

We have had the opportunity to fellowship together downstairs and I just want to add my words to Pastor Tim's great appreciation for Linda Davidson and the ministry of Pioneer girls for the fellowship that you have facilitated in your service to the body. And I wanted to take this opportunity this evening, this particular celebration of the Lord's Supper, to speak about a very familiar portion of Scripture, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, because this is specifically dealing with the Lord's Supper as it was being practiced within that church. I wanted to take this evening do to that, partly because it's just a really great text, but secondly, and I think more importantly, is what we've just done this afternoon. And that is to sit around tables together, to fellowship with one another, to break bread together, and then to come upstairs and to spend time in worship and to celebrate the Lord's Supper together is actually a very ancient practice. In fact it's a practice that has been happening since the earliest parts of the church. In fact, that's what was happening in Corinth.

And so with that in mind--it's a larger passage, so I want to read it, I'm going to jump to it quickly, and then I'm just going to break down, I won't be able to exhaust all of it tonight, we'll be continuing to teach on it, but hit some of the high points that can then facilitate our coming to the Supper. Now I want to say that I recognize as I look around the room, there are a number of young people who likely have not become communing members of the church, which are here tonight. And you might be thinking, well, I am not a communing member yet, I haven't made a public profession of faith, and so when my parents come to the Sunday evening service and they celebrate the Lord's Supper, I'm not really sure why I'm here. But we want you to know that the Lord wants you here, and we're glad that you're here. And what I want to do tonight before we actually take the Supper, I want to pray for you. And I want to pray for your families, to ask that the Lord would give you a greater understanding and appreciation and a love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and he would bring you to that place where you're ready to make a public profession of faith before the body of Christ. For it is God's intention through the church of Jesus Christ, equipping people, equipping families with the gospel, that that is passed on to our children. And so I would ask that you, too, even though you may not be celebrating with us tonight, you'll be participants, you'll be witnesses. And so this word is to you as the Lord would use it in your life, preparing you to be communing members of this part of Christ's church.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and I believe the translation you have in front of you is the ESV. I'm not sure, but I'm going to bet that it is, and with that, I'm going to read it from the ESV. I apologize if I'm not reading the right translation. They're still a lot alike. 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. "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. 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. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 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. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night in which 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.' In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 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 the cup. 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. But 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. 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." This is the word of God. Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me. Father, as we spend a few moments in your words tonight preparing for the Lord's supper, we would ask that by your Holy Spirit you would move us more and more to see that Jesus is both more beautiful and more believable than when we first came through these doors. Please present Christ to us, Lord, as we prepare to worship you vertically through the celebration of this sacrament, but also the implications that this Supper has for us relationally, horizontally as a body. Father, I pray that you would give us a deeper understanding that we might apply this word in a way that is appropriate and true to the way in which you intended. Give us wisdom and discernment. And we ask that you would help us and be present with us by your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

So let me just say by way of introduction that this is a passage. My hope is someday to perhaps be able to preach through the entirety of the Corinthian letters. It is a fascinating read, and I believe perhaps an even more fascinating sermon series. You'll hit everything, I think. But I'm particularly grateful for the study that I have done in this passage. I'm thankful for pastors who I've not met personally, but just over the phone: Pastor Nathan Trice whose article a number of years ago has impacted my thinking on this verse—he's a pastor in the OPC in Matthews, North Carolina; I'm thankful for F.F. Bruce; I'm thankful for Gordon Fee; I'm thankful for Brian Chappell; and so many others who've been so helpful in my understanding and appreciation for this portion of 1 Corinthians. I'm also thankful for one scholar who perhaps doesn't get enough attention, and his name is Gerd Theissen, who's written a book called *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*. It's essays and Corinthian theology. He talks about what in the world was the social context that Corinthians is set in and gives us some instruction. Because you can't read this passage, verses 17 to 34, and not begin to ask the question, what is the context into which Paul was speaking in giving instruction in regard to the Lord's Supper. So tonight briefly I want to look at the context of this teaching, Paul's central concern--what it is not and what it is---and then celebration—celebration of the Lord's Supper.

So, let's look at the context. To do that, three things: the letter, the church, the practice. So first, the letter. The letter to which Paul was writing to the church, we must understand, is a church that he knew well. It was the church that he planted. Paul planted this church during his second missionary journey. He pastored it for, we believe, up to a year and a half and likely wrote this letter less than two years after leaving it. Now, this letter is comprised, as we have it in our English translations, as two letters, but there are a number of things we don't know. It could very well be two letters that we broke up into two, but very likely could be a composition of three letters. We're not completely sure. We also know that it was in response to a letter that Paul received, but we do not have that letter in extant form. It's nonexistent that we are aware of, but he certainly addresses it. And in this letter Paul is responding to reports that he has received from Corinthian visitors to their church. And we need to note, so that's this letter that he is intending. He's been the pastor. He was the church planter. He's very closely, you know, still tied with the congregation. He is not far removed from it. He's received reports as I have received reports from the church that I planted in New Jersey as people have come down and visited. That's precisely what took place here. And in fact, just a couple of weeks ago we had one of our leaders visiting and worshiping with us here---one of our leaders at our church at Redeemer Montclair, and I took the opportunity over lunch to say: How is the church? How is it doing? What's going on? How is the Lord moving? That's exactly what was happening here. And so this had reached Paul, and so Paul responds. And as Pastor Tim clearly pointed out this morning, these are not letters where he sort of shirks back and is afraid to deal with the issues at hand. He's not afraid to call out particular names. He's not afraid to call out specific situations. He deals with it directly.

So let's hear a little bit about the church. Now we can read through 1 and 2 Corinthians, and there are a number of things we're going to learn. First, that he focuses on serious and widespread problems. Deep division and disunity in this young church. This disunity was largely caused by belief in wrong doctrines. In fact, the reason why he spent so much time in 1 Corinthians 15 teaching about the resurrection was because some within the Corinthian church were giving up a bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that some heresies that were already being spread throughout the Greco-Roman world after Paul would come and preach and come and plant churches. There were those who were coming along after him preaching and teaching another gospel, preaching and teaching a false gospel and false theology. So that led to all kinds of division. It was also manifest in their bickering. We read early on in chapter one, some would say I follow Paul. No, I follow Apollos. No, I follow Cephas. It also led to the fact that if you'll notice if you re-read Corinthians Paul spends a lot of time in this letter defending his very apostolic ministry, because there were many within the Corinthian church who questioned his apostolic ministry. They didn't like the fact that he talked about the gospel, being one, as a ministry from weakness. They didn't like hearing about that. They wanted to talk about spiritual strength, which is why it led them to a spiritual pride in relationship to their gifts. Also he had to do with lawsuits, arguments about marriage and divorce, eating in idol temples with disregard to those who were weaker Christians who were stumbling over that practice. They were full of pride in regard to their spiritual gifts. There was all kinds of socio-economic breakdown that was in the church--not just a socio-economic diversity, but that diversity led to a breakdown relationally. So these are just some, just some, of the issues. Now let me just state that the issues for which Paul is dealing in this letter are still prevalent today throughout the body of Christ. Were you to be able to take a tour of the administrative offices of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church or the offices of the Presbyterian Church in America you will see shelves upon shelves upon shelves of lawsuits between Christians. You'll hear the stories of churches breaking apart because of their wanting to follow different leaders. You'll hear arguments about whether a divorce was biblical or not. The state of the body of Christ is still one that needs this word, which is why it is so helpful to us.

But to read this word without an understanding of the particular issues which Paul was dealing with is to go forth without an understanding of why didn't he talk about the Lord's Supper. So let's talk about that. So you have the letter from a church planter, we have what was going on in the church, but what about their practice of the Lord's Supper that brought forth this issue. Well, a couple of things that we need to be aware of in their context. First, that for this discussion within the Greco-Roman Corinth, slaves and laborers did not work just six days. They worked all seven days. They did not eat three meals a day. They ate two meals a day: one in the morning and one in the late afternoon. So, as was their practice as you read the gospel of Luke and Acts—if you read through the Acts—you will see that they celebrated in worship together every day. In fact, they celebrated the Lord's Supper every day. So at the end of their workday they would go back to these house churches, and these laborers, these slave laborers, along with the wealthy in their midst, would come together in these homes and they would celebrate a fellowship meal as we just did downstairs. Now note this: If you were a laborer it would have been very difficult for them to often be on time, so lateness would've been an issue. And if you're coming straight from work, and if you don't have enough money to provide a whole lot of meal for your own family, you would not have been able to bring enough bread for your family and to also provide it for others who would have the fellowship meal and then to take a common loaf which would've been their practice in the celebration of the Supper—to be able to provide that loaf for everyone. So there was an issue of lateness, there was an issue of hunger. It was an issue—not everybody could go home and eat first.

So they had all these kind of social issues and economic issues that played havoc in their midst. Now, because there were probably two meals a day, the church and the Lord's Supper was probably later in the day near the time of the second meal. So therefore it would've been more challenging for everyone to arrive on the same time, to have the same ability to provide for each other. So guess what was happening? Paul tells us in the early portions of this passage, he says in verses 17-22, he

says specifically, "When you come together," verse 20, "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat, for as you eat, each one goes ahead without waiting for anybody else." So it's simple. They were just sitting down to the table before everybody got there and they were chowing down. And then when they would celebrate the Lord's Supper, those who had food and had bread and had wine weren't sharing it with those who didn't have. So do you see what was happening? They weren't waiting and they weren't sharing. There were obvious problems. So he says, you go ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry. Another gets drunk. Now in the Greek it seems as though Paul is being hyperbolic. He's almost—he's trying to just stretch the issue. Whether there were people actually getting drunk at these fellowship meals and at the Lord's Supper, we don't know. But it is illustrative to the problem that the have-nots weren't waited for, they were not being shared with. Those who had were getting for themselves, and it was causing all kinds of problems with respect to their worship. Now imagine for just a moment those songs which you sang just a few minutes ago. If this part of the congregation decided to sing one verse ahead, and this other group over here were just one verse behind—how well is that going to go? We have a word for that; it's not harmony, but dis-harmony. That's exactly right. So that is precisely what was happening with regard to the Lord's Supper.

So you have the letter from a church planter, you have the church and its various issues, and you have their practice. Their practice of the Lord's Supper was not one of sharing, was not one being done together as a common family sharing in one faith, one baptism, one Lord, one Supper. They were divided.

So we have the teaching of Paul, and so he says here, verse 22, "Don't you have homes 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 praise you for this? Certainly not." He then says, if you will, Okay. Those are the circumstances. That's the context. Now he gets to his central concern. How do we celebrate the Supper together? What is his instruction to this group with these issues? He then goes about teaching what we believe to be the case, what he received from the Lord Jesus that we have repeated in the Gospels. "That Jesus on the night which 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.'" Jesus, inviting his disciples and giving of this bread as a symbol and sign of what he was getting ready to do—to be bread, like food, given out—his body given out for the benefit of others. Christ's body on the cross. Though his body was pierced, his body was never broken. But notice what he says: He takes the bread, he breaks it, and he gives it. The point is that he was one who gave himself on the cross just as he gives the bread to his disciples. And so as he does that he says, he says specifically to them, "that which is for you, do this in remembrance of me." Now note this for just a moment: Jesus's death on the cross, for its effectiveness, did not have to happen at a different time for everybody. It was once and for all. So when we do this, when we take of this bread from the Lord Jesus, by his instruction, this bread which is his body, which he points to the symbol of his body, given, do this remembrance of me, means that we do so together. Christ once and for all. So it is meant to be one of commonality. It was given to the disciples and they ate together. It is always meant to this. What the worship happens vertically is to also have a horizontal implications. Worship has a vertical and a horizontal element to it. That that which we say we are receiving from the Lord, in essence, and I'm then turning to my neighbor and saying, well, I got enough for me and my family, but I'm not going to give any to you. How is that a reflection of what the Lord Jesus says here: "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In fact, it should lead us not to self-centeredness, not to selfishness, but to selflessness.

This is his instruction and he continues, and he says in the same way, after supper, he took the cup saying, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." This cup is the cup of the new covenant. This covenant is a covenant of grace once and for all. This lamb slain, this blood poured out for the remission, for the forgiveness, for the removal of sins, to be washed clean by the blood of Christ. We take that cup, and we drink together

again of Christ's body and of his blood as the sacrifice taken together. Christ once and for all. A common confession, a common trust, a common belief. Now he then adds these words, when Paul instructs this church, he takes what he received from the Lord and he gives them specific instruction in their context. And he said, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." So how are we to understand that instruction? Briefly. What does he not mean? He does not mean that we need to come before the Lord's Supper and examine ourselves, trying to find secret sin. He never instructs them to examine themselves trying to find secret sins, but rather he calls them to address very known sins: sins of division, the sins of selfishness, not sharing, those who have not giving to the have-nots, those who were going before others. So when he calls us to examine, he's not saying try to find secret sin, because, by the way, I believe that someone who professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit--the presence of the Holy Spirit, God's power working together with the word--I believe that actually the Holy Spirit does a very good job of telling us what our sin is. And the instruction here is not to try to find secrets. It is also, I believe, not specifically addressed to non-Christians. This text is being addressed specifically to believers. Now, let me explain. It doesn't mean that unbelievers, then, should partake of the Supper, because to do so would be a lie. But that is not Paul's first priority. That's not what he's addressing here. He's writing to people who he assumes have professed faith openly. He therefore, based on that profession of faith, trusting in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, he is saying to them, my instruction is to you, and it's not about unbelief. Nor when he says to them, a man ought to examine himself before he eats, in other words this has often been translated—now this is within, broadly speaking, Christian circles... Maybe you've never thought about that what God is asking you to do is look for secret sin. Maybe you've never even thought about the fact that he is addressing Christians specifically. But there are many Christians, I fear, who come into these doors, who come to this Supper for fear that they have a secret sin, that unless they uncover it, they can't come to the Supper. What I am saying to you is that is not what Paul is teaching, and he is addressing you if you're a professing believer. But nor is he saying for you to take a gauge of your spiritual health. He doesn't say, test yourself whether you can grasp the grace of God and the mercy of God. Yes, we ought to, but I sure do hope that my ability to come to the Lord's Supper is not contingent on my intellectual ability to grasp how wide and long and high is the love of Christ. None of us are ever spiritually healthy enough to come to the Supper. This is a Supper for sinners. The only one who is spiritually healthy enough is Jesus Christ, and it is this same Savior whose body and blood has been given out to cover our spiritual death, our spiritual sin.

It is a belief and a trust in this spiritual perfection, in the glory and in the beauty of Jesus Christ that we come. In many ways this has led many Christians who believe they are to find a secret sin, who worry that they may not believe, and who are concerned about where they are in terms of their spiritual health--it's led to a very individual understanding of the Supper. And many Christians, though they have professed faith before their elders, they've confessed before the church, they've taken these vows, they seek by God's grace to live by faith--so oftentimes come into these doors and then self-excommunicate themselves from the Supper. Our encouragement to you as elders and as pastors is to not do that. If you have known sin tonight in your life, and you know it--and I trust in the Holy Spirit to bring it to your mind and in your heart--know this: confess it now and come to the Supper. If you are concerned about whether or not you are where you think you need to be spiritually, but you've professed faith, you've been examined before the elders of this church--come to the Supper, but set an appointment. Talk to your elder, talk to a pastor, talk to the ones that Pastor Tim so eloquently spoke of this morning, the guardian of this body. Speak to another believer; ask them to pray for you. But be careful not to self-excommunicate yourself.

Also, what is he referring to, then. He is referring to known attitudes of division, known behaviors that

contradict the unity that we have in Christ and the common Supper which we celebrate. That is what he is instructing us to address.

So then, with that in mind, what is the Supper? We ought to take seriously the profession of faith that we have made, and we ought to remember that, we ought to celebrate it every time we come to worship, not just when we come to the Supper. We need to celebrate the faith that we have professed, that Jesus has worked in us every time we pray, every time we read the Scriptures. But when we come to the Supper we need to celebrate the profession of faith which we have made. And we need to remember it. And we need to, yet again, by God's appointment with his word, by the aid of the power of his presence of the Spirit to again say, Lord, I believe, help me in my unbelief, but by faith and not by sight, I walk. Profess that again. Is not unbiblical to examine yourself. Of course you ought to. But may it not lead to such an introspection, such a navel-gazing that we forget that this is a celebration of what Christ has done. That it ought not to become such a dour thing that we feel as though that to come to the Supper means I need to bury my head and just nod in deep thought. Now I'm being hyperbolic to make a point. It is perfectly okay to do so in quiet and prayer. Celebrate as the Lord has laid it on your heart, but don't think that our being dour makes it any more worthy of the Lord. It does not. But it is most certainly a celebration, and what is it a celebration of? That Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God the Father, has said to sinners, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever should believe in his name will have life." And that when you have professed faith to your elder, you've been examined for membership, you've professed faith before others, and you seek to walk by grace through faith--and this is not of yourselves, it is a gift of God--he says, come.

I end with this illustration. It's an illustration from an old Scottish pastor, and his name is Dr. John Duncan. And one Sabbath morning as he was leading the Lord's Supper after preaching a particularly pointed sermon on sin, as elders were serving he noticed a woman quietly sobbing near the front. Apparently affected by the sermon, she let both the bread and cup pass without taking it. Duncan rose from his seat, took some bread and wine from an elder, and brought them to the woman saying, take, woman, it's for sinners.

Ladies and gentlemen, absolutely none of us deserve this Supper. None of us ever deserve to be invited to it. It is all of grace. But when you have been invited to know the salvation that is in Christ alone, and you have received it, and you have professed it, then you come not in your strength, not in your intellectual ability, not in your good works, but in the perfection through the sacrifice, through the death, and through the victorious resurrection of our Savior. Come, sinners, to the Supper of the Lamb who gave himself for us. Take and eat; drink of this cup. Do this in remembrance of me.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, I pray that you would help us as we celebrate the Supper tonight. And I ask, Lord, that you would enable us to examine ourselves and our need for you. But Lord, help us to do it appropriately, trusting in Christ alone for salvation, coming to this Supper which he has invited us to, that we do in remembrance of him. But more than a memory, you are present by your Spirit, and in that we take great comfort. Lord, help each of us as sinners confess our need tonight and come to Thee for grace. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.