach the table with reverence and that's what we're going to see today.

Our text this morning comes from 1 Corinthians 11 and I invite you to turn there with me. We're going to cover a long text here in just our brief time together, but I wanted to give you kind of a sweeping overview to give us a sense of what communion means according

to Scripture, to not take that for granted in the life of our body, and then for us to partake of communion together. 1 Corinthians 11:17, Paul is writing to this troubled church at Corinth and he withholds his affirmation from them in this section of Scripture. Verse 17,

17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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 He took the cup also 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 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.

Our Lord initiated the Lord's supper on the night prior to his crucifixion at a Passover meal. He was with his disciples and he gave them a symbol of the new covenant which he was about to inaugurate in his blood, over in Matthew 26, we read the account of this where Jesus did this with his disciples. In Matthew 26:26, it says, "While they were eating," this Passover meal, "Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, 'Take, eat; this is My body.' And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.'" In that Gospel account, we see the echoes, we see the original historic setting that Paul is drawing upon when he gives the instruction about communion to the church at Corinth and by extension, to the church that would last

until Jesus returns. Communion was an important part of the early church, it was an important integral part of their early worship. In Acts 2:42, you read that they were "continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." Breaking of bread being a reference to communion, the rite of communion. In Acts 20:7, it pictures the church in this way, "On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them."

So, beloved, what I want you to see here is that as we come together 2,000 years later around this table with the elements in front of us, we are joining in a tradition which our Lord Jesus Christ himself first inaugurated, that the early church practiced as believers in Christ who remember and worship him by, and which the Apostle Paul considered so central and so important to be practiced properly that he gave instruction at length in 1 Corinthians to say, "You are doing it wrong. Don't do it this way, do it this way." So by the precept of our Lord, by the practice of the early church, and by the admonition of the apostle, we have so much to inform what we are about to do later in the service, and our text here from 1 Corinthians, helps us to understand and appropriate communion in a proper way. And what I want to do, again, in just an overview fashion, is to give you three primary principles about taking communion so that we would honor the table in a proper way when we share in the Lord's supper, not only for today but to set a pattern and to set as part of our church life, "This is how we approach communion."

We see that it's not a casual matter. It's not something that you just approach and you walk off the street and you take the elements and you walk back out, this is something significant that is about to take place. And I know for some of you, you come from traditions where communion was celebrated each week, we don't do that for reasons that we could go into another time perhaps; I don't mind weekly communion but that's not our practice here. Others, you've been conditioned to treat it lightly perhaps from your past experience at churches and there wasn't serious tension given, there wasn't the preaching of the word as I alluded to in Acts 20, they gathered together to break bread and Paul taught them in conjunction with that. Well, we start to see that the early church and our Lord himself took it seriously, so much so that it was almost the final crowning act of his public ministry before he entered into Gethsemane where he would truly shed his blood for the remission of our sins. So while we love this table and we enjoy this table in a reverent way, I want you to see that this is something that we take seriously as the people of Christ.

Now, as a practical matter, there have been different views about the significance of communion that have been taught over the years in, broadly speaking, the Christian church. We'll save our assessment of those things for another time. What we want to do today is simply limit ourselves to the biblical significance of communion as it is practiced in our church. That's what we want to do here today. How do we understand Scripture? How do we practice communion? And once we establish that base, somewhere down the road we'll deal with things in more detail, but what should be on your mind as you come to the table today? What should be the mind of Truth Community Church as we approach the table? What is our responsibility, first of all, as we come to the table? Point 1 from our text this morning: we protect church unity. We protect church unity and you see that

laid out very clearly in the first section of what Paul said in the passage that I read earlier. We protect church unity. The Corinthians were practicing the Lord's table in the midst of strife and selfishness and Paul was appalled at their behavior. He was appalled at the sinful, carnal way that they were approaching the Lord's table.

Let's look at that first section again. I'll read through it and just make some overview comments of it, but notice that Paul is rebuking them for the strife and division that marked their practice of the Lord's table as I read these next few verses in verse 17. Paul said, "But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse." He says, "When you come to the Lord's table, that which should be an act of worship, it would actually be better if you didn't do it at all. You are making things worse by the way that you're practicing communion," he says to them, "and so I can't praise you." And those of you that love your parents, whether they're still with you or perhaps they've gone on, but you remember your parents with a fondness or you think of them with fondness and you realize that the affirmation of your parents was important to you when you had a healthy relationship with them. Well, imagine the stinging rebuke it would be for your father or your mother to have said to you, "I don't praise you. I withhold my praise from you." It is an understated way to administer a rebuke and to say, "Oh, the apostle does not praise us." He is rebuking them in an understated way when he says, "I do not praise you here." In other words, "I am rebuking you. I must correct you for what you are doing."

Why is he correcting them? Look in verse 18, he says, "For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it." Paul had received reports, he was not at Corinth obviously when he wrote this letter but people who were familiar with the situation at Corinth had come to him and given him a report about what was going on in their church practice. So he says, "I've heard about what's happening here." And he says, "in part I believe it." He knew enough about them to realize that the reports were consistent with what he knew to be true about their carnal nature and yet he gives them a little bit of the benefit of the doubt and he says, "in part I believe it. I don't have to know it all and it doesn't all have to be true in order for me to administer this rebuke," in other words.

In verse 19 he says, "For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you." He said, "It's necessary from time to time that there would be division because division shows who is true and who is real, and the outworking and the resolution of the division will show who is false, who is sinful, who is carnal." And we've had episodes of that in times past in our church. We understand that that's one of the things that happens is, the genuine people are manifest and those who are false are manifested differently.

So Paul now, in verse 20, brings it back the Lord's table to what he's talking about. He said, "I need to rebuke you about your practice of the Lord's table. Here's why I am rebuking you. I hear about divisions among you. I believe a good part of it, I don't have to believe it all in order to continue on with what I have to say." Now in verse 20, he clarifies exactly what it is that he is rebuking them for. Look at verse 20 with me, he says,

"Therefore," resuming his thought," he said, "when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." He says, "The way that you are practicing communion could not at all be said to belong to the Lord. You are going through the rite, you're going through the rite of communion but the way that you are practicing it shows that this has nothing to do with Jesus Christ in what you're actually doing."

Verse 21, he explains what he's talking about, "for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk." Now, what he's referring to here is that it was a practice at the time that they would have a communal meal before they actually practiced the elements of communion and received communion together. They would gather together for a love feast, as they would call it. Think in terms of a potluck supper, people would come together and eat a meal before they entered into...communion would be kind of the culminating portion of the time together. So they were gathering together for a meal but what was happening was this: people were approaching it in an entirely selfish, carnal way.

Paul goes on and says, he says there in verse 21, "each one takes his own supper first; one is hungry and another is drunk," and what he's referring to is that people would bring their own food, eat it quickly, eat it selfishly without sharing it with those who had nothing, eating it first rather than waiting for others to come to be with them, and what was supposed to be a love feast rather became simply a selfish indulgence in the presence of others who perhaps didn't even really have anything to feed their own selves with. It was an utter contradiction of love. It was an utter contradiction of unity. What kind of love is it among the body of Christ for one to eat his fill and to drink unto the point of intoxication, bad enough as it is, while standing beside are those who had nothing of their own to eat, in a different state of life, in a different economic position.

So these rich people, these selfish people, were humiliating and neglecting and inflicting pain upon another part of the church, those who were equally bought together with the blood of Christ. They didn't share with those who had need and here's the thing, beloved, here's what I want you to see in this: that spirit, that conduct which the cultural dimensions of the meal are different than what we experience here in the 21st century, but understand the underlying nature of the rebuke that Paul is making. There is a spiritual point that he is making. It is not simply about a potluck supper. Paul says that when the church of Jesus Christ gathers together, it should be animated by a spirit of selfless love and unity toward one another. When we come together, we come together not focused on our own personal life, our own personal situation, our own personal need which is what they were doing, "Man, I'm hungry! Let's eat now! The others can come later and they can fend for themselves." You see, there is a self-centeredness to it. There is a selfishness at the core of that which is what Paul is rebuking. Rebuke the sin of selfishness and the sin of the carnality of it all and you'll take care of the overflow of the externals of the meal. So Paul is rebuking them not simply for the externals of how the supper was conducted, he is rebuking them for the selfishness that marked their lives.

Now, here's the thing, here's what I want you to follow, here's what you need to see as we come together around the Lord's table today. What is it that we remember when we come

to communion? We remember preeminently the most exquisite act of selflessness that this universe has ever seen. We remember a boundless love poured out in human blood on the cross of Calvary. We remember the exalted Son of God becoming a man, going to the cross and saying, "I will lay down my life in order to reconcile unworthy sinners to my heavenly Father." And you and I as we come as Christians, we are the beneficiaries of that selfless act. We walk in the overflow of the love of Christ. We know joy and peace. We know an objective reconciliation with God because our Lord Jesus Christ selflessly laid down his life for all of his people for all of time, and you and I individually who know Christ, we come to Christ all in the same way, as they like to say, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Some of you are people of means, some of you struggle to make ends meet. Some of you are accomplished in life, some of you have struggled in life. There are men and there are women. There are those who are outwardly great sinners amongst us, there are those who were simply hypocrites and inwardly rebellious. And we come from a variety of different backgrounds and perspectives when we came to Christ but we were all saved on the basis of one sacrifice, by one Savior. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism. So what we are to see as we remember the table as we come together, is that that brings us together. It brings us in unity to one another, and the distinctions that would mark the externals of our life become unimportant in a special way when we come to the table. So to come in selfishness, to come in preferring ourselves over others, to come in a spirit of disregard for others in the body, could not possibly be more contrary to the spirit of Christ which gave rise to this remembrance in the first place. Do you see that? Christ had selflessly given his life for the entire church to make it one body and the instruction of Scripture, Ephesians 4:3, which we looked at a couple of years ago said, "Be diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit." So there is this overarching responsibility that you and I have to each other and preeminently to the Lord to be careful to preserve the unity of the church and not to be an instrument of injecting strife, selfishness, division or schism in the way that we conduct our lives. Unity in the church is paramount. It is a preeminent priority of Christ as seen so often in what he says in his word.

So, beloved, remembering that this is the Lord's table, remembering the Lord's sacrifice and that we, as it were, come somewhat as guests to his table, then we realize that we must preserve the unity which that was supposed to give birth to; that that was to give rise to. Do you see, beloved, that to inject selfishness into the life of the church, to be at odds and with an un-reconcilable spirit with others in the church, is a denial of that which we celebrate at the Lord's table? So to approach the table in a selfish way, to approach the table with unresolved and irreconcilable divisions with one another, is a deplorable contradiction in the way that communion should be celebrated. When the church comes together to celebrate communion, there must be a spirit of unity that marks it. We practice communion with the intent – watch this – we come to communion time after time after time, underlying our approach to communion is this, it is with an intent to further that fundamental principle of unity or – watch this – we don't take it at all. That's how serious it is. So we come to communion in order to protect church unity. Now, in the context of the passage in applying this to ourselves, what you should be asking yourself is: are there relationships here in the body that I am a party to a broken piece of disunity? Somebody that you've been at odds with and you have refused to reconcile with them? Is there something like that in your life? If so, you need to resolve before you take the

elements, you need to resolve to resolve that and honor your commitment afterwards. So, brothers and sisters in Christ, we approach communion as being anticipated. We say, "Okay, this is a good checkpoint." Are the relationships among us, okay? Are there any open sores, any unresolved disputes? You check yourself for things like that. Why? Because unity at the table is a preeminent priority of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so there is this horizontal dimension that we look at as we approach communion.

One other thing that I would say just by way of application is that communion is for corporate worship. It's really not appropriate, it's not in keeping with this idea of corporate unity to practice communion privately on your own. Communion is given to the church to practice together, not to individuals to practice as their own element of private devotion, and to separate yourself out in an ordinance that is designed to promote unity is contrary to the spirit of why the Lord gave that to us. So I would just leave that for your consideration as well.

So why do we practice communion? How do we approach it, the table? We do so, first of all, to protect church unity. And here's the thing, beloved: unity is not simply a matter of responsibility for the elders or the leaders in the church. Unity is the responsibility of each one of you. Sometimes that's going to go to the way that you practice unity within the privacy of your own home: husband and wife, parent and child; both claiming Christ, well, there needs to be unity there. That's how far this searches us. So unity also becomes that which you are mindful to guard. You are all agents, especially those of you that are members of Truth Community Church, you are all agents of guarding, protecting, developing and building the unity of the church. That doesn't just fall on the elders. This is what all of us do together in order to honor Christ in communion.

Now, secondly. We said that we protect church unity. What else does communion represent? Well, we remember Christ fully. We remember Christ fully. Having looked at the horizontal element that should mark the practice of communion in the church, we now shift our focus vertically. We shift our attention to Christ who is the center of the remembrance and there are three aspects that communion reminds us of, of the work of Christ that we celebrate together. What do we remember about the work of Christ? Well, first of all, we remember Christ's past work for us. His past work for us, and this is precious. It really is. The bread and the cup are symbols by which we remember the sacrificial death of Christ for us.

Look at verse 23 of 1 Corinthians 11, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body,'" in other words, this signifies my body, this is a symbol of my body. There is no way that the disciples on that night looked at him holding bread as a man and say, "Oh, that bread is in fact his body." They realized that he was talking in a symbol; that the bread signified something else. Verse 24, "when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'This is My body, which is for you,'" it's on your behalf. I give my body for you, he says. "Do this in remembrance of Me." And they partook of the bread. A moment later, verse 25, "In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this,

as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" And so repeating things that we've said many times during communion services but never tiring of the repetition, never tiring of saying these things again and again and again, communion is appointed by Christ to be a visual way for us to remember his past work on our behalf.

Here's the thing: we partake of literal bread and we partake of a literal cup and it is a reminder – watch this, precious – it is a reminder that the literal body of Christ was literally nailed to a literal cross 2,000 years ago in order to secure our salvation. It's a reminder, the cup is a reminder – watch this – that his literal blood was literally spilled on the ground in order to inaugurate the new covenant promises found in Jeremiah 31, that there would be forgiveness of sins and a new heart flowing out of the work of Christ to those who believe. And for those of you who know that you're guilty sinners, who have fallen short of the glory of God, this table, these elements are a reminder that what Christ did on the cross was sufficient. It was enough. It was payment in full for all of your iniquities; that all of your sins are washed away in the blood of Christ. So we cherish Christ and we cherish the opportunity to have a visible representation that he appointed to remind us and, as it were, to take us back 2,000 years and remember, "This really happened." A perfect man who was God in human flesh, out of love for your soul, voluntarily subjected himself to murder as the price that would be paid to rescue you from all of your sin and from eternal damnation. How can that not be precious to us? 1 John 1:7 says, "the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin." In communion, we look back on that death and remember and it creates this sense of holy gratitude in our hearts that says, "Yes, Lord, I remember. You did this for me." And there is an implicit reminder that our sins were once as scarlet but now they are as white as snow, and that a perfect satisfaction has been made for all of our guilt. God no longer holds our sins against us. Why? Because the body and blood of Christ were given on our behalf. We remember the past work of Christ when we take communion.

Now, at the same time, there is another aspect to remembering the work of Christ, there is Christ's present work for us that we remember. His past work and his present work. There is a present aspect to remembering Christ at communion. Look at verse 26 with me. Paul says in verse 26, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup," he doesn't prescribe a set pattern of practice, whenever you do it, this is what's happening, "you proclaim the Lord's death." There is a present aspect going on with what we do here. When we gather together today around the Lord's table, we are proclaiming in time and space now that this is a living reality; that the Gospel is true; that his blood is continuing to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. And we participate by faith now in his saving virtue; that he is continuing to keep us; that he is continuing to save us; that he will keep us all the way until glory. We remember that at communion, that it wasn't simply a past act of Christ, that it wasn't simply a past prayer that we prayed, that this is a present ongoing reality in our lives and that's why we do it repeatedly, and so we remember that present aspect of the work of Christ.

Thirdly, we remember Christ's future work for us. Past, present and future. Tucked away, it's easy to overlook this, tucked away in Paul's instruction is a reminder – oh, this is so wonderful to contemplate – tucked away is a reminder that the fullness of our salvation is

still yet to be consummated; that there is more to come. Look at the end of verse 26 with me, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death," here it is, "until He comes." Embedded in communion is an anticipation of the future return of Christ; that this is something that we do on an ongoing basis expecting a final return of Christ when he returns for his people when we will belong to him forever and he will drink with us new the vine in his kingdom. There is a coming consummation that reminds us that salvation is not preeminently about this life at all, it is about the eternal life which Christ has secured for us that is one day certainly going to come and will certainly be our possession as believers in Christ.

Communion, beloved, communion reminds you of something that should be most precious to your soul. Christ, having sacrificed himself for us, Christ will not abandon us to the grave. Christ will not have us suffer a moment in hell. Christ will not abandon us to this wicked world in which we live and all of the uncertainty and the trials and just the flagrant rebellion against God that we see all around us, communion is a promise where Christ says, "I'm coming again. Do this until I come." And when he comes, his ransom of his people will be complete; his deliverance of us will be sound, it will be perfect; and we will leave this world behind, never having tasted the fruit that our sins deserved. There is an implicit promise in communion that Christ is coming again and we wait for the ultimate consummation, and so as we take communion, we do so with a joyful anticipation that there is more to come in this glorious salvation that we are already enjoying. It's wonderful, isn't it? To be able to partake of the elements and say, "I have a share in this." And to say it in a way and part of what makes it sweet, I mean, the vertical dimension is preeminent but, beloved, here's what I want you to see, here's what I want you to think about as we take this together corporately: we share in this together. You share in this equally with the elders. There is no distinction that there is a position in the church where someone enjoys this benefit more than you do. We come to it in unity. We share in it together. We love one another because we love Christ and he suffered for all of us who believe. What a precious thing to share in. What great spiritual realities are ours in Christ and communion points them all out to us.

So let me say this, I need to say it: there is such a joyful mixture in the way that we approach communion. We approach it with a sense of reverence, "Wow, Christ did this. I don't want to approach this in a flippant manner." And yet sometimes people can get so introspective about it and so concerned that they miss out on the fact that this is the Lord's table. He has invited us. He wants us to come. He shares in this with us and that this is, as it were speaking in a very broad term with a metaphor that's not at all the best for the occasion but it will communicate: communion is a down payment, as it were, that Christ will complete his salvation for us. So with that, we come with a sense of expectation and joy. "What a blessing to be at this table! What a blessing to be in Christ! What a blessing to know that all of my sins are forgiven! What a blessing to know that I am reconciled to a holy God and I need not fear his judgment!" So we come with joy, with gratitude, with reverence, thanksgiving, happiness and expectation. You see, we come to communion with this overwhelming sanctified sense of, "I'm glad to be here." That's the way that you should approach communion.

Finally, we've said that we protect church unity, we remember Christ fully. Thirdly, we examine ourselves earnestly. We examine ourselves earnestly and we see this in the last section that Paul gives. The love of Christ and his redemptive work and the unity of the church are not matters to be treated lightly. Look at verse 27 with me. He says, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord." He says, "You incur the discipline of God when you approach this in an unworthy way. You're to remember what Christ did. You are to judge the body rightly and therefore you can't approach it flippantly or in unconfessed sin. That would not be worthy." How, think about it this way with me, how could you come knowing that you are living in sin? How could you come to communion knowing that you have been committed to a hardhearted path of rebellion that you know is contrary to the word of God and is hurting the people around you? How could you come with a life like that and take communion and outwardly say, "I identify with Christ's deliverance of me from sin," with this hand, while you're clenching sin in the other hand? You can't do that. You have to examine yourself and say, "I confess and I repent and I will not pursue this way of sin any longer." Or you say, "No, I love sin too much to let it go," and then you watch as the elements pass by and you say, "As I'm clinging to sin, I can't partake of these elements." You can't do both at the same time. Communion, as it were, when we approach communion with the right spirit, communion, as it were, takes your clenched fingers around your unconfessed sin and loosens them up and you let it go before the remembrance of Christ. It brings you to a spirit of repentance and a forsaking of that sin. And beloved, we need to say this, we need to take it seriously: if there is sin in your life that you're not willing to let go of, you should not take communion when we pass the elements in a few moments. If you know that you're sinning and you know that you're not willing to repent of that, don't add to your guilt by taking communion just to put on a show for the people around you. That only makes it worse.

So in verse 28, Paul says, "a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup." You see, it's not that we expect you to come in sinless perfection, we don't have sinless perfection in this life. It's a matter of an attitude that says, "I submit to Christ, not to my sin. I let my sins go in order to be in fellowship with Christ."

Verse 29, for those who are unwilling to approach it that way and still partake of communion, "he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly." How seriously does God take this point? Paul says in verse 30, he says, "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world." Paul says this matter is so important to God to take communion in a worthy way, to examine yourself and repent of known sin and not to take communion while you are unrepentant in your heart and in your life, God takes that so seriously that he said that he has brought physical sickness upon some to discipline and chastise them and some even sleep, the sleep of death. He says sometimes God will bring death to bear upon a life in order to protect the purity of his table for those who take in an unworthy way. It's sobering. Now,

this is in the context of church unity and the particularly vile way that the church at Corinth was practicing it, but still we see the principle of holiness and reverence that should mark it that say, "I want to treat this seriously. What is going on in my life? What are my relationships in the church like? Okay, as far as I can tell, not perfection but direction is right. I can take it." That's the way that we approach the table.

And Paul wraps up with an appeal to them to correct the problem at Corinth. He says in verse 33, "So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." Remember how it started out? They were going ahead and eating on their own and not sharing? Paul says, "When you come together, wait for one another. Do this in a spirit of unity and selfless love. And if you can't do that," verse 34, "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment." He said, "You've got to stop practicing communion in this vile divisive way so that you excuse yourself and you bring yourself out of the realm of the Lord's coming chastisement upon your lives. Don't do that," he says. Examine yourself as you come. Remember Christ as you come. Be unified with one another as you come.

Communion is wonderful, isn't it, for the realities that it points us to? It's a checkpoint, a periodic checkpoint along the way in the life of our church where we look and we say, "Church unity, as far as we know, yeah. The work of Christ past, present and future, oh, yes, Lord, thank you. Your blood has washed away my sin. Jesus, thank you, and I have examined myself, confessed my sin in coming, confessed the sins of the past week." And beloved, if there's something that you can't resolve just this moment but you're committed to it, just say, "Lord, whatever it takes, I will do that." Take it with that spirit of complete resignation and submission, receive communion and then go out and act upon what you told the Lord that you would do. That's the spirit in which we take communion. These are the spiritual realities that this table points us to. Communion is a wonderful thing, isn't it?

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Lord, we remember your sufferings on our behalf. We are strengthened in the knowledge of your return. We pledge ourselves to the best of our ability to unity in the body of Christ. Father, we take this moment to quiet our hearts, to confess any lingering sin in our lives. We want to come to this table in a manner that is worthy, to examine ourselves. We take a quiet moment now, Lord, to pause and to deal with those matters that perhaps we've let accumulate. Father, we acknowledge that communion is not for everyone in the world. You didn't give this to the world, you gave it to the church. You gave communion to be shared by your obedient disciples. That's the spirit of the way in which we approach you today, Lord, trusting in the shed blood of Christ for our salvation, submissive to you in every known respect, loving you and loving one another and celebrating those realities around the table to which you invite us now. Amen.

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