

**Sermon:** The Most Important Meal of the Day (The Lord's Supper)

**Series:** Controversial Questions from Corinth, 1 Corinthians, part 4 (2)

**Passage:** 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup> 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.

Let's pray together.

*Father in heaven, as come to your Word, as always, we ask that your Holy Spirit would teach us –that you would be the true teacher, the true speaker of the Word because you gave us this passage for our good and for your glorious name. There is something in here that we need in order to have a more full life, the way Jesus intends it. Help us to have attentive hearts and attentive ears. Would you help us to be open before You? Would our hearts be like soil that is fertile so that you may plant the seed and so that the seed may sprout and bear fruit. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.*

We are in a series at the end of 1 Corinthians which I've called "Controversial Questions from Corinth". I love Pastor Steve's sermon last week on the early part of 1 Corinthians 11. It really touched upon women covering their heads, prophecy, prayer, and all these amazing controversial, touchy subjects. As he said, somehow the Lord ordained that he was assigned that touchy passage and that's God's will.

For me this morning, I will be continuing with this passage. Today, it might seem strange because when it comes to the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion, I don't think most people think of it as controversial. Yes there might be some theological controversies about the exact nature of the Lord's Supper, but why is it controversial there?

Let me put it this way. It is controversial because one of the most precious gifts is the Lord's Supper, given to the people of God. When it is used improperly, it is one of the most destructive forces in the church. If you've ever taken Holy Communion, if you've ever seen other Christians take Holy Communion, if you've ever actually been here at BCEC when we've had the four stations where people take the wafer, representing the body of Christ, and dipped it in the cup, representing the blood of Christ, we need to understand that there are very specific, God-given, helpful ways that would change how we think about this whole concept, this remembrance of Christ.

To begin with this, let me tell you about my family's summer plans. One of my children has pretty bad skin issues. Over the years, we've tried different medicines. I think I've used him in numerous sermon illustration and eventually, when he gets older, I think I'll have to stop using his stories in my sermons. He's old enough to understand to not eat certain things, otherwise his skin will breakout. We've tried western medicine and Chinese medicine.

My parents, being as generous and concerned as they are, have said, "We are really hurt every time we see your son have these bloody scratches and sores. We would like to bring him to California so that he can have traditional Chinese medicine treatment for a couple months." I'm thinking, "Well I'm not really sure that's going to work, but thanks mom and dad for your generosity."

As we talked about it, we thought that maybe if we just pulled our boys out of school a few days early, got them onto a plane, and left them in California for a month, it could actually work. I would just leave them at my mother-in-law's house, go speak at another retreat, and bring them back. Originally, we thought we would just stick them on a plane and have them go on their own, but we found a way where we could fly there and fly back with them.

If you ask my second son's friends, they'd say that going to California for a month in the summer is so cool. Yeah, I guess it's so cool to sit in a car for 80 minutes (one way) to drive to a doctor's office to be prodded at and forced to drink this nasty, chunky Chinese medicine three days a week. That's just going to be blast.

Because of that and because we thought our second son might get lonely, we assigned our youngest son to keep him company. Don't do this because you might scar them emotionally, but if you were to talk to my second son and ask him why he was going to California, he would reply, "To try to see if my skin can get better." If you asked my youngest son, he would reply, "To keep my brother company and to support him." My oldest boy will be at a camp here called Project Destiny, which I hope many of you will cook dinner for his counselors.

In our family devotions, we're thinking about how to make the best use of this time when our family will, for the first time ever, be physically apart. For the past few years, we've been trying to think about how to get our boys to read the Bible consistently and develop good disciplines on their own. My boys have been reading the Bible as a part of the routines we set, but we decided

that it is time for a new routine. We decided that when the two little ones are in California, we need a routine that will cause the two boys to think of and interact with the rest of the family. We decided that it is time for us to deploy our old cell phones.

We had a really old cell phone (cell phone #3) that was just floating around. My mother offered us a cell phone (cell phone #4) and we also got this really old phone (cell phone #5) that doesn't even have a SIM card so it can't actually make real phone calls except 911. We've given the best phone to our oldest son, another cell phone to our second son, and the cell phone with no SIM card (cell phone #5) to our youngest son. We installed this app onto all the phones and said, "We would like for you to text our family group every day after you read the Bible and tell us what you learned. To do that, you better start now."

We're trying to create this system so that, even when we're in different places, we can remember each other. While a lot of kids think their cell phones and texting are a way of annoying their parents, I've tried to hijack this by causing them to first associate cell phones with a way to connect more with their parents. I'm hoping that they will text me every day throughout college.

I bring this up is because this challenge to remember is so important to remember for Christians. If you aren't Christian, I'm so glad you're here today because we'd love to get to know you and because God has instituted two major sacraments in the church: baptism, the initiation right where you immerse yourself in water to symbolize a new life in Christ, and Holy Communion, the regular practice of the Lord's Supper.

If you're a Christian and you've ever felt distant from God, ever wondered if you are still loved by God, ever struggled with obedience, ever struggled with temptation, the Lord's Supper is God's way of keeping our walks with Christ vital. It is absolutely vital and amazingly powerful, refreshing, and helpful.

If you're not a believer, the Lord's Supper, as a sacrament that we practice here, is not magical in of itself. Eating this wafer and drinking this grape juice is not suddenly going to change you as a person. It is important to understand the meaning of it.

This morning, as we come to this controversial text for Corinth, because they were having lots of conflict and problems over this concept, I hope we will see three things in this passage and better understand how the Lord's Supper is a good gift given by God to help us walk with the Lord.

1. How do we destroy the Lord's Supper?
2. What is the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper?
3. How do we experience the Lord's Supper the way God intended it?

In the same way I am trying to give my kids a routine, Holy Communion is God's perfect way of helping you and I remember what Jesus has done.

1. How do we ruin the Lord's Supper?

In this text, we will see that the way they ruin it is by making Holy Communion about themselves, about people, rather than about Jesus. The way they ruined it is by forgetting that

Holy Communion is not about you getting right with God or you doing a good ritual; it is about Christ and what He has done.

Let's take a look at the passage. In those days, they would gather together and eat a whole meal together as a part of Holy Communion and it was causing so many problems. Let's take a look at verse 17. Paul is so upset with how they are handling it.

<sup>17</sup> 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.

Now let's just pause right there. Paul basically says this: it's better that you don't gather as a church and take Holy Communion together because when you gather as a church and when actually take the bread and the cup, it is terrible; it is worse! I don't know if he is being theological or he's just expressing his great concern. Let's continue:

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.

Let's pause there. This is how they did it. At the end of the first century, Christians were eating regularly together. Some historians suggested that they ate together daily. They would eventually have something that was called "The Love Feast". When they did this, they would take the words of Holy Communion literally. At Supper, Jesus took the bread and broke it. For the words of the cup, he would say 'after supper'. At the beginning of the meal, they would break the bread, representing the body of Christ, and then have full on meal, just like how you and I would, and they would fellowship, talk, hang out, etc. At the end of the meal, they would take the cup, so that the body and the blood of Christ would "bookend" this meal. What they were doing was beginning to show their divisions, particularly divisions of a socio-economic nature.

You see, the slaves and the poor people were much more limited in time, whereas the wealthy had more time. Therefore, when they gathered for meals, some scholars suggest that the rich would sit in better places while the poor would sit on the outside or on the floor. Secondly, the rich would bring all this food and would eat it before the poor and the slaves could get there to celebrate together. Instead of communion being this great meal together where we worship Christ, the powerful, the rich, and the privileged were eating all the food.

Imagine that you're a slave of that day but you're allowed to worship in the Christian community. You finish everything your master says and you make your way to this church gathering because you're going to have this "love feast" where we celebrate the body and the blood. Not only is there no more food, but also there is no more wine and the people are drunk. You come to church and people are drunk.

Let's take a look at how Paul describes this in the passage, starting in verse 21.

<sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> 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.

I know it sounds a little extreme. This meal, the Lord's Supper, which was intended by God to help us remember all that Jesus did for you and me, is now used to identify who is rich and who is poor, who has food and who is going hungry, who can time off time from their day and come early and who is slavishly working and getting there barely in time to find that there is nothing left. This is an incredible division in the church.

This is why Paul is basically saying, "Well what do I do with you? Do I tell you to stop taking communion? I mean, I kind of want to because it's so bad because of what you're doing. I'm not going to commend you for this." Then he moves onto the instructions. This is pretty hard.

As a Chinese heritage church, some of you may know that Tiananmen Square's 25<sup>th</sup> commemoration is this week. Tiananmen Square is about the size of sixty football fields. Twenty five years ago, students were there protesting and the Chinese government ordered tanks to fire at the students protesting. We know at least several hundred died, but we still don't even know the full number. This time, the Chinese government was prepared for more protests, some sort of commemoration on the Tiananmen Square. Instead, nothing happened.

There's a book out called the People's Republic of Amnesia. There is this reporter that went into universities in China and showed hundreds of highly educated students pictures of Tiananmen Square and asked them if they remembered where the pictures were from. Less than 17 students knew. Most of them said things along the lines of, "Oh, is that in North Korea or something like that?" Those who could identify the pictures were scared to talk about the incident. I'm not trying to make a political statement; Rather, I think this is an accurate redoing of the memorial.

The government, a few years back, decided to do something to commemorate Tiananmen. They have a flag raising at Tiananmen Square. Thousands of people would line up early to watch the Chinese flag go up. They have effectively done a brilliant, although possibly due to ulterior motives, job of taking a physical location/event and changing the commemoration meaning from the freedom and protests of the students who were trying to make a case for democracy to the nationalistic symbol of people's pride and confidence in the Chinese government.

Have you ever had that happen at a birthday party? Perhaps your own birthday party? You're there yet no one talks to you? Have you ever been lying in a hospital bed and people come to visit and instead of talking to you they play games with each other? It feels terrible when you're the focus of a particular event, yet people forget it. That is what happened in Corinth.

There is a meal that Jesus gave for the purpose of: "every time you eat and drink, remember what I did for you because I love you, because your sins required a great sacrifice, because I voluntarily gave up my life for you." Instead, Corinth was not eating to remember the grace of Christ; they were feasting just to eat and get drunk and it became a source of great division.

How do we hijack it today? In our church or in this North American context? I think one way is when we take Holy Communion, we think, “I’m okay. I haven’t really been following Jesus but I went to church today and I took Communion. Whew, I’m good for another week.” I think that’s one of the ways we hijack it. Communion is not about me getting my booster shot of holiness so I’m good for the next week. Communion is not about me checking off my spiritual to-do list. Communion is not about you; it is not about me. It is about Jesus. Unless we are clear on the purpose of communion, we will always tend to make Communion about you and me.

We’ll complain about the wafers. We’ll complain about the grape juice. Sure, you don’t want to eat or drink spoiled food. We’ll complain about the location of the Communion stations or the Communion music. Those are important topics, but if we are not clear about the purpose Jesus intended for this meal, we will inevitably make it about us. That brings us to the next question.

## 2. What is the purpose of Communion?

How do we understand the essence and the heart of what Jesus did when he said, on the last night he was on Earth before the crucifixion with his closest friends and he instituted this meal, “my followers will do this forever until I return.”

There are probably lots of ways to break it down, but let me suggest that we break down the purpose of communion in three ways. First is a memorial. Second is relational. Third is eschatological. I think that’s really what Jesus is doing. We’re going to turn to verse 23 and talk about how communion is a memorial, a remembrance.

<sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> 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.”

In God’s wisdom, Jesus is basically saying this, “What sign would I give to the people of God so that they would remember and have a constant reminder of my loving sacrifice for them?” You know, a lot of times as a people, we want to add new traditions. That’s good but God is so smart. God looked at the one activity that every human being has to do every day for his or her entire life: eating and drinking. It’s brilliant. This is the best idea ever. What will we do to help us remember? Well God basically said, “I’m not going to institute this new thing. I’m going to take something that every person has to do in order to survive; I’m going to reclaim every time someone eats and every time someone drinks. I’m going to take that imagery of the bread, which was the common, staple food of the Mediterranean empires of those days and is synonymous with food in general, and the wine, which was the common drink.

The idea is that every time you eat this bread, Jesus wants us to think of His body; every time you eat of this wine, Jesus wants you to think of His blood. It is a memorial. It is a remembrance. Regardless of your theology of the exact nature of the Lord’s Supper, all the

different viewpoints have one thing in common: the idea that Jesus instituted this meal so that we would remember forever. It doesn't take a wafer.

Every time you eat you can think of the body of Christ. Every time you drink, you can think of the blood of Christ. I would be so thrilled if my children, every time they saw a cell phone, they would think of their parents. Isn't that crazy? I mean cell phones are such a ubiquitous thing. Jesus did this great thing: he said, "Food and drink. You're going to have to eat and I want you to remember my body. You're going to have to drink and I want you to remember my blood." The remembrance. The memorial. That is the first fundamental essence.

In church, the gathering of worshipers, sure, we believe that it's good to have a deacon or pastor officiate and do Holy Communion, but we don't necessarily believe that it is a miraculous transformation of the bread to the literal body of Christ. When we think about it, I think parents can have communion at home. I think families should take communion together. I think you can take communion with you wherever you go. You don't need to have some ordained reverend. What did Jesus say? "Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, do this in remembrance of me."

Besides the essence of Holy Communion being a memorial, it is also relational. The setting is that Jesus is with His best friends, His confidants, His disciples. Let's look at the passage again, beginning with verse 24:

<sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

He is not talking to just one individual, but a community. This is the other beauty of the Lord's Supper. The idea is that it is the people of God coming together to eat the meal to remember together. That is why in Corinth, it was exact opposite. They were using the Lord's Supper, whether intentionally or not, to separate people from one another, the rich and the poor. The passage talks about the Lord's Supper being used to bring people together.

Here's the thing: when we do Holy Communion here at BCEC and people are walking through the aisles to receive communion, I get to stand in the front; I love being in the front so I can see people coming forward because I am filled with so much gratitude and worship. Not to make you nervous or insecure, but I'm watching you all. I'll see some scruffy kid wearing a t-shirt and shorts taking communion. I'll see someone more nicely, more formally dressed coming forward taking communion. I'll see someone I know who is struggling financially and is unemployed and I'll see someone very financially blessed both coming forward to take communion.

It doesn't matter who you are or what your background is. When you come down to the table, we are all sinners. We are saved by the grace of God together. It doesn't matter who you are. We come together. There is this memorial sense of Communion. There is this relational sense of Communion that we all take it together. That is why sometimes I miss the way we used to do it.

When we do it at anniversary services, everyone, over a thousand people, stand together, holding the wafer together and taking Communion at the same time. We're all drinking the cup together. I mean, they're both beautiful ways of expressing the Lord's Supper. I'm not sure that all the disciples physically waited for Jesus to take the bread before eating; it is possible that they just took the bread and started eating. There is a lot of richness in those traditions.

The third meaning is eschatological. What do I mean? I mean that it is a reminder that Jesus is going to return. If you and I take the bread and the cup or we see someone else take Communion, we need to have a conscious sense of "Jesus, you will return. You promised that you would rise from the dead and you did. You promised that you would rise again and you will". Jesus even said in the Gospels, particularly in Luke, Jesus said, "I will not drink of this cup until I return." That is why verse 26 says:

<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Now, I have to confess, I have really blown this for many years. I have been really sloppy with this passage. If you heard me last week, I said, "As you eat this bread and drink from this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death and resurrection." That's not what this says. Lord forgive me. That is the problem when you preach. You have to swallow all the words you've said in previous sermons.

This memorial is not about the resurrection. This memorial is about the passion, the crucifixion, and the suffering of Christ. That is what the words Jesus gave us say.

<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

That's where we get the life because He cannot return if He is dead in the grave. He cannot return if He is a mere mortal and there is no afterlife. He cannot return if He is not the Son of God. Paul is saying that you eat of the bread and drink of the cup to proclaim the Lord's death. He died. He was in a tomb. There was no pulse. His body was dead. Jesus Christ was dead. You proclaim that every time you take Communion until He comes because, praise the Lord, He is alive. That is the power of Communion.

Friends, if you're not a believer, you have to think about this stuff. I agree with you; this looks really silly. People eating this semi-tasteless, bland, white object and drinking this old grape juice; they believe these things represent the body and blood of Christ. They believe He is going to come back. Honestly, it is a beautiful ceremony but if you believe that Jesus is dead right now, then the whole idea of Communion is pretty silly. Not only is it silly, but it makes Christians look pretty stupid. That is why Paul said, "If there is no resurrection, then Christians are among the most pitied of all people." But, if Jesus is alive and He is going to keep His promise and come back, then the Holy Communion is the most powerful picture we can imagine of the remembrance, the memorial, the communal dimension of us together as a people of God, and a reminder that Jesus will return.

We could say a memorial, relational, and eschatological or we can say that Jesus' purpose of Holy Communion is that we would remember together that Jesus is coming back. That is what Communion is about – that we would remember together, as the people of God, Jesus' death and future return. That, in one sentence, is what Paul is saying. Holy Communion is so that we would remember together that Jesus will come back.

If we've talked about how Corinth ruined Holy Communion and how we can also hijack Holy Communion and what the purpose of Jesus' assignment of Communion to us, then the third question is this:

### 3. How do we experience the Lord's Supper the way God intended it?

How do we celebrate communion? How do we get everything out of it that God, in His goodness, intended for us? What's the mindset? How do we do it properly?

It is not the physical mechanics, although those are important issues. A lot of Christians disagree about things like: is it really bread? I kind of like using bread. I was visiting Philip Chew's church a couple weekends ago and there was the bread on the table and little cups with a sign that said "Outside: grape juice, inside: wine". Unfortunately, there was only inside left. Those are important issues and stuff, but I think it's striking that Paul dedicates his instructions to matters of the heart, as is so much of the Christian life.

Of course, we should talk about that, theologically wrestle with that, and submit to the Bible on that. However, Paul is saying that it's not about the mechanical, material things, it's a spiritual, attitudinal thing. I would suggest, from this text, three practical steps:

#### A. Self-examination

When we take communion, it should be done with a self-examination spirit. Let's take a look here beginning with verse 27:

<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Now, friends, this is so striking. He is basically saying here: scholars will talk about because you have not self-examined yourselves, some of you have been weak or fallen asleep. Pretty much all commentators have said: No, Paul is saying something that might be strange for you and me to hear: Because of the way they mishandled Holy Communion, people got sick and people died. This passage does not stand alone. Earlier in 1 Corinthians 5 or so, Paul talks about incest. Every

sickness does not mean a judgment of God. Don't go there. Just because someone is sick or loses their job does not mean they have sinned. On the opposite side of the spectrum, it would be too far to say, "Oh, you're sick? It has nothing to do with your spiritual life... It's all about, you know, germs."

The Bible says sickness and misfortune does not automatically mean the judgment of God. However, the Bible does say that it can be the judgment of God. If you go through the New Testament, there are lots of significant sins that people committed. One of the sins where you can physically suffer is Holy Communion. That is striking.

What does that look like? Self-examination, I don't think, is this somber, gut-wrenching thing where you think "I'm so unworthy. I'm so unworthy. I'm so unworthy. I'm not going to take Communion" because that would defeat the purpose of Communion. True self-examination and our true unworthiness drive us to take Communion, not the other way around. The same goes for baptism.

Some of us feel "I don't feel ready to do baptism. I'm not good enough. I'm not mature enough. My friends at school would think I'm a hypocrite." Every time we have a baptism, the most common thing I hear is: "I believe in everything I need to for baptism. I just don't feel ready yet." The irony is that baptism isn't just proclaiming union with Christ. Baptism is claiming "I'm a sinner". When you invite people to your baptism, you're basically inviting people to see you raise a huge banner in the sky saying "I'm a sinner! I need to die to myself and be alive in Christ." That is what Communion is.

If you think "I'm so unworthy. I'm such a sinner." and you stop there, you're missing the point. If you and I think, "I'm so unworthy. What I did this morning... what I did last night... I'm such an unworthy sinner. Thank you God for giving me your body. Thank you Jesus for giving me your blood." That is what Communion is. It is to remind us that yes, we are unworthy. That is why self-examination is so important. A lot of times, that is where church discipline happens.

You will hear of the Holy Roman Catholic Church denying certain government officials Communion because of their stances on certain moral, social, political issues. That's another way that people struggle with this. For us, it is appropriate to withhold baptism from someone if they have not conducted self-examination. Here is why: if you have not practiced self-examination or we as a church have not given you a few moments to reflect, the Bible says you are eating and drinking judgment on yourself. I don't want to do that to anybody. If I ever do Communion and say, "You really need to self-examine before you take Holy Communion." That's the beauty of this whole music thing before and during Communion. You can spend a verse or so reflecting, "Is there anything else I need to be clean to you about before I take Communion?" This allows more personalized self-examination. We must do that.

There might be some times where someone is under church discipline is unwilling to obey the Word of God or unwilling to follow the practices of Galatians 6, Matthew 18, etc. We might say, "We are holding Communion from you, brother or sister, because you are facing issues that you have not fully come to terms with before the Lord." I want to say to you, church, that we, the

pastoral staff, are doing our best to uphold the integrity of Holy Communion. It is not easy; it is complicated. I don't feel that I am in the place to judge, but the Bible is so clear. It states that if you take it without self-examination and we let you, we are letting you eat and drink judgment. That's self-examination.

## B. Take Communion with One Another

We recognize we are taking it together. Let's take a look at verse 33:

<sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup>if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

Because Communion was meant to be taken together. That is why I love it when we take Communion and we carry up the wafers and the grape juice up to the worship team and serve the Communion servers. Biblically, we need to wait for everyone to be ready. Whoever is going to take it, you wait. I don't think waiting is really the command; rather, we need to remember that we are taking Communion together as a people of God together. If you're fellowship or your own experience of Communion is lacking, then perhaps this is a great opportunity. Have you actually taken Communion together? Have you gone forward to take Communion with your spouse? I look forward to the day when I can go up front and take Communion with my wife and children.

Maybe one of these Sundays, all you baptized high school teens can come down and take Communion with your counselor and intentionally take it together. Maybe one of your friends here at BCEC just got baptized and for her first Communion as a baptized believer, you and her small group decide to go down and take Communion together. There are so many ways to take Communion together. Wait for each other. Use the rich meaning Jesus gave us in Communion. If it was Mother's Day and my mother was in town, I would love to take Communion with my mom. That would be awesome. You can take Communion together.

In North America with our individualism, it is so easy to think about ourselves and to think "Eat. Drink. Me. Jesus" as I walk back to my seat. However, we were really meant to take it together.

How do we take Communion? The first step is self-examination. Communion forces us to think, "Is there a sin I need to be reminded of? You love me and you forgive me." The second part is waiting and taking Communion together with the people God has called you to journey and live life together with.

## C. Take it in a Worthy Manner

We must take Communion with the dignity afforded to the significant, majestic picture. That is the overall idea. It comes from verse 27, but I think it's the big picture idea, which is why I gave it to you last.

<sup>27</sup> 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.

What does it mean to be guilty? When I was younger and went to church, I would hear the preacher say, “J.B. Phillips paraphrase says this...” and it took me a couple years to realize that that was another version of the Bible. J.B. Phillips is rarely cited now, but there is a new paraphrase called “The Message”. In the paraphrase of this passage, it says something along the lines of, “Guilty concerning the body. If you drink and eat in an unworthy manner, you’re just like one of the people in the crowd who killed Jesus. You are throwing him your jeers and your mockery.” We have to take it in a very worthy manner.

One of my friend’s church’s youth groups took Communion with Doritos and Coke. It’s not about the mechanics and it’s not about the materials, and I suppose it is possible to take Communion with reverence. However, it is not hard for me to imagine that kids are smirking when they are popping a Dorito in their mouth. Whether you dress up nicer for Communion or you really think about it, whatever it is, the key is worship.

Let me give you an example. Offering. There are many different traditions when it comes to offering. One particular tradition I am fond of but have never actually done is offering done in complete silence. The offering bag goes around in silence. In churches like ours, offering is a time to talk to friends, read the bulletin, etc. I’m not sure how many of us is thinking, “God, receive this humble gift. Make it useful and pure and use it for your glory.” It’s so easy to lose some of the meaning behind the traditions. Communion can be like that. We need to remember the dignity afforded to the fact that this is the Body. We don’t desecrate the Body. If there is a casket someone where, no jumps on it or turns it over; you act very respectfully.

What Jesus is saying is this, “This is the body of Christ. This is the blood of Christ. We must take it in remembrance and reverence.” It is still a celebration. It is what I call a “sober, joyful celebration.” It is sober because it is the death of Christ. It is a celebration because He gave it so that we can live forever and have forgiveness of our sins.

I really wrestled with whether or not to have Communion this week. On one hand, I thought it might be good to be able to apply it. On the other hand, I thought that it might be best to wait for our regular timing because then we would be forced to, in the next few weeks, to be thinking about this so that the next time it comes, on the first Sunday of the month, we can remember that we take Communion together to remember that Jesus is coming again.

If you’re not a Christian, if you aren’t baptized yet, this is what Paul would want you think about: Communion is not some spiritual right reserved for super holy people. It is a right that shows us that we have died but we live again by the body and the blood of Christ. It is a beautiful picture.

Let’s pray together.

*Oh gracious Father, help us to remember that You are so wise that You use two of the most basic human activities, bathing and eating, for Your symbols and signs for us. That is what*

*baptism is. We get baptized because we are unclean, sinful, and unworthy. Humans have to bathe; we realize that. You take that and say=id, "every time you bathe, remember that you were washed and cleansed by the blood of Christ." You've taken the food that we have or might enjoy later this afternoon on this beautiful Sunday and we pray that we would remember, remember that it is not about us, but about Jesus and what He did. Help us remember and have that flow into our hearts with greater love and obedience for You Father because You sent Your son and by the power of the Holy Spirit, He rose again and is our savior and Lord today.*